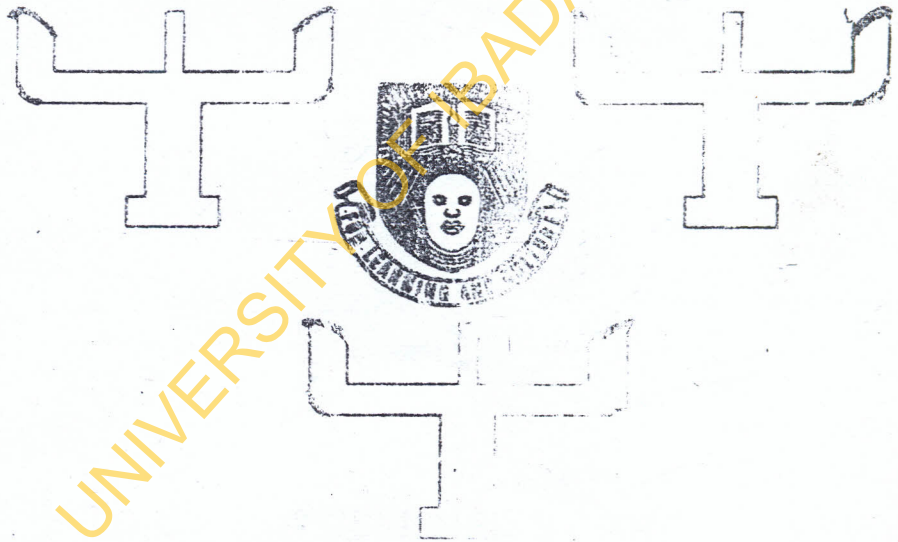


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## EDITORIAL COMMENT

The journal of psychology is out again after it had been comatose for some five years, a development that was not unconnected with the diminishing fortunes of the Nigerian economy and the turmoil that had been academia in Nigeria. That this edition eventually wriggled free of the sundry attendant constraints is a testimony to the untiring effort of an indefatigable editorial board, the good will and the financial commitment of the Department of Psychology and the cooperation of well meaning academics who have variously served in such capacities as article assessors, proof-readers and advisers.

This edition, like it was promised in the journal's debut five years ago, is unrelenting in the empirical pursuit of knowledge. Rather than parochially betray a bias for the discipline of psychology alone, it has chosen to adopt a multidisciplinary outlook. To be able to come up with the selection that made this edition, pain-staking efforts were made at the editorial level not to compromise quality and not to stake currency but also to maintain inter-disciplinary fervour required for a balanced knowledge acquisition. As we on the editorial board do appreciate the unflattering input of authors whose works are included in this edition, we equally commend the efforts of the score of others whose articles could not be published. It is our sincere hope that with time all contributors shall be rewarded. They are therefore advised not to relent.

As we commend this edition to the use of such target audience as scholars, researchers, teachers and the entire tribe of knowledge seekers, we wish to reaffirm our earlier pledge that our biannual (March and September) publication commitment shall continue to flourish henceforth.

Dr. Elegbeleye, O.S.  
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# ADOLESCENT GIRL, COMMERCIAL SEX WORKERS AND HIV-AIDS AWARENESS

BY

E. ADENIKE EMEKE (MRS.)

## ABSTRACT

*The objective of the study is to assess the level of awareness of HIV/AIDS among adolescent girl commercial sex workers in terms of the existence of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria, and the sex workers' awareness of their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS infection. The study also examined the preparedness of the commercial sex workers to quit the trade. A 20-item questionnaire- HIV/AIDS Awareness Among Commercial Sex Workers - was administered on the 12 adolescent commercial sex workers in the two brothels used for the study. Results indicated a high level of awareness of the existence of HIV/AIDS among the commercial sex workers. Results also indicated that though the workers are aware of their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS infection, they do not see themselves quitting the trade since they believe they already have the stigma as sex workers.*

*The findings have implications for designing intervention strategies which can help promote behavioural change in the adolescent sex worker, and help restructure her cognitive make-up regarding her mind set about having a stigma.*

## INTRODUCTION

HIV-AIDS has remained a scourge ever since it was diagnosed and recognized in the early 1980s. It has up to date defied any cure, in spite of the tremendous amount of medical research and the huge sums of money invested in these researches. Similar efforts are also being stemmed up in the social, psychological, and religious spheres to combat this scourge that has come to man. Despite these efforts and huge sums of money on AIDS research, the pandemic is increasing almost every day in geometric progression.

Recent reports (The World Bank, 1993) have it that about 20 million people in the world are infected with HIV, 10 million of those people are Africans. Cumulative Full blown AIDS cases across the globe stand at 4.5 million people (World Health Organizations, 1995) and the prevalence rate in Nigeria is 3.8%. The reports further have it that between 7-8 million women are infected, and that while every one minute a woman is infected, every two minutes a woman dies of AIDS. Included in this condensed category of women are adolescent girls. In fact, a 1993 WHO AIDS Surveillance Report put HIV-AIDS incidence among adolescent girls in Nigeria at over 45%.

Adolescence is a period of "explosion" in many spheres of the adolescent's life - intellectually, emotionally, sexually and socially. Adolescence sexual impulse can be overwhelming and difficult for the adolescent to control. There might be a strong urge to satisfy this impulse which may lead to indiscriminate involvement in sexual activity. Nwagwu (1991) found that 70% of the student population she sampled indicated that they were sexually active. A study conducted in Lagos showed that 4% of adolescents were sexually active by age 10 and 36.4% by ages 15 and 16. Apart from just being sexually active, the incidence of adolescent female commercial sex worker is now getting on the increase (Nakajima, 1994).

HIV-AIDS has been found to have a higher rate of transmission via sexual intercourse (Feyisetan & Peibly, 1989; Isiugo-Abanihie, 1993; Orubuloye, 1993). Commercial sex work is an established trade that has sexual intercourse as its distinctive feature.

It is therefore not surprising that a high prevalence of HIV-AIDS is found among commercial sex workers. Akinsete (1994) reported that seven out of every ten commercial sex workers (CSWs) are infected with the virus - HIV, and that the prevalence is more in the rural areas. Similar results of high prevalence of HIV-AIDS have been reported by Altman (1991, 1994) among commercial sex workers in Delhi, Feldman and Yonemoto (1992) reported same among prostitutes in Japan (though the Japanese government still denies the reality of the pandemic in the country), also Ankomah (1992) reported same among sex workers in Ghana, and Abebe (1990) again among sex workers in Nigeria.

Quite a number of adolescent girls have been driven to commercial sex work as a result of economic hardship, as was discovered by this writer in the course of this research. Other reasons for taking to commercial sex work as reported by the adolescent girls include loose family ties, lack of guidance, societal demands (especially from men) and inability to resolve identity crisis when it occurred.



## PURPOSE OF STUDY

The reported studies indicating high prevalence of HIV-AIDS among commercial sex workers in Nigeria have no definite statistics on Oyo State. Yet, commercial sex work appears to be a booming trade in almost all the brothels in many of the towns in the State. This made the researcher to wonder whether the commercial sex workers in the State are aware of HIV-AIDS and risk of infection that their trade involves.

The study therefore set out to find the level of HIV-AIDS awareness among commercial sex workers in some brothels in Ibadan. The study also looked into the level of preparedness of the sex workers to quit the trade.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research aimed at finding answers to the following questions:

- (1) *Are adolescent commercial sex workers (CSWs) aware of the existence of HIV-AIDS?*
- (2) *Are adolescent commercial sex workers (CSWs) aware of their vulnerability to HIV-AIDS?*
- (3) *Are adolescent commercial sex workers (CSWs) prepared to quit commercial sex work?*

## METHODOLOGY

### Population and Sample

The brothels in two locations within Ibadan City were involved in the study. All the CSWs in the two brothels were used in the study, but the result reported in this paper represent the one analyzed for the 12 adolescent sex workers in the population. (The total population of CSWs in the two brothels was 22).

TABLE I  
COMPOSITION OF SUBJECTS IN THE STUDY

BROTHEL	ADOLESCENT	NON-ADOLESCENT	TOTAL
1	8	7	15
2	4	2	7
TOTAL	12	9	22

### RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The research instrument was a 20-item questionnaire - HIV/AIDS Awareness Among Commercial Sex Workers - developed by this investigator. The item selection was informed by the current literature on the awareness, occurrence, spread and prevention of HIV-AIDS. Subjects' awareness of HIV-AIDS was measured on a three point scale of (i) Yes, (ii) No, and (iii) I do not know. The questionnaire also contained items tapping the subjects' level of preparedness to quit commercial sex work.

### Procedure

The first encounter was spent convincing the brothel proprietors and the CSWs that the researcher and her colleagues were not government agents out to censor them, but rather their friends who are out to educate them about safer ways of going about their trade, especially as regards HIV-AIDS. (Let it be mentioned that the study being reported here is part of a large study on CSWs). The skepticism gave way after some persuasions, and the CSWs relaxed and talked freely with us as the discussion progressed.

The administration of the research instrument did not take place until the third encounter with the CSWs. The questionnaire was administered as a verbal test for the following reasons:

- (1) *Not all the CSWs were very literate, and though they were able to speak some appreciable amount of English Language, they were not as equally proficient in reading and writing.*
- (2) *Available literature, and the experience of this researcher point to the fact that CSWs will not open up sufficiently when it comes to their writing down facts about their trade and their persons.*

- (3) CSWs consider it an infringement on their time and energy when they are asked to do some writing.

In view of the foregoing, the research instrument was administered as a verbal test. The questions were asked informally as the discussion progressed and the researcher and her colleagues noted the responses and ticked them under appropriate columns.

## RESULTS

Simple percentages were used. The results under the three response categories are reported below. The subjects indicated "I don't know" for only three of the 20 items of the questionnaire.

TABLE II  
AWARENESS OF THE EXISTENCE OF HIV-AIDS  
AMONG ADOLESCENTS CSWs

ITEM	X	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
(1) AIDS exists and is already in Nigeria	12	(8) 66.7%	(4) 33.3%	NIL	100%(12)
(2) AIDS is a white man's disease	12	(3) 25%	(9) 75%	NIL	100%(12)

Table II, indicates that there is a relatively high level of awareness of the existence of HIV-AIDS among the adolescent CSWs.

TABLE III  
AWARENESS OF THE NATURE, SPREAD, SYMPTOMS  
AND CURE OF HIV-AIDS

ITEM	X	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
(3) AIDS has no cure.	12	(8) 66.7%	(4) 33.3%	NIL	100%
(4) AIDS can be cured by the traditional healers	12	(9) 75%	(3) 25%	NIL	100%
(5) The symptoms of AIDS are not quite clear	12	(6) 50%	(3) 25%	(3) 25%	100%
(6) Antibiotics can prevent AIDS symptoms from appearing early	12	(10) 83.3%	(2) 16.7%	NIL	100%
(7) AIDS can spread through sexual intercourse	12	(9) 75%	(3) 25%	NIL	100%
(8) AIDS can spread through oral sex	12	(5) 41.3%	(7) 58.7%	NIL	100%
(9) Sexual intercourse with many partners can lead to the spread of AIDS	12	(9) 75%	(3) 25%	NIL	100%

A fairly large proportion (66.7%) of the CSWs are not aware that there is no cure yet for AIDS. This lack of awareness appears reinforced by their belief that traditional healers can cure AIDS, and furthermore, that the regular use of antibiotics can delay the occurrence of HIV-AIDS. They are aware that a mode of transmission of HIV-AIDS is via sexual intercourse, and also that sexual intercourse with many partners (a feature of their trade) can increase the spread of HIV-AIDS.

**TABLE IV**  
**ADOLESCENT CSWs' AWARENESS OF THEIR**  
**VULNERABILITY TO HIV-AIDS**

ITEM	N	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
(10) Commercial sex workers can easily be infected with AIDS.	12	(7) 58.7%	(5) 41.3%	NIL	100%
(11) AIDS can be prevented through the use of condoms	12	(10) 83.3%	(2) 16.7%	NIL	100%
(12) A client who will refuse the use of condoms must pay more	12	(10) 83.3%	(2) 16.7%	NIL	100%
(13) It does not matter if a client refuses to wear condom	12	(6) 50%	(6) 50%	NIL	100%
(14) AIDS does not kill immediately	12	(2) 16.7%	(9) 75%	(1) 8.3%	100%

It would appear from the results on Table IV that the adolescent commercial sex workers have a fairly high level of awareness of their vulnerability to contract HIV-AIDS, and are aware that the wearing of condoms by their clients is safer for them. A large proportion (75%) are also aware that AIDS does not kill immediately.

TABLE V  
CSWs' PREPAREDNESS TO QUIT COMMERCIAL SEX WORK

ITEM	NO	YES	NO	TOTAL
15. I shall be prepared to quit commercial sex work if I find a more lucrative job	12	(4) 33.3%	(8) 66.7%	100%
16. Only commercial sex work can fetch me as much money as I am earning now	12	(8) 66.7%	(4) 33.3%	100%
17. I cannot see myself quitting commercial sex work since I already have the stigma	12	(5) 41.3%	(7) 58.7%	100%
18. I am prepared to do other jobs in the morning like selling clothes, but will come back to sex work in the evenings	10	(6) 60.0%	(4) 40%	100%
19. Since AIDS takes some years to manifest, I would have enjoyed myself before it manifests	12	(10) 83.3%	(2) 16.7%	100%
20. Even if I contract AIDS, the cure would have been found before it gets to an advanced stage in me.	12	(11) 91.7%	(1) 8.3%	100%

The indication from Table V is that the adolescent CSWs are not quite prepared to quit the commercial sex trade.

### DISCUSSION

The results of this study have indicated that the adolescent commercial sex workers have a relatively high level of awareness of the existence of HIV-AIDS in Nigeria. Only a small percentage (25%) still think it is a white man's disease. This is not surprising, since the Federal Military Government, NGOS, voluntary religious and civil organizations, the electronic and print media have for some years now been mounting publicity and propaganda on the existence of HIV-AIDS in Nigeria. Posters and handbills abound in many strategic places like

hospitals, public places and some schools. It can be said that his publicity and enlightenment strategies are paying off.

The adolescent commercial sex workers do not however seem to be aware that up to date HIV-AIDS has defied any cure. Over 66% of the subjects are not aware of the no-cure-yet situation of HIV-AIDS, and 75% of them think that traditional healers have the cure. They probably think AIDS is just any other STD like syphilis and gonorrhoea which they might have contacted in the past, and this probably explains why such a large percentage (83.3%) think that the use of antibiotics can prevent the early appearing of the symptoms of AIDS.

It is rather sad to note that in spite of the relatively high level of awareness of their vulnerability to HIV-AIDS infection, the adolescent commercial sex workers do not seem prepared to quit the trade. Economic reasons appear to be a definitely over-riding consideration in the sex workers' concern. Otherwise, how would one explain the situation where at least 60% of the sex workers think that the use of condoms by their clients can be a safer measure for them against HIV-AIDS infection, but would give in to the clients' non-use of condoms as long as they are prepared to pay more, and in fact would give in to the non-wearing of condoms if the insistence would probably result into low patronage. But probably economic reasons alone will not completely account for the non-preparedness of the adolescent sex workers to quit the work. At least 66.7% of them do not want to quit even if they find more lucrative jobs, while about equal number (60%) were prepared to do some other business in the daytime, but will return to sex work in the evenings.

A more plausible insight may be obtained from the fact that many of them (66.7%) think and probably believe that the society has already put a stigma on them. They very likely believe that even if they quit today, they will still be looked down upon as prostitutes, and as such, there is no need to quit, in spite of the perceived dangers and risks of the work. This perception and mind set is not good enough for these adolescents who form part of the larger and more viable proportion of our population. Adolescents are the adults and leaders of tomorrow, and for some to get into a trade line that opens them to tremendous risks and health hazards is bad enough for the nation. It becomes worse off when a rather suicidal approach is taken by these adolescents as a result of their perception of non-opportunity of reintegration into society without the stigma and label following them for ever.

This aspect of the findings of this study calls for a need for counselling for these adolescent sex workers, with a built-in strategy for behaviour change and more importantly for cognitive restructuring. This will go a long way in probably, eradicating commercial sex work in general. Commercial sex workers

need warmth, love, and empathy rather than condemnation. They must not be set aside as "lost" and "irredeemable". The society should accept a commercial sex worker, and help re-integrate her into the social milieu on quitting the trade. The government and voluntary civil and religious organizations should make moves towards providing alternative means of livelihood for our CSWs especially, the adolescent girls among them. As Nwagwu (1995) rightly noted, the family, schools and social organizations should be partners in educating the youths and their parents. Parents should be aware that the quality of the home background exerts tremendous influence on the sexual behaviour of adolescents. The older men in the society who patronize these sex workers should also realize that their non-patronage of the sex workers is a step in the right direction for our building a healthy population.

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