Lagos is Tackling HIV/AIDS Head On - Dabiri from allafrica.com

Lagos — Since 1986 when the first case of a person living with AIDS was reported in Nigeria, public perception about the disorder has gradually strengthened.

Various medical experts and government parastatals have ceaselessly made relentless effort to subdue the spread of HIV - the causative virus of AIDS. In this area, the Lagos State Government leads. Lagos was first to set up a Foundation on HIV/AIDS and the Lagos State AIDS Control Agency (LSACA) implements one of the most vibrant HIV/AIDS control and prevention programme initiatives in Nigeria.

No one knows this better than Dr. F.A Dabiri, Senior Special Assistant to Governor Babatunde Fashola, on HIV and AIDS. Dabiri who is also Chief Executive Officer, LSACA spoke to Kola Folorunsho. Excerpts:

On HIV/AIDS control & prevention
LSACA was first to become an autonomous agency of government. Directly, we are under the government and as such, we work together with development partners, public and private sectors. There is no barrier for the activities we do. Most of them are preventive activities. We work with public hospitals etc.

Prevention activities
What we are doing is in line with what Lagos State Governor is doing. Last year, for example, we took our campaign to the barbers and hairdressers.

His Excellency gave out 1,000 sterilising kits to them and he made them realise that they are using sharp objects which has over the years opened up the people to contracting infectious diseases.

When you barb your hair, you at times get bruises from barbers. His Excellency, living by example, advised the barbers to always use the sterilising kits when they barb. He told them further that if the clippers which the barbers are using are not their own, they should not use them.

Status of LSACA
LSACA is the Lagos State chapter of the National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA) which is directly under the presidency while LSACA is directly under the Lagos State government.

We have had campaigns for barbers, automobile technicians and NAWOCA courtesy of the Lagos State First Lady. On this, we have gone to the traditional rulers and the State House of Assembly.

A law signed by Asiwaju Bola Tinubu brought about women emancipation in Lagos State. I stand to be corrected, this giant step has not even been implemented in Abuja. We have launched two divisions of National Women Coalition on AIDS (NAWOCA) in Ikorodu and Badagry. Epe, Lagos Island and Ikeja are in the pipeline. This is one of the aims and means by which we can take campaign against HIV and AIDS to the grassroots.

On statistics of PLWA in Lagos State.
It’s an on-going thing. It used to be 4.4 million, it is now 5.1 million. Really, it is nothing to be frightened about. What is happening in Lagos State is that more people are staying alive because our programmes are successful.

Precautionary measures
Young ones especially should avoid sex without condom. The married should learn to be faithful to their partners.

Sex workers and men who have sex with other men should use condoms constantly. We are getting more variants of the virus. However, the virus is very easy to kill if it is discovered very early.

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On role of NGOs
We are in collaboration with NGOs and organisations through the NIBUCCA in eradicating the spread of the virus in Lagos State.

Message
People need to get close to the facilities provided by the State government.

The State Ministry of Justice is also there to cater for cases of discrimination. I advise all Nigerians to go for the HIV screening test.

There is nothing to fear. It is when you know your status that you’ll know the next line of action.

To access the article online, go to http://allafrica.com/stories/200910200596.html

Effects of School Health Nursing Education Interventions on AIDS-Related Attitudes of Students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria from the Journal of Adolescent Health 44 (2): 118-123 Feb 2009

Purpose: One of the greatest challenges facing school nurses is that of identifying and using appropriate strategies to meet the health education needs of adolescents in regard to prevention of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). This study examined the effects of HIV/AIDS preventative health education with parental involvement on students’ attitude towards HIV/AIDS prevention in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

If you have access, you can read this article here. If you would to read the .pdf file, please email REACH@northwestern.edu.

KENYA: More education equals less teen pregnancy and HIV from plusnews.org
NAIROBI, 25 July 2008 (PlusNews) - Keeping Kenyan girls in school and ensuring they have access to HIV and sex education has a dramatic effect on lowering future levels of HIV, according to experts.

"Young people do not have the information they need, and the dropout rate, particularly for girls, is still too high," said Rosemarie Muganda-Onyando, executive director of the Centre for the Study of Adolescence (CSA), which conducts research into teen behaviour and implements programmes for them.

"Dropping out of school ensures a life of poverty for these girls, and many of them also wind up HIV-positive because the male-female power dynamics become even more slanted against them."

Although the government introduced free primary school education in 2003, an estimated one million children of school-going age are not attending school. Up to 13,000 Kenyan girls drop out of school every year as a result of pregnancy, and around 17 percent of girls have had sex before they turn 15. HIV prevalence in Kenyan women aged between 15 and 24 is about 5 percent, compared with just one percent for their male counterparts.

The Kenya Demographic and Health Survey of 2004 found that better educated girls were less likely to marry early, more likely to practice family planning, and that their children had a higher survival rate.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund, uneducated girls are also more likely to contract HIV/AIDS, which spreads twice as quickly among them than among girls who have had even some schooling.

The Ministry of Education has an HIV/AIDS prevention and sex education curriculum that focuses on upper-primary and secondary school, but no specific time is set aside for this, leaving teachers and school heads to fit in the subject at their discretion.

"I would like to see compulsory comprehensive HIV and sex education - and not just the bare bones, but something that goes further and teaches kids to become responsible for their actions and take greater control of their future," Muganda-Onyando said.
"Not enough teachers have been trained for this type of education, so children are leaving school with academic qualifications and not many life skills."

These were not the only obstacles: the strong influence of fundamentalist Christians in HIV funding to Kenya had also played a part in preventing sex education from being taught in schools; and "There is also resistance from parents, many of whom feel school is not the place to learn about sex," she said.

This lack of information meant girls were not practising safe sex; a 2003 government survey noted that just 25 percent of women aged 15 to 24 reported using a condom the last time they had sex with a non-marital, non-cohabiting partner.

Schools ill-equipped for sex education

Schools in remote, rural areas and deprived urban areas are often ill-prepared to handle sex education; many have not seen the government's curriculum.

"We don't have sex education or HIV education; the government hasn't given us any materials or training so we don't know where to start," said Christopher Barassa, principal of Genesis Joy Primary and Secondary School in Mathare, Nairobi's second-largest slum.

Although registered with the Ministry of Education and the Nairobi City Council, the school is considered as 'non-formal' because of its location and lack of facilities; it has no playing ground or toilets, so the school is surrounded by 'flying toilets' - fecal matter wrapped in plastic bags and thrown away - and garbage. All the students are from the slum, and Barassa says keeping them in school can be difficult. "Our drop-out rate is not very high, but teen pregnancy is a real problem," he told IRIN/PlusNews. The school's policy is to encourage girls to return to school after they give birth, but many felt too stigmatised or had no help to look after their children and therefore stayed away.

"When we investigate the pregnancies, it is almost always an older man ... over twenty and sometimes over thirty," he said. "We work with the local police to prosecute them - we recently had a 31-year-old man arrested for marrying one of our students who was just 15."

He noted that many parents in the slum had inadequate control because work kept them away from their children, sometimes for days. As a result, children learnt about sex from the wrong sources, such as the numerous video halls that allowed children to view pornographic films. "The girls also have to live in one room with their parents until they are mature, and many of them witness their parents having sex, so they learn about it early," Barassa said. "Sometimes they get a man when they are still young in order to get out of that situation."

More sex education, less sex

The CSA runs projects aimed at lowering the drop-out rate for girls and teaching them about sexual and reproductive health, including HIV. "The projects train teachers to impart life skills, create safe spaces in schools where girls can freely discuss the issues they are facing, and foster mentor-protégé relationships between older and younger students, so the younger ones have somewhere to turn," CSA's Muganda-Onyando said.

"One of the big problems has been the breakdown of our traditional African systems, where an aunt or grandmother was responsible for sex education ... people say discussions about sex are taboo in Africa, but this is not true," she said. "We lost those systems through colonisation and modernisation, and they haven't been replaced; these projects are trying to give children back that support system."

The CSA also establishes ties with the community, encouraging parents to take an active role in teaching their children about sex, and to behave more responsibly themselves. The initiative, which is being implemented in more than 100 schools around the country, has had positive results so far: participating schools have noted a significant drop in teen pregnancy, higher retention and completion rates of school education, and improved self-esteem and confidence among girls, which in turn has led to higher scores in exams.

"Girls also need to be supported with uniforms, books, and other material necessities for school," said Principal Barassa. "If a girl has everything she needs for school, she can stay in school and concentrate on her studies, and she will not look for an older man to buy them for her in exchange for sex."

To access the article online, go to http://www.plusnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=79456

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