

Accessibility and Utilization of HIV / AIDS Information by Moi University Undergraduate Students

NAMARU, R. WANYONYI, DIN I, CEPHA AND ROTICH, DANIEL

School of Information Sciences

Moi University

Po. Box 3900-30100

Eldoret

Abstract

University students indulge in risky sexual behaviour that put them at risk of contracting HIV virus. This is largely attributed to lack of information, knowledge and skills to avoid dangerous behaviour. This study investigated the accessibility and utilization of HIV / AIDS information by Moi University undergraduate students.

The specific objectives of the study were to determine the kind of information needs Moi University students have in relation to HIV / AIDS, determine the use of available information services on HIV / AID by students, determine the problems that affect communication of HIV / AID information to the students, establish the various HIV / AIDS information sources available to the students and the extent to which they are accessible to serve their information needs, establish the various channels used to communicate HIV / AIDS information to students, assess the effectiveness of the channels used by students in accessing HIV / AID information and establish the problems that hinder effective communication of HIV / AID information to students and suggest possible solutions.

The survey method was used for this research. Systematic sampling technique was used to obtain a representative sample. A total of 257 students participated in the study and were drawn from three campuses of Moi University, namely; the Main Campus, Chepkoilel campus and College of Health Sciences. The nominal rolls at respective campuses were used as sampling frames for respondents.

Data was collected by use of questionnaires and interviews. Documentary sources were utilized as a complimentary method of data collection.

Data collected were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Tables were used to enter specific types of data in order to show relationship between variables.

The findings from the study indicated that the provision of HIV / AIDS information in Moi University was not effective. Several reasons can be advanced for this phenomenon. These include: lack of well-defined policies stipulating how HIV / AIDS information should be provided by the university, lack of appropriate HIV / AID information by mass media; lack of trained resource persons and restricted location of HIV / AIDS information resources.

It was concluded that Moi university students need to be informed about HIV ; AIDS information resources available in order to address some misconceptions that they hold as well as influence their behaviours to avoid HIV infection. The study recommends that the university should formulate policies on provision of HIV; AIDS education to university students, giving guidance and counseling to the university students on HIV ; AIDS, promote use of peer group counseling, health professionals, AIDS patients, religious leaders, professional counselors, parents and use of mass media to provide HIV; AIDS information to students. HIV; AIDS awareness *clubs* and performing arts; information role-play should be utilized to disseminate HIV; AIDS information.

Introduction

Background Information

Today, the world is faced with the global pandemic of HIV; AIDS that has evolved rapidly in the past seventeen years since it was first detected. The HIV; AIDS epidemic has been termed as one of the challenges facing the world with researchers unable to get the cure. It has had significant negative impact on individual families through loss of loved ones, and on communities by increasing the burden on caring for the ill, while countries have been affected by reduced productivity (Nduati and Kiai, 1996). The Kenya AIDS GO's Consortium (2000) noted that HIV ; AIDS affects mainly people aged between 15 and 50 years of age and this results in large numbers of orphans, shortage of labour, the loss of expensively trained specialists, as well as deteriorating education standards in the country. In Africa, the disease has been spread heterosexually from the outset that is unprotected sex apart from blood to blood contacts and maternal; from mother to child through pregnancy.

The rapidity of the spread can be partly explained by the lack of health resources, poor general health, long periods of social unrest and economic disruption. HIV; AIDS has clearly demonstrated how the interaction of human behaviour with a micro - organism can result in an epidemic of untold proportions.

By understanding how the virus is transmitted from person to person, it is possible to avoid contracting it and also advise others. In early positive state, an infected person may appear HIV ; AIDS for various reasons. Most of the students are in their adolescence, a stage when young people usually undergo a lot of physical, psychological and emotional transformation. As a result, some of them engage in risky behaviour such as drug taking and sexual activity in the name of experimentation and discovery (Egger, King 1986).

It is therefore during this adolescent stage that the young people need adequate, timely and relevant information. The information will help the students to understand their vulnerability to HIV infection and equip them with knowledge to assist in avoiding contracting the virus.

Odingo (1999) suggests that HIV; AIDS related educational programmes should be developed and made more effective by categorizing the community into functional groups such as farmers and rural communities, students and teachers, technicians, professionals in various fields, policy makers, planners and administrators. He further points out that there is ample opportunity to provide HIV; AIDS information more effectively if attention is paid to the information needs of each group and the level of literacy of the group.

A study such as this is necessary to establish the true state of affairs regarding the provision, accessibility and utilization of HIV; AIDS information to university students and what needs to

be done to improve their information needs. Moi University provides a large captive and active population to which appropriate HIV / AIDS information should be targeted. HIV / AIDS in Moi University is a confirmed problem affecting students within the university as reported by Moi University Health and HIV / AIDS office. Factors that might contribute to the prevailing problem are lack of access and utilization of HIV / AIDS information, non-availability of HIV / AIDS information, inappropriateness, or unsuitability of HIV / AIDS information, and the inadequacy of the available HIV / AIDS information.

An important aspect of the planning for such an information system for Moi University students is to identify their HIV / AIDS information needs, establish the kind of information they require to satisfy their HIV / AIDS information need and identify the information sources they are likely to use. This study also attempted to offer suggestions on the factors to be considered in order to provide information programs that can be accessed and used easily.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which the students of Moi University access and utilize HIV / AIDS information in the university.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the kinds of information needs Moi University students have in relation to HIV / AIDS,
2. Determine the use of available information sources on HIV / AIDS by student ,
3. Establish the various HIV / AIDS information sources available for Moi University students and the extent to which they are accessed to serve their information needs,
4. Establish the various channels used to communicate HIV / AIDS information to students,
5. Assess the effectiveness of the channels used by students in accessing HIV / AIDS information,
6. Identify the problems that hinder effective communication of HIV / AIDS information to Moi University students and suggest ways of improving it,
7. Offer suggestions on more effective and efficient ways of providing HIV / AIDS information to students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to achieve the above objectives:

1. What are Moi University students' information needs related to HIV / AIDS?
2. What types of HIV / AIDS information resources accessible by Moi University students?
3. How easily accessible are HIV / AIDS information resources by the students?
4. Which media are frequently used by students to access HIV / AIDS information?

5. How do Moi University students use HIV / AIDS information once received?
6. What suggestions can be made to improve HIV / AIDS information dissemination to students?

Assumptions

The study was based on the following assumptions:

1. That the existing media for communication of HIV / AIDS information to undergraduate students of Moi University are inadequate and so very little information on HIV / AIDS is accessible to students.
2. That since Moi university students are young and sexually active, they require information and knowledge to protect themselves from HIV / AIDS infection.
3. That lack of provision of HIV / AIDS information leads to high prevalence of HIV / AIDS at Moi University.
4. That although there is no proper organization of information system for passing HIV / AIDS information to students, the university still has a role to play in the provision of AIDS information to students to curb the spread of the disease.

Significance of the Study

There is neither cure nor vaccines for HIV / AIDS. Various studies have been carried out worldwide to come up with the best way to slow the spread of HIV / AIDS. It is known that the only way to curb the spread of this disease is to avoid risky behaviour such as irresponsible sex among other issues.

This study is significant in that, it is imperative to show that there is need for proper availability of HIV / AIDS information resources in order to satisfy information requirements for Moi University students. There is urgent need to promote the accessibility and utilization of information resources by university students. The study therefore provides useful insight into the specific HIV / AIDS information needs of university students and shows how these needs should be catered for.

The findings of such a study can also be applied in other Kenyan universities and assist in the provision of HIV / AIDS information to their students to prevent the spread of the epidemic as they still operate in more or less the same information and social environment.

The findings of this study may assist in deciding on fresh situation analysis to be undertaken, new priorities to be set and new programs to be launched; hence the planning cycle will evolve again.

Lastly, it is expected that the findings of the study will assist to curb the problem of HIV / AIDS at Moi University and other public universities in Kenya.

Research Methodology

Survey Research

The survey method was preferred because it introduced the systematic collection of data on a group of entities and facilitated drawing of conclusions from what the data shows.

Study Population

The target population comprised Moi University undergraduate students; both male and female from the three campuses with a total population of 8935 students.

A Sample of 257 students out of 8935 undergraduate student of Moi University were used for this study. From Main Campus 149 students were sampled while 93 and 15 were sampled from Chepkoilel and College of Health sciences respectively.

Director of Moi University HIV / AIDS Control Unit (MUHACU), University Librarian and two branch Librarians, Student Counsellors in three campuses, Clinical Officers in charge of Voluntary AID Test in the three campuses and three student entertainment officials. There was a great extent of homogeneity within the clusters and also the sizes of the sample were proportionately drawn from the clusters.

Sampling Procedures

This study used simple random sampling. To sample out the students, the student nominal roll for the entire university students' population was used as sampling frame. From the nominal roll, a student list was generated and students were picked using simple random techniques. Both male and female sexes were represented in the sample of 257 who participated in the study.

Data Collection

Data Collection Instruments

This study basically used face-to-face interviews supplemented by documentary reviews. The interview method was thought appropriate because of its flexibility and ability to elicit satisfying responses.

Administration of Interview

An interview schedule was used. A set of open and closed ended questions administered to the respondents were contained in a semi - structured interview schedule. Open-ended questions assisted the interviewer to probe further on opinions and facts of informants. This was also meant to give the interviewees a chance to express their own views on various facts that this study covered.

Validation of interview schedule

A pilot study was conducted on 27 students at three campuses of Moi University to test the validity of the interview schedule to ensure that all collected data was going to be relevant.

Ethical Considerations

The respondents were informed about the objectives and significance of the study and where there were doubts, clarifications were made. In the course of carrying out the actual study, appointments with the respondents were made in advance. All the respondents remained anonymous apart from where the researcher had discussion with the health unit and student affairs departments.

Documentary sources

The researcher consulted different sources of HIV / AIDS information both in print and electronic form. The literature accessed supplemented the literature review in this study.

Findings of the Study

Information needs of university students

The research revealed that the students of Moi University need information on **HIV / AIDS**. The students require general information on **HIV / AIDS** and how the disease is transmitted so that they can be able to take care of themselves. The information required should address risky behaviour, factors leading to risky behaviour and level of knowledge on **HIV / AIDS**.

Information resources which were available in the university

Majority of respondents felt mass media (newspapers, magazines, television, radio etc) were the most easily available sources of **HIV / AIDS** information, friends were rated second easily available source of **HIV / AIDS** information. Friends are known to share openly their experiences, excitement, influences and problems. As a result, they are able to talk about and discuss **AID** and related subjects.

A small number of students cited health Unit staff, Counsellor, Audio Visual material (AV), Clubs/societies as a readily available source of **HIV / AIDS** information. It was found that the service of **MUKAS** in the university is not well publicized and so very few students know about its existence in the University. From the above findings, it can be deduced that there are a variety of information resources that provide students with **HIV / AIDS** information. However, the availability of the resources depends also on the efforts made by individual students to access them. It can also be inferred here that the frequency of **HIV / AIDS** information provision by majority of the resources available at the university' three campuses was unsatisfactory. This can be attributed to several factors.

- Most **HIV / AIDS** information resources are not tailored to meet specific needs of the university students.

- Some resources are beyond reach by students because of factors such as inadequate finance both on the side of the institution and students.
 - Restricted access since most of these resources cannot be borrowed out.

- The majority of Health officials/counsellors, friends, club / societies were ill equipped to provide accurate and adequate information on **HIV / AIDS** to students.

How students access HIV/AIDS information in the University

There are a number of ways in which students went about accessing information on **HIV / AIDS**. These included:

- reading printed sources on **HIV / AIDS** information available in the university
- watching televisions,
- listening to radios,

- Attending to lectures presented by resource persons/ lecturers.

Other ways included getting information from posters displayed on notice boards. However, there were no laid down policies or guidelines on the provision of **HIV / AIDS** information to students in the University. The accessibility of these resources by students depended on what was available in the University and also the efforts by University management to provide such information. Majority of university students have access to televisions and radios at halls of

residence and at social halls. The televisions are provided by the University Management for the purpose of news and entertainment. Most students have personal radios used in their rooms.

The communication of HIV / AIDS information by the existing media

The study revealed that the print and audio - visual formats are the most preferred by the students. Majority of respondents did indicate that they preferred newspapers, followed by magazines, radio, television, books, friends, health officials and counselors. They are widely available and easy to use. However, when asked to state the HIV / AIDS information resources they preferred using but were not available in the university, the majority of the respondents did indicate video shows, while others preferred peer counselors.

The above media were preferred by students due to several reasons. The above resources were open and provided detailed information on HIV / AIDS, they were readily available, they are clear and easy to understand, they were knowledgeable and experienced. It is therefore necessary that the university management acquires these formats and the students be sensitized on the availability of the same.

It can therefore be deduced that majority of the resources were very useful to the respondents. A further analysis indicated that the majority of the resources that provided information that was quite adequate were also viewed to be very useful by the respondents. The above findings are significant to the designers of HIV / AIDS education information programs for students in the universities as they provide an insight into the kind of resources preferred by students.

Problems identified in the provision of HIV / AIDS information

There are some problems that were specific to Moi University HIV / AIDS Unit (MUHAU) and Health Unit staff. These were:

- Lack of publicity on the available HIV / AIDS information resources
- Lack of funds for seminars and workshop on HIV / AIDS.
- Lack of proper guidelines on HIV / AIDS information provision to students.
- Lack of adequate facilities to run HIV / AIDS programmes.
- Lack of proper training and staff to provide HIV / AIDS information.
- Lack of proper forum to disseminate HIV / AIDS information.
- Lack of office space and VCT rooms to handle the students in privacy.
- Majority of students feared to ask questions about HIV / AIDS since they fear to be mistaken to be victims.
- Some students take HIV / AIDS related diseases casually.
- HIV / AIDS information resources were too expensive for the students.
- Lack of commitment in relationships, having multiple partners and fear to be tested at VCT center at the University.

Recommendations of the Study

The study sought suggestions from students and Moi University HIV / AIDS Unit (MUHAU) on how to solve the problems encountered in order to improve the availability of HIV / AIDS information to University students.

Given the seriousness of the threat posed by HIV / AIDS epidemic to the core business of the University, it is essential that the university's response to this crisis be rapidly mainstreamed across all key activities. It is crucially important that the University has a clear idea about what needs to be done to minimize the impact of the epidemic to the students.

However, it is essential that appropriate organization and management structures are put in place that will ensure that the HIV / AID strategy is effectively and efficiently implemented. In order for AID management programmes to be effective, there must be comprehensive, upto-date information systems. There is therefore need to encourage the university management to acquire adequate HIV / AIDS information resources and also to get the students involved in co-curricular activities that promote HIV / AIDS information provision.

Several reasons account for the preference of students to certain types of materials and these include:

- The resources are open and provide detailed information,
- they are clear and easily understood,
- they are knowledge based and with wide coverage of information on HIV / AIDS,

- they present information in an interesting manner,
- They are entertaining and offer privacy.

Emerging approaches in communication advocates for participation of the audience in the selection of the channels. The challenge to university management is to develop communication strategies within HIV/ AIDS projects and programs that will support and facilitate positive behavioural change.

In an effort to curb the spread of HIV / AIDS within the university and also to improve the provision and accessibility to HIV / AIDS information resources, the following suggestions are made.

- Education, information and communication (ELC): More imaginative ways of delivering information on HIV / AIDS and sexual reproductive health to students should be introduced. A full time EIC co-coordinator should be appointed with proven track record in running effective EIC programmes for students.
- The university management should provide more HIV / AIDS information resources.

Resource people in the area of counselling, Health professionals and HIV / AIDS patients should be engaged to disseminate HIV / AIDS information.

- The guidance and counselling, Health Unit/VCT, MUHAU departments should be more active in the provision of HIV / AIDS information to the students.
- Moi University Know AIDS students (MUKAS) should be active in sensitizing the student population about the impact of the disease.
- Drama, poetry, debates, music extravaganza on themes concerning HIV / AIDS should be encouraged within different campuses in order to involve Moi University students in the sharing of ideas, and concerns about the spread and effects of HIV / AIDS. These can be included in the programmes of the university calendar.

- Regular seminars and workshops should be organized in the university to enlighten students about the disease and also to provide the students with opportunity to ask questions and share information with experts in this area.
- The community surrounding the university should be engaged in education about HIV / AIDS to enable them to participate effectively in guiding their children on HIV / AIDS .
- More programmes on HIV / AIDS relevant to the youth should be introduced on different channels on radio and television at the most opportune time when students can listen to them. For example, they can be aired in the evenings and during weekend when students are not busy with academic programmes.
- Religious leaders should get more involved in the provision of HIV / AIDS information to their faithful. These will provide a good forum for educating both the adult and the young on the Scourge.
- Provision of HIV / AIDS information should be done using other media such as visual formats.
- The university should provide adequate funding for programmes on provision and dissemination of HIV / AIDS information to the university students. The funds should be utilized to purchase information material on HIV / AIDS and facilitate seminars/workshops on HIV / AIDS where research papers are presented and information shared.
- The HIV / AIDS programme designers for the youth should ensure that the materials they present are interesting, comprehensive and easy to understand.
- Information materials on HIV / AIDS should be made available freely and those that are sold should be subsidized by the Government to make them affordable. They should also be attractive and effective in the messages they carry.
- The university should encourage communal efforts; both at university and with the public on the provision of HIV / AIDS information.
- The yearly anti-AIDS campaign should be included on the university calendar and university students be involved in the organization of such activities .
- The use of condoms should be encouraged in the university by availing the condoms at all social places for accessibility.
- Lecturers and other staff at the university should be engaged in regular seminars and workshops as this will provide a forum to disseminate HIV / AIDS information to the students and also help them pass the same information to the students during their daily interaction .
- AIDS is primarily a behavioural challenge of decreasing sexual partners, though we need care in finding out on behavioural Outcomes of ABC - Abstinence, Reducing partners, Condom use to prescriptive policy - Promoting abstinence or Condom use (Ref: The Lancet Vol.364, 0.9428 July, 2004).
- Parents should be more actively involved in passing information on HIV / AIDS to their children freely so that the youth get informed on HIV / AIDS early.
- Curriculum infusion should be done so that HIV / AIDS issues are infused in the courses offered by every department at the university

Conclusion

Information use in the university is hindered by various factors such as poor information services which have been designed without a proper analysis of the needs of users.

However, there is still ample opportunity for information experts in the university to stimulate the use of information if more attention is paid to the information needs of the various groups and the communication process among each group of the user community.