Sexual Behavior and Risky Practices among Adults Living with HIV/AIDS in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

Ifeoma C. Ofurum a* and Onyinye G. Mba b#

a School of Public Health, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.
b Department of Community Health, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Authors’ contributions
This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

ABSTRACT

Background: HIV/AIDS remains a public health challenge with an estimated 37.9 million persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) globally. Risky sexual behaviours/practices among PLWHA increase the likelihood of co-infection and further spread of infection. Understanding the pattern of these behaviours will aid in the modelling of campaigns to control further spread of infection.

Aim: To examine sexual behaviour and risky practices among adults living with HIV in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Methodology: Six hundred (600) participants were recruited for this cross-sectional study from the HIV/AIDS clinics at Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Yenagoa, and Otuasega Cottage Hospital, Ogbia in Bayelsa State, after obtaining informed consent. An interviewer-administered questionnaire was used to collect data comprising socio-demographic characteristics and the sexual activities/behaviour of the respondents in this study. The data obtained from the study were analyzed and presented as frequencies and percentages.

Results: Most of the respondents reported sexual intercourse 532(88.7%) 3 months to study. Sexual intercourse with casual partners 20(3.8%), multiple sexual partners 72(12%), and sex workers 2(0.4%) were observed among the respondents. Regular use of condoms during sex was reported by 63(11.8%), while 200(37.6%) sometimes, 96(18.0%) rarely, and 173(32.5%) never. A recent treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) was reported by 115(19.2%). Alcohol use before sex was reported by 218(36.3%). Overall, 253(42.2%) of the respondents engaged in at least one form of risky sexual behaviour.

*Consultant Public Health Physician;
*Corresponding author: Email: ofurumifeoma95@gmail.com, ileoma.ofurum@uniport.edu.ng;
Conclusion: There is a preponderance of risky sexual behaviour/practices among PLWHA in Bayelsa State that may account for coinfection with STI as well as increase HIV/AIDS transmission.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS; sexual behaviours; risky practices; PLWHA; Bayelsa State.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) remains a global public health concern with an estimated global population of 37.9 million people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) [1]. Though recent global trends are indicative of declining HIV prevalence, new HIV infections are still highest among youths living in Sub-Saharan Africa with about 5% of the adult population in this region living with HIV [2]. By implication, the sustained spread of HIV in this region is highly suggestive of indulgence of PLWHA in risky sexual behaviour.

Risky sexual behaviour among PLWHA has been defined in literature as engaging in unprotected sex with any partner, having multiple sexual partners, casual sex, sex under the influence of alcohol and sexual exchange [1]. This serves as a major and effective driver of the HIV epidemic [3], increasing the risk of infection in non-HIV partners and exposing HIV-infected partners to the risk of suprainfection by other strains of HIV [4-6]. Hence, risky sexual behaviour among PLWHA has the potential to both limit as well as erode progress made in the control of HIV/AIDS both locally and globally.

There have been inconsistencies in the reports of previous studies examining the sexual behaviour of PLWHA. Studies conducted in California [7], Uganda [8] and Cameroon [9] noted a decrease in rates of risky sexual behaviour among PLWHA after initiation of ART whereas other studies from New York [10], Cote D'Ivoire, Uganda [11], Nigeria [12], and Ethiopia [13] reported increased likelihood of engaging in risky sexual practice after initiation of ART.

We suggest that disparities in previous reports from different countries as well as different regions within same country may be due to country/region-specific differences in social, cultural, economic and geopolitical settings. Hence understanding the prevalence and pattern of sexual behaviour among PLWHA in specific regions will help identify risky behaviours that could sustain HIV infection and suprainfection within the studied region and provide useful information for counsellors to guide sexual health care delivery among PLWHA.

In the south-south region of Nigeria, Bayelsa state is rich in crude oil as well as natural gas, thus serving as home to several foreign and local oil gas companies. This is adduced as being contributory to the very active nightlife within the state which may boost transactional sex and other sexual activities that could encourage the spread of HIV infection. Despite these known indices, there is paucity of data regarding the sexual behaviour among adults living with HIV in Bayelsa state.

Therefore, this study was aimed at examining sexual behaviour among adults living with HIV in Bayelsa state, Nigeria to evaluate the prevalence of risky sexual behaviour among this population.

2. METHODS

2.1 Study Design and Study Site

This cross-sectional survey was carried out in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. One secondary and one tertiary health facility was selected for this study. The choice of the facilities where the study will be carried out was achieved by balloting for the secondary and the tertiary health facility independently. Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Yenagoa was the tertiary health facility selected while Otuasega Cottage Hospital, Ogbia was the secondary health facility selected. The study was carried out between August and November 2021.

2.2 Sample Size Determination

The sample size was calculated using the Cochran formula:

\[ n = \frac{z^2 \times p \times (1-p)}{e^2} \]  

where:

- \( n \) = least required sample size
- \( z \) = standard score at a confidence level of 95% (1.96)
- \( P \) = Prevalence of unmet family planning needs among HIV-positive women, 38.5% [15].
e = acceptable margin of error at 5% (0.05)

Interpolating, n will be:

\[
e = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.385(1-0.385)}{0.05^2} = 364
\]

With a Design Effect of 1.5 [16] = 1.5 x 364 = 546

10% for questionnaire non-response error was also added.

\[n + n (10\%) = 546 + (546 \times 0.10) = 600\]

A total of 600 samples was used for the study.

2.3 Participants

Study respondents were selected using a multistage sampling technique. Following selection of health facilities by balloting, the list of PLWHA who visited the health facilities were generated from the database of the HIV clinics. PLWHAs who attended ART clinic, had been on ART for at least one year, women of reproductive age (15-49 years) and men who were married or in a union were included, while acutely ill persons who were unable to communicate were excluded. These comprised of one thousand five hundred (1500) patients who then constituted the sampling frame from which respondents were drawn. Probability proportional to size (PPS) method was used to determine the number of participants to be selected from each facility. This amounted to five hundred and forty (540) respondents from FMC Yenagoa that had one thousand three hundred and fifty (1350) patients who visited the HIV clinic in the previous month, and sixty (60) participants from Otuasega Cottage Hospital, Ogbia that had one hundred and fifty (150) patients who visited the HIV clinic in the previous month. All patients on the sampling frame were assigned numbers and the random start number of 3 and an interval of 2 were applied for selection of participants from the sampling frame. A total of six hundred (600) respondents were recruited for this study.

2.4 Study Instrument and Data Collection

A pre-tested interviewer-administered semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data in this study. Data collection was done by four trained research assistants. The questionnaire was divided into three sections covering socio-demographic characteristics, sexual behaviour, and reproductive desires.

2.5 Statistical Analysis

The data obtained were entered into excel file and cleaned before exporting into the software, IBM Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 25 for analysis. Data were analyzed with the use of descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages.

3. RESULTS

A total of 600 PLWHA were recruited and a response rate of 100% was recorded in the study. The study comprised of 160 males (26.7%) and 440 females (73.3%). Most of the respondents 340(56.7%) were between 31-40 years, 338 (56.3%) had vocational/technical education as their highest level of education, and 457(76.2%) were married. The mean age of the respondents was 34.6±6.4 years (Table 1).

Most of the respondents, 592(98.7%) were heterosexual and 532(88.7%) reported having sexual intercourse in the last three months, out of whom 20(3.8%) had sex with a casual sexual partner and 2(0.4%) had sex with commercial sex workers. Also, three months prior to the interview, 68(11.3%) of the respondents had had no sexual partner, 460(76.7%) had one sexual partner, and 72(12%) had multiple sexual partners. A total of 359(67.5%) of the respondents used condoms out of whom only 63(11.8%) used condoms each time they had sex, while 200(37.6%) sometimes used condom, 96(18.0%) rarely used condom during sexual intercourse. The result also shows that 115(19.2%) had treated STIs in three months prior to the study. Intake of alcohol before sex was reported by 218(36.3%) of the respondents with 56(25.7%) indicating that they always take alcohol before sex, 105(48.2%) often take alcohol before sex and 57(26.1%) occasionally take alcohol before sex (Table 2).

Overall, 253(42.2%) of the respondents engaged in at least one form of risky sexual behaviour (Fig. 1).

4. DISCUSSION

This study provides insight into the patterns of sexual behaviour among PLWHA in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. It was observed that 88.7% of PLWHA in Bayelsa state were sexually active and had engaged in sexual intercourse within 3 months prior to the study. Improvement in the health of PLWHA following continued use of ART
was previously suggested to engender renewed sexual desires with return to sexual activity for reasons such as; companionship, to save their marriages, to have children, material support and to satisfy their sexual desires [17]. Our finding therefore indicates the need to pay attention to the sexual and reproductive health of PLWHA following consistent use of ART with evident...

Table 1. Social demographic characteristics

| Variable     | Frequency (n=600) | Percent (%) |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------|
| **Sex**      |                   |             |
| Male         | 160               | 26.7        |
| Female       | 440               | 73.3        |
| **Age group**|                   |             |
| ≤20 years    | 15                | 2.5         |
| 21-30 years  | 140               | 23.3        |
| 31-40 years  | 340               | 56.7        |
| 41-50 years  | 100               | 16.7        |
| > 50 years   | 5                 | 0.8         |
| **Mean ± SD**| 34.6 ± 6.4        |             |
| **Education**|                   |             |
| Basic primary| 15                | 2.5         |
| Secondary    | 78                | 13          |
| Under graduate| 30             | 5           |
| Vocational/Technical | 338         | 56.3        |
| Graduate     | 65                | 10.8        |
| Post graduate| 74                | 12.3        |
| **Marital status**| |             |
| Single       | 78                | 13.0        |
| Married      | 457               | 76.2        |
| Separated    | 24                | 4.0         |
| Divorced     | 6                 | 1.0         |
| Widowed      | 13                | 2.2         |
| Cohabiting   | 22                | 3.7         |

Fig. 1. Prevalence of risky sexual behaviour among respondents
improvement in health. This would ensure that the sexual and reproductive wellbeing of PLWHA is not neglected due to the requisite attention given to HIV treatment. Furthermore, PLWHA will also receive the needed psychosocial support to help them adopt safe and healthy sexual behavior.

The proportion of sexually active individuals in this present study (88.7%) is higher than previous reports of 74.6% in Togo [18], 64% in Mozambique [19] and 51.4% in Uganda [11] among PLWHA on ART. This difference may be due to differences in the studied populations, given that this present study surveyed PLWHA of reproductive age with at least one year of ART.

The high rate of sexual activity observed among PLWHA in Bayelsa in this present study also portrays the need to continually promote safe sex practices among PLWHA during follow-up clinic and counselling sessions. Sustained health education to continually remind and encourage PLWHAs to practice safe sex with particular emphasis on its role in the prevention of opportunistic infection and superinfection with other HIV strains is important and should be integrated into HIV and AIDS management programs.

The overall prevalence of risky sexual behaviour observed in this present study was 42.2%. This is similar to the reports of previous studies in Kenya [20,21], Ghana [22], and Nigeria [12].

| Variable                              | Frequency (n=600) | Percent (%) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| **Sexual preference**                 |                  |             |
| Heterosexual                          | 592              | 98.7        |
| Homosexual                            | 7                | 1.2         |
| Bisexual                              | 1                | 0.2         |
| **Sexual intercourse in the last three months** |                  |             |
| Yes                                   | 532              | 88.7        |
| No                                    | 67               | 11.2        |
| I don’t remember                      | 1                | 0.2         |
| Who had sex with n=532                |                  |             |
| Spouse                                | 438              | 82.3        |
| Regular sexual partners               | 72               | 13.5        |
| Casual sexual partner                 | 20               | 3.8         |
| sex worker                            | 2                | 0.4         |
| **Number of sexual partners**         |                  |             |
| None                                  | 68               | 11.3        |
| One                                   | 460              | 76.7        |
| Two                                   | 70               | 11.7        |
| Three                                 | 2                | 0.3         |
| **Used condom during sex n=532**      |                  |             |
| Each time                             | 63               | 11.8        |
| Sometimes                             | 200              | 37.6        |
| Rarely                                | 96               | 18.1        |
| Never used                            | 173              | 32.5        |
| **Infected with STIs the last 3 months** |                  |             |
| Yes                                   | 115              | 19.2        |
| No                                    | 458              | 76.3        |
| I don’t remember                      | 27               | 4.5         |
| **Take alcohol before sex**           |                  |             |
| Yes                                   | 218              | 36.3        |
| No                                    | 382              | 63.7        |
| **Frequency of alcohol intake (n=218)**|                  |             |
| Always                                | 56               | 25.7        |
| Often                                 | 105              | 48.2        |
| Occasionally                          | 57               | 26.1        |
High prevalence of risky sexual behaviour among PLWHA poses a heightened risk of spread of HIV infection in the general HIV-naïve population as well as re-infection with a different HIV strain and proliferation of opportunistic infections among PLWHA. This may explain in part the continued increase in new HIV cases and disease-related mortality rates in the developing countries. In this present study, 19.2% of PLWHA reported infection with STIs within 3 months prior to the study. This may be associated with risky sexual behavior in this population and only represents a fraction of the possible opportunistic infections that PLWHA are encumbered with.

The prevalence of STI among PLWHA observed in this present study is similar to a previous report of 18.2% in Northwest Ethiopia [23] but less than 26.6% reported in Central Ethiopia [24]. An association between STI and risky sexual behavior including multiple sexual partners and not using condom during sexual intercourse was demonstrated by [23]. It is therefore, pertinent to promote safe and healthy sexual behavior among PLWHA through continued health education. Risky sexual behavior among PLWHA have been associated with several factors including; having a positive sero-status partner, not disclosing sero-status, having a desire for a child, having experience of perceived stigma, and lack of education of protecting self from strain [25].

The risky sexual practices observed in this present study include sexual intercourse with casual partner, multiple sexual partners, sex with sex workers, irregular use of condom during sex and use of alcohol before sex.

Given the pattern of risky sexual behavior observed in this present study, there is a need to identify tools that can effectively discourage and mitigate risky sexual behaviours. The pattern of risky sexual behavior observed in this present study supports the reports of previous studies [18,21,26].

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is a preponderance of risky sexual behaviour/practices among PLWHA in Bayelsa State that may account for coinfection with STI as well as increase HIV/AIDS transmission. ART programs should integrate behavioural change intervention and secondary prevention strategies with continued education and counselling sessions for PLWHA.

**ETHICAL CONSIDERATION AND CONSENT**

Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT) and University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital (UPTH) with ethics’ number UPTH/ADM/90/SII/VOLXI/1063. Administrative approval/permission was also obtained from the Ministry of Health, Yenagoa, Bayelsa state. Written informed consent was obtained from all study respondents after carefully explaining the study protocol and significance. All materials used were de-identified by using randomly assigned research identifiers. The study respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provide.

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**COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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