



## **Awareness of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV AIDS in Katsina State, Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the level of knowledge and awareness of mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of HIV/AIDS in Katsina State, Nigeria. Katsina State is one of the states with high burden of HIV/AIDS especially among pregnant women, making the fight against mother-to-child transmission a major task to government and stakeholders. The study adopts survey as a method using interview and questionnaire as tools for data collection. While questionnaire was administered at the pregnant women, selected hospital officials were interviewed to collaborate on the responses generated from pregnant women through questionnaire. The study draws conclusion from the findings that much needs to be done to promote knowledge and awareness on mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Katsina State. The study therefore, recommends that extensive awareness programmes be sponsored on radio by government and its agencies to improve awareness and knowledge on pregnant women the mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Katsina State.

**Keywords:** Radio, HIV, Mother-to-Child, Transmission, Awareness, Knowledge

### **INTRODUCTION**

The prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV is critical in reducing the number of children being infected by the virus especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Although there are no much literature that explain the exact rate of transmission especially from mother-to-child in Nigeria, this study explores the level of awareness and knowledge of among women on mother-to-child transmission in Katsina State, Northern Nigeria.

Nigeria is said to accounts for close to 10 percent of HIV/AIDS cases globally. Evidenced based studies also show that women constitute no fewer than 48 percent of adults infected with the HIV globally. In Nigeria, however, women account for 57 percent of adults infected with HIV. Studies have also shown an increase in the number of children infected with the virus in recent time due to increases in the number of HIV-positive women especially the pregnant women.

Consequently, more than 90 percent of HIV infections in children are through mother-to-child transmission. This trend has raised concerns among health professionals and stakeholders on the need to promote knowledge and awareness on mother-to-child transmission of the virus. To achieve this, media especially the radio has a critical role to play as a universal medium of information dissemination.

Katsina State is located in North West Nigeria with one of the highest rate of infections with low participation in counseling among pregnant women due to cultural practices. This study explores the level

of awareness among the women and ways to expand the level of knowledge using radio as a medium of communication.

### **Problem Statement**

The concerns of children testing positive to HIV virus after birth has increased in developing countries over time. The study assessed the level of awareness among pregnant women about mother-to-child transmission. (MTCT) in Katsina State. The study used both secondary and primary data. The Nigeria National Demographic Health Survey (2008) shows that 70 percent of women in the northwest lack adequate awareness on mother-to-child transmission of HIV virus.

Consequently, several studies have been carried out on the potent power of media on effective public health information campaigns. However, the dangers associated with MTCT has further received attention of academics from various countries on the pervasive role of the media in bringing attention of the globe to the dangers of the MTCT by helping in disseminating protective measures of the World Health Organisations. Studies have further defined the media as agenda setters and watchdog of the society.

But while studies such as that Bou-Karroum<sup>1</sup>, El-Jardali, Hemadi, Faraj, Ojha, Shahrour, Darzi, Ali, Doumit, Langlois, Melki, AbouHaidar & Aki (2017) confirm that a number of literatures on the impact of media interventions on health behavior and their use in increasing awareness and education exist, much has not been done on the radio and promotion of knowledge and awareness among women in Katsina State on MTCT despite the prevalence of the trend.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant to the researcher, the body of knowledge and to the general society. The study exposed the researcher to the challenges of knowledge sharing among women in Katsina State on MTCT. Secondly, findings in this study is a contribution that enriches the existing literature on the HIV transmission especially those involving mother-to-child. It, therefore, serves as a reference document to scholars and students, doing similar research.

Thirdly, the study enriches public knowledge and understanding of the challenges faced women in accessing antenatal care in Katsina State.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To find out the level of awareness among pregnant women on mother-to-child HIV transmission
2. To Determine the level of engagement of radio stations in promoting knowledge on mother-to-child HIV Transmission among pregnant women in Katsina
3. To find out other campaign strategies adopted by Katsina State agencies in promoting knowledge on mother-to-child HIV transmission

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the level of awareness among pregnant women on mother-to-child HIV transmission?
2. What is the level of engagement of radio stations in promoting knowledge on mother-to-child HIV Transmission among pregnant women in Katsina?
3. What are the other campaign strategies adopted by Katsina State agencies in promoting knowledge on mother-to-child HIV transmission?

### **Scope of the Study**

This study covered pregnant women attending weekly antenatal care in the month of June at the General Hospitals ie, Mashi, Dutsinma Malumfashi Hospital, all in Katsina State.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to the World Health Organization (2023), globally, an estimated 1.3 million women and girls living with HIV become pregnant each year. And due to lack of intervention, the percentage of transmission of the virus from mother-to-child especially during pregnancy, labour, delivery or breastfeeding was between 15 percent and 45 percent.

Studies also show that mother-to-child transmission had risen from 13 percent to 23 percent from six weeks to the end of breastfeeding, rising challenges in retention of women throughout the breastfeeding period. Therefore, there is need to adopt measures to reach out and engage more pregnant and lactating women on protective measures to take to reduce the spread.

To achieve a wider reach and engagement of more pregnant women and lactating mothers to stop the spread of the virus from mother-to-child, media, especially radio has a crucial role to play. Studies have pointed out that during the last two decades, the mass media have become a vital part of social, political, economic, and environmental situations. Studies have also pointed out that the role of the mass media in any crisis or disaster cannot be denied, as the media facilitate access to information for government, policy makers, and citizens to assist in managing the situation Ghassabi and Zare-Farashbandi (2015). Against this backdrop, Obono (2011) and Nelson and Salawu (2016) underscore the importance of mass media in health awareness campaigns and as the cornerstone for health communication interventions.

Mass Media has been divided into two major categories namely: the broadcast and the print. Broadcast media is made up of radio and the television, and they disseminate their information or programmes to audience through airwaves while print mainly comprises of newspapers and magazines. McQuail (2010) defines broadcasting as “the transmission of radio and television signals over air from fixed terrestrial transmitters and with limited range.” Print media on the other hand, include mainly the newspapers and magazines Sambe (2005).

Both broadcast and print media perform vital function in the society. Mass media are the very important institutions through which public communication is made which are basic to the survival of the society Hamza (2013). They disseminate messages or information to a large and heterogeneous audience or as social institutions with well-organised and defined relationship for collecting, processing, packaging and relaying of message or information for audience consumption. The receivers of information could be general public or relatively segment of audience within the public in general.

Mass media play essential roles in any society –they interpret events for understanding of individuals, and for social and political needs of the audience pivoted by the transfer of meaning – communication Akashoro, Okidu and Ajaga (2013). The normative functions of mass media in the society are to inform, educate, and entertain. Other functions, according to Sambe (2005) are surveillance and correlation functions. He posits that mass media are expected to serve as “eyes and ears of the public” (p. 37). The information in the media is mainly provided inform of news and feature stories.

It is, therefore, important to note that, one of the basic needs in the face of the global spread of HIV through mother-to-child transmission is access to information to address the problem. Fondation Hironnelle (2020). For every citizen, access to reliable information becomes a major concern when it comes to protecting oneself and loved ones. According to Fondation Hironnelle (2020), one of the basic role of the media is the provision of quality information and questioning the authorities about their choices and the implementation of their decisions in curtailing the spread of the virus.

Health Experts and organisations including the World Health Organisation explain that the best way to prevent and slow down transmission is for citizens to be well informed about the virus and how it spreads. This further underscores the important role of media in curtailing the spread of the virus through provision of information on how it spreads. Therefore, media is used to create awareness and educate publics on how to protect themselves from the virus.

Other related literatures show that media have played significant role in the past in creating awareness and providing information about diseases such as Ebola, Lassa Fever, HIV/AIDS, breast cancers, among others, by facilitating the dissemination of information on the diseases. For instance, Mejia, Ticona, Rodriguez-Alarcon, Campos-Urbina, Catay-Medina, Porta-Quinto, Garayar-Peceros, Ignacio-Quinte, Esteban, Mamani, and Tovani-Palone (2020) confirms the role of media in the fight against diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Therefore, media intervention is needed in Katsina State to promote healthy society. It is against this backdrop that Bou-Karroum et al (2017) defines the media interventions in health crises as organized and purposive activities that utilize a variety of media channels to inform, persuade, or motivate populations. In health care, media interventions can convey health-related information including research evidence to the public, policymakers, and health professionals. They can also influence individual health behaviors. Studies has shown the viability of media campaigns in decreasing health crises such as tobacco uptake, reduction of alcohol-impaired driving and alcohol-related crashes and influencing health services utilization.

Noar, (2006) cited in Catalán-Matamoros (2011) stresses that mass media campaigns have long been a tool for promoting public health being widely used to expose high proportions of large populations to messages through routine uses of existing media, such as television, radio, and newspapers. Communication campaigns involving diverse topics and target audiences have been conducted for decades. Catalán-Matamoros (2011) note that mass media campaigns have generally aimed primarily to change knowledge, awareness and attitudes, contributing to the goal of changing behaviour.

Explaining the power of media in relation to the provision of information in a period like this, Laughey (2009) states that the media influence how people think and feel. This confirms the importance of media such as radio in the regime of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Saraf & Balamurugan (2018) adds that the mass media change the negative behavior of people into positive behavior regarding the health issues. It can dismiss the negative thoughts about health issues in the minds of people and create awareness about the various health issues and solutions. Reaching out to large population, the mass media has a wide range of scope in reaching to the masses. Also, a survey by Grilli, et al cited in Saraf & Balamurugan (2018) finds that, 70% of the people are positively affected by mass media related to health behavior.

### **Social Responsibility Theory**

This study is anchored on Social Responsibility Theory of the Mass Media. The theory emerged in the mid twentieth century. During the 17th and 18th centuries, libertarian principles gave absolute freedom to the media disseminate information deemed necessarily for the public good. This theory refers to ethics that spell out role of the media and put on them the obligation towards environment, society, and other aspects of the society. Social Responsibility theory put it upon the media, the need to promote environment and socio-cultural aspects in relation to the economy of the place. The theory argues that mass media content should be filtered through the public obligation and interferences. If media must be free from control, they have to be socially responsible to the society in which they exist and operate. This explains the crucial role of mass media in the fight against mother-to-child transmission of HIV. The role is not only the provision of information about the virus to the public, media also owe the public a duty to investigate the budgets and allocation of funds in the fight against the disease.

Social Responsibility theory is one of the four normative theories which argues that, the media has an obligation to act for the benefit of the general society. Social responsibility is, therefore, an ethical theory, in which individuals are accountable for fulfilling their civic duty; the actions of an individual must benefit the whole society. Sambe (2008) argues that one of the tenets of social responsibility theory is it demands for equal access to the mass media as channels of mass communication. Ike (2005) notes that social responsibility theory puts it upon the media the necessity to perform a public service to allow their existence by properly informing and responding to the needs of the society. Nkwocha (1991) also points out that under social responsibility theory, the media respond to the wishes of the people to create a better society.

Relating this theory to this study, radio stations in Katsina are to serve as voices of the people. They are to serve avenues or platforms for social development. Therefore, they are to educate, inform, document, analyse, mediate, create and proffer solutions to social problems. Uzuegbunam (2013) that under the Social Responsibility theory of the media, the media owe the society a duty of keeping them informed of happenings around them, criticize government and other institutions, preserve democracy by properly informing the public and by responding to society's needs and interests.

The mass media is also regarded as the Fourth Estate of the realms and charged with the responsibility of providing information required by the citizens to take informed decisions that contribute to the general development of the society. Therefore, in the fight against the infection and spread of HIV, media serve as information providers on measures that curtail the spread of the virus, preventive measures by serving as watchdog, monitoring the activities of other arms of the government and communicating the measures to the citizens. Quality information either in form of news and features stories, provided by journalists is an integral part of the efforts to stop the pandemic from spreading.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A total number of 275 pregnant women between the ages of 18 years and 45 years were sampled at the General Hospital, Mashi, Dutsinma and, Malumfashi General Hospitals attending weekly antenatal clinic. The total number of pregnant mothers who attended antenatal care at the Mashi General Hospital in the months of June were 65. The antenatal care days at the 3 General Hospitals in Katsina state were Mondays and Thursdays while attendance at the Heart-to-Heart Clinic was on Tuesdays and Wednesdays when the infected mothers received Counselling and treatment. Similarly, 125 pregnant women were sampled at the Malumfashi General Hospital while 85 pregnant women were sampled at the Dutsinma General Hospital.

The study found that level of awareness and knowledge of mother-to-child transmission of HIV among pregnant women in the selected towns of Mashi, Malumfashi and Dutsinma were low even though they were received on a regularly basis for antenatal care at the three selected hospitals in Katsina State.

The study revealed that most of the respondent did not know much about mother-to-child transmission of HIV because they don't regularly attend counselling and antenatal care while both state government and NACA were not running awareness programmes on radio except those run occasionally by NACA on some radio stations in the state.

The respondent did not also hear much on radio aside what they knew at the weekly counselling sessions at the sampled hospitals. The sampled women listen to radio as their preferred and most means getting information.

The contributory factors to high transmission rates include limited access to antenatal care, lack of knowledge and awareness, societal stigmas, and cultural barriers while there was no awareness on radio stations.

All the media both Print and Electronic Media do not have any programme related to HIV/AIDS or MTCT in the State. It was only NACA State Chapter that runs some Jingles on HIV/AIDS. The pregnant mothers were left with only lectures during antenatal care days. Also of barrier was the fact that some husbands don't allow their pregnant wives to attend antenatal care particularly for fear of stigmatization while some women were not allowed to do or to go for tests to know their health status.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concluded that there was inadequate awareness about MTCT among women in Katsina State. It is therefore recommended that more effort should be geared towards creating awareness among the entire State if the scourge of MTCT of HIV/AIDS is to be brought below the level of public health concerns. There must also be political commitment in promoting programs of State Action on Control of Aids (SACA). Awareness campaign on MTCT should also be regularly disseminated at various health facility centers.

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