**Media-saturation, communication exposure and HIV stigma in Nigeria**

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**ABSTRACT:** HIV-related stigma constitutes an impediment to public health as it hampers HIV/AIDS control efforts in many ways. To address the complex problems of increasing HIV infection rate, widespread misinformation about the infection and the rising level of HIV-related stigma, the various tiers of government in Nigeria are working with local and international non-governmental organizations to develop and implement strategic communication programs.

This paper assesses the link between these communication efforts and HIV-related stigma using data from a nationally representative household survey. The results show that accepting attitudes towards people living with HIV are more prevalent among men than among women. Exposure to HIV-related communication on the media is associated with increased knowledge about HIV, which is in turn a strong predictor of accepting attitudes. Communication exposure also has a significant and positive association with accepting attitudes towards people living with HIV. In contrast, community media saturation is not strongly linked with accepting attitudes for either sex. The findings strongly suggest that media-based HIV programs constitute an effective strategy to combat HIV/AIDS-related stigma and should therefore be intensified in Nigeria.

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**African First Ladies Harness Hollywood Star Power**

from reuters.com by Jill Serjeant

16 April 2009 — The first ladies of 15 African nations will gather in Los Angeles next week to promote their work in improving the health and education of women and girls in a continent ravaged by AIDS, poverty and a scarcity of clean water. The two-day meeting, billed as the first such summit by the first ladies in the United States, will introduce the influential African women to California business leaders and health policy experts -- as well as Hollywood stars. These first ladies already know Washington and New York. They thought that by coming to Los Angeles, some of the inspiration that inspires movie makers could also inspire them in their objectives,” Jean Stephane Biatcha, executive director of African Synergy, one of the organizers, told a Beverly Hills news conference on Thursday.

Movie stars Sharon Stone, Danny Glover and Billy Zane -- all of whom have worked with charities in Africa -- will help to host the April 20-21 event, which includes a celebrity luncheon.

"Lethal Weapon" star Glover, a former United Nations goodwill ambassador, told reporters that African women play a vital role in healthcare and in influencing the education of girls at home. The meeting will bring together the first ladies of Angola, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia, Swaziland and 10 other African countries with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s wife Sarah Brown, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger’s wife Maria Shriver and others.

The gathering is being organized by the Los Angeles-based nonprofit group US Doctors for Africa (USDFA) and African Synergy Against AIDS and Suffering, a charitable group formed in 2002 by 22 First Ladies from Africa.

USDFA founder Ted Alemayhu said the meeting "will pair these leaders with U.S. experts, key political figures and important organizations to create ongoing partnerships."

"These are some of Africa’s most important leaders and aiding their efforts is critical to improving health throughout Africa," Alemayhu said.

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More articles on page 2 . . .
Mogae shifts stress to HIV prevention
from Harvard University Gazette
by Alvin Powell

An African leader whose anti-AIDS programs resulted in one of the continent’s few HIV success stories said Monday (April 13) that he is shifting his efforts from treatment toward prevention in hopes of creating an “HIV-free” generation. Festus Mogae, who was Botswana’s president from 1998 to 2008 and is currently African President in Residence at Boston University, said he has begun new efforts as the head of Botswana’s national AIDS council that will push prevention programs across the nation in hopes of lowering the still-high prevalence of HIV in his country. The program is being conducted in collaboration with other sectors of society, including schools, churches, labor unions, and private industry. The hope is to reach many different parts of society with prevention messages, from adults listening to sermons in church to young people in primary, secondary, and university classrooms.

The second phase of the initiative — to run after the prevention messages have been heard — will promote male circumcision in hopes of reducing infection rates. “They are all aimed at prevention,” Mogae said. “Prevention is now priority No. 1.”

Mogae’s efforts also extend to the international arena. He is part of an organization called Champions for an HIV-Free Generation, made up of former African heads of state who travel to different countries to energize national anti-AIDS programs across the continent.

Mogae spoke at the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) on “Evolving HIV/AIDS Policies in Africa,” in an event sponsored by HSPH’s AIDS Initiative. The initiative has close ties to both Mogae and the government of Botswana. It runs an extensive research program centered in a laboratory building on the grounds of the main hospital in Botswana’s capital of Gaborone. The research has examined everything from mother-to-child transmission of HIV to the training of health workers, and has informed a variety of government policies.

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS remains high in Botswana at 17.1 percent of the general population, according to a 2004 survey. It has begun to decline, however, in some key sectors. The prevalence among pregnant women visiting antenatal clinics, as high as 37.4 percent in 2003, fell to 32.4 percent in 2006, according to UNAIDS. Prevalence rates have also fallen among those aged 15 to 29, and the percentage of children born to HIV-positive mothers who are also infected has fallen from 40 percent to 4 percent, Mogae said.

Under Mogae’s leadership, Botswana began aggressively attacking the problem of HIV in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a time when some African leaders still questioned whether HIV and AIDS were real threats.

In contrast, Mogae mobilized the people of Botswana, saying that the nation’s high prevalence rates meant that Botswana’s people were facing extinction if nothing was done. The national program includes public education campaigns, voluntary counseling and testing, and free antiretroviral drugs for those who need them.

Mogae was introduced by Harvard School of Public Health AIDS Initiative Chair Max Essex, the Lasker Professor of Health Sciences, who praised Mogae’s leadership on AIDS, both inside Botswana and on the global stage, saying that at one point, Mogae pledged to not give a public speech on any topic — whether it be opening a police station, school, or other non-health related event — without talking about AIDS.

Though Mogae is shifting his own efforts toward prevention, he said that testing and treatment programs remain critical in Botswana. Public education campaigns have been successful, he said, and most people are aware of the risks of HIV. National data, however, shows that while more than half of the population has been tested for HIV, the country is still far short of the national goal of 100 percent. The antiretroviral drug distribution program has also been largely successful, with 85 percent of those needing the anti-HIV drugs receiving them. Death rates from the disease have fallen to 10 percent.

Despite these positive indicators, the epidemic still rages in Botswana, with 18,000 new infections annually and prevalence rates in some age groups over 30 percent. The nation’s success holds its own dangers as well, Mogae said, as HIV-positive people who feel well because of antiretroviral drugs stop taking them or engage in risky sexual behavior.

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REACH is a collaborative program of Northwestern University and the University of Ibadan with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. REACH aims to improve HIV/AIDS prevention strategies in Nigeria through social science and community-based research.