

## ATTITUDE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS TOWARDS VOLUNTARY HIV/AIDS COUNSELLING AND TESTING

**Obi Chidiebere Nneka**

*Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling,  
Faculty of Education,  
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.  
[divaonyii@gmail.com](mailto:divaonyii@gmail.com)*

### ABSTRACT

*This study investigated the attitude of undergraduate students towards voluntary HIV/AIDS counselling and testing in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Three null hypotheses were formulated for testing at 0.05 level of statistical significance. Ex-post facto research design was utilized in this investigation. A sample of 400 undergraduates, drawn through multistage sampling technique, was used for the study. A valid and reliable instrument developed by the researchers titled Attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing Inventory was used for data collection. Data analysis was done using independent samples t-test to test the null hypotheses. Results revealed that male undergraduates have a significantly lesser attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing than female undergraduates. No significant difference was observed between Christian and Muslim undergraduates and those who reside off-campus and on-campus. It was therefore recommended that specialized programmes should be developed aimed at undergraduates so as to increase their interest in HIV/AIDS screening.*

**Keywords:** Undergraduate students, HIV/AIDS, Counselling

## INTRODUCTION

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), the causative organism of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is the leading cause of death in Africa and the continent's greatest challenge to making economic and social progress and development. This pandemic is a unique challenge to humanity in the sense that it affects all sectors, makes groups potentially vulnerable and reaches from villages to state capitals and international business capitals (World Bank, 2005). Ever since the first reported case of HIV infection in 1986, the Nigerian government and concerned organized private sector continues to grapple with significant increase of this pandemic. In response to this appalling threat, the country has responded by taking proactive steps, as well as developed national guidelines aimed at curbing this negative trend. Starting from 2001, three strategic frameworks covering different time scales have been developed and implemented. The most recent of these frameworks, the National HIV/AIDs Strategic Plan (NSP, 2010-2015) has as its objective to

“reposition prevention of new HIV infection as the centrepiece of the national HIV/AID response. Thus greater focus will be placed on scaling up HIV prevention services that enables individuals to maintain their negative status, as well as improve access to quality treatment and care services for People Living With HIV (PLHIV) including positive health, dignity and prevention intervention that reduces their transmitting HIV to others” (National Agency for the Control of AIDS, NACA, 2010, 26).

Despite the above laudable goals, various intervention programs and support from global development partners and Civil Society Groups, current result is a far cry from projected expectation. According to the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDs (UNAIDS, 2013), Nigeria is second only to South Africa with the highest number of HIV burden and new infections globally. Continuing, the report added that Nigeria has the highest number of AIDs related death internationally. Despite the gloomy data above, one hope is that HIV/AIDs is preventable, in particular if the young population is reached. This is what the World Bank calls the window of hope (World Bank, 2005, p1). According to the World Bank report, education touches all parts of society, particularly young people and has the potential to play a key role in the battle against HIV/AIDs.

The concentration of education as a panacea in combating HIV/AIDs is because HIV infection among children and young people in many parts of Africa continues to grow. About 14% of new infection worldwide occurs among children. UNAIDs (2003) estimated that of the 12 million young people infected with HIV/AIDs worldwide, about 72% (8.6 million) live in Sub-Saharan Africa. The severity of the epidemic among young people varies significantly by country, reaching as high as 40% in Swaziland. Locally here in Nigeria, it has been reported that 60% of all reported cases of HIV/AIDs come from the age groups of 15-24 years, who constitute more than 50% of the national population (National Education and Research Development Council, NERDC, 2003). This has made the need to deal with students and adolescents reproductive health an urgent national priority.

This data is worrisome and calls for concerted and increased momentum in tackling this trend. To adequately do this, individuals need to know their status and curb the spread of

the virus. Different approaches have been developed to slow down the impact and reverse the spread of the virus. These approaches includes Provider-Initiated Counselling and Testing (PICT), diagnosis of HIV infants and young children, family care and partner testing, condom promotion and provision, targeted intervention for sex workers and homosexuals, male circumcision and voluntary HIV/AIDS screening (Addis et al, 2013).

Among all these strategies, voluntary HIV screening is internationally recognized as an effective strategy for both the prevention and management of HIV (Human Development Report, 2004). Voluntary HIV screening has been identified as an effective approach to combating opportunistic infections such as tuberculosis and prophylaxis, prevention of mother to child transmission, antiretroviral therapy and provision of psychological support to infected (Hogan & Salomen, 2005). It helps people to know their status as well as aid appropriate behavioural change, reduce unsafe sex and the spreading of other STIs. This is true for the general population as well as special population such as students in tertiary institutions including undergraduates.

Students at tertiary institutions may not benefit from general interventions because they constitute a special group. The environment of universities provides ample opportunities for adventurous sexual activities often with multiple partners, injection-based drug abuse, and often unprotected sex (Duncan et al, 2002). Additionally, students in tertiary institutions range between 16 and 49 years old, a significant proportion of persons affected by HIV/AIDS (Federal Ministry of Health, 2012). Moreover, students possess an abundant strength and youthful vitality which predispose them to a high level of sexual activity. It is therefore necessary to investigate their interest in going for HIV/AIDS screening as this would go a long way in promoting safe and targeted intervention strategies. It is against this background that this study is investigating undergraduate students' interest towards HIV screening specifically in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.

In this researcher opinion, some factors that could influence students' attitude towards voluntary HIV/AIDS counselling and testing include gender, religion and place of residence (on-campus or off-campus). After extensive and in-depth looking at the literature no study has been conducted that investigated the role of gender, religion and location on the interest of undergraduate students in receiving HIV/AIDS screening in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. It is against this background that this study was designed to investigate the influence of gender, religion and location of residence on students' attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing.

As the young are the leaders of tomorrow, it becomes very important to understand their opinion towards issues of local and international importance. Therefore, a study of this nature is important to a wide array of individuals and stakeholders such as students, teachers, counsellors, school administrators, curriculum developers, governmental organizations, international organizations and civil society organizations just to mention a few.

Through this study, students would better understand their misconceptions about HIV/AIDS and approaches to getting accurate information about the topic. Teachers likewise would be able to understand how to best present information regarding the topic of sexuality and HIV/AIDS to students, this is so because despite the carefully crafted or developed curriculum teachers are the final implementers.

Counsellors would through this study provide needed persona-social information to their study, especially those who do not hold accurate information about the topic of HIV/AIDS. Also this study will help counsellors to know what information to provide to student during group counselling session. School administrators are likely to benefit from this study as it will enable them to know what students already know about the topic, what they need to know and how best to provide an open and supportive school climate for the discussion of topic surrounding adolescents' sexuality and HIV/AIDS education. Curriculum developers such as Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) will find this study useful as it will provide them feedback on how students view the Family Life and Health Education (FLHE) curriculum. This knowledge would be very useful when developing similar curriculum in the future.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitude of undergraduate students towards voluntary HIV/AIDS counselling and testing in Port Harcourt. In specific terms, this study aims at:

- 1) Finding out the attitude of undergraduate male and female students towards voluntary HIV/AIDS counselling and testing in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.
- 2) Find out the attitude of undergraduate students towards voluntary HIV/AIDS counselling and testing in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education based on location.
- 3) Find out the attitude of undergraduate students towards voluntary HIV/AIDS counselling and testing in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education based on religion

### **HYPOTHESES**

The following null hypotheses would be tested at 0.05 level of statistical significance:

- 1) Male and female undergraduate students do not differ significantly in their attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.
- 2) Christian and Muslim undergraduate students do not differ significantly in their attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.
- 3) On-campus and off-campus undergraduate students do not differ significantly in their attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.

## CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Theoretical Framework: Theory of Planned Behaviour

This theory originally was formulated as the Theory of Reason Action (TRA) by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1980. It was developed to explain the discrepancy between interest and behaviour. TRA was related to voluntary behaviour. Later on, it was discovered not to be 100% voluntary, this led to a change from TRA for Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).

The core assumption of TPB suggests that a person's behaviour is determined by his/her intention to perform that behaviour and that his intention is in turn a function of one's attitude towards the Behaviour and subjective norm. Simply put this theory holds that there are three (3) components that define a person's behavior and they are:

1. The attitude the individual holds toward the behaviour in question.
2. The subjective norm and
3. Their perceived behavioural control.

This theory posits only specific attitude towards the behaviour in question can be expected to predict behaviour. The second component, subjective norm, refers to individual beliefs about how people's expectancies about their own behaviour in a given setting. Lastly perceived behavioural control refers to people's perception of their ability to perform a given behaviour or not. A confluence of these three components leads to a greater intention, the cognitive representation of a person's readiness to perform this behaviour (Ajzen, 2002).

Smith, Taran and Thompson (2008) have applied this theory to demonstrate the help seeking behaviour of men with psychological problem. Agurre (2012) in accordance explained the help seeking behaviour of college students of Mexican origin suffering from anxiety or depression symptoms. Within the context of this study the theory of planned behaviour refers to how the attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control all interact to influence the interest of undergraduate students in receiving HIV/AIDS screening.

## METHODOLOGY

**Research Design:** Ex post facto research design was adopted for the study as the research design. According to Nwankwo (2013:77), the ex post facto design, also called causal-comparative design, "involves collecting and analyzing data about some variables retrospectively or about variables which are already in place without manipulating any of them in order to find out how some of them influence, or are related to other variables". From the above definition, the rationale for adopting an ex-post facto design in the research enterprise is to identify how the identified variables of gender, religious affiliation and residency influence or are related to undergraduates' attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.

**Sample and Sampling Technique:** Based on the population size of undergraduates in the institution, the Krejcie and Morgan Table was used to determine an appropriate sample size of 400 respondents. In order to arrive at a representative sampling, two sampling techniques were adopted: cluster sampling technique and convenience sampling technique.

**Instrument for the Study:** The instrument for the study is a researcher-developed, non-cognitive instrument titled “**Attitude towards HIV/AIDS Counselling and Testing Inventory.**” The instrument is divided into two sections namely Section A and B. Section A of the instrument contains spaces for filling demographic information such as age, department, level, gender and religious affiliation and location of residence. Section B is a 10 item questionnaire constructed on a four-point likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Respondents are expected to tick the degree to which they agree or disagree with the items. Some items in the instruments were reverse-coded. To establish the face and content validity of the inventory, draft copies of the instrument were given to the experts in test development and also a health care professional, along with the objectives and research questions of the study, to evaluate the instrument on item content, relevance, comprehensiveness, clarity, and literacy demand. Their suggestions, corrections and modifications would be incorporated into the final version of the instrument before administration. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using the test re-test technique. The researcher administered some copies the instrument on 20 undergraduates who were not part of the selected sample twice, during a two-week interval. Scores from both administrations of the instrument generated useful data that was then used to correlate a Pearson Product Moment correlation. The obtained correlation coefficient (r) was 0.79. This indicated that the instrument possess suitable reliability for utilization.

**Administration and Analysis of the Instrument:** The instrument was administered using the direct delivery method where the researchers gave the selected respondents the instrument during their lecture period and religious service. On completion of the instrument, the researcher collected the instrument on the spot. While the data obtained from the instrument was analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, independent samples t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of statistical significance with SPSS Version.

### Data Analysis

Table 1: Gender influence on attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Male	203	20.79	6.17	398	-2.043	0.042	Rejected Ho <sub>1</sub> (p<0.05)
Female	197	22.10	6.67				

From table 1 above, it can be seen that there is a difference in the interest of undergraduates in receiving HIV/AIDS screening according to gender. From the obtained data which was analyzed above, male had a mean of 20.79 (SD = 6.17), while females had a mean of 22.10 (SD = 6.67). This shows that female undergraduates are more interested in receiving HIV/AIDS screening than male undergraduates. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the difference in receiving HIV/AIDS screening based on gender, analysis revealed a  $t(398) = -2.043$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . This result suggests that male and female undergraduates in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education significantly differ in their attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. The males have a significantly lesser interest in receiving HIV screening than their female counterparts.

Table 2: Religious influence on receiving HIV/AIDS screening

Religion	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Christian	310	21.34	6.357	398	-0.548	0.584	Retained HO <sub>2</sub> (P>0.05)
Muslim	90	21.76	6.707				

From table 2 above, it can be seen that there is a difference in the attitude of undergraduate students towards voluntary HIV/AIDS counselling and testing in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education based on religion. From the obtained data which was analyzed above, Christian undergraduate had a mean of 21.34 (SD = 6.36), while Muslim undergraduates had a mean of 21.76 (SD = 6.71). This shows that Muslim undergraduates are more interested in receiving HIV/AIDS screening than Christian undergraduates. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the difference in receiving HIV/AIDS screening based on religion, analysis revealed a  $t(398) = 0.548$ ,  $p = >0.05$ . These result suggest that Christian and Muslim undergraduates in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education do not differ significantly in their attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing. The null hypothesis is therefore retained.

**Hypothesis Three:** On-campus and off-campus undergraduate students do not differ significantly in their attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.

Table 3. Residence influence on attitude towards voluntary HIV/AIDS counselling and testing in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education

Residence	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
On-Campus	179	21.90	6.563	398	1.328	0.185	Retained HO <sub>3</sub> (p>0.05)
Off-Campus	220	21.04	6.324				

From table 3 above, it can be seen that there is a difference in the interest of undergraduates in receiving HIV/AIDS screening according to residence. From the obtained data which was analyzed above, undergraduate residing on campus had a mean of 21.90 (SD = 6.56), while undergraduates residing off-campus had a mean of 21.90 (SD = 6.32). This shows that on-campus undergraduates are more interested in receiving HIV/AIDS screening than off-campus undergraduates. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the difference in receiving HIV/AIDS screening based on residency, analysis revealed a  $t(398) = 1.328$ ,  $p >0.05$ . This result suggests that on-campus and off-campus undergraduates in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education do not differ significantly in their attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing. The null hypothesis is therefore retained.

## RESULT FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the research question showed that male undergraduates have a significantly lesser attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing than females. The result of this study is similar to that reported by Siro and Avanine (1999) who conducted a study to investigate the level of sexual activities and attitude towards HIV/AIDS

screening among university students in the University of Oulu in Finland. In the above study, female have a higher level of sexual activities and displayed more positive attitude towards screening. This finding therefore suggests that females would be more interested in approaching centers for HIV/AIDS screening.

The result obtained from the study revealed that there is a difference in the interest of undergraduates in receiving HIV/AIDS screening from the two major religions within the locale of study; the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. In specific terms, the result revealed that Muslim undergraduate have a greater attitude towards HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing, compared to undergraduates from the Christian faith. Although, a non-significant value was obtained when independent sample t-test was applied. This suggest that the Muslim students are most likely to go for HIV/AIDS screening.

The result from the study revealed that there is a difference in the interest of on-campus and off-campus based undergraduates in the University, although this difference was found not to be statistically significant. Some possible reasons for this result could be because students who reside off-campus do not constantly hear the message of HIV screening as much as those who reside on campus. In addition, residing on-campus come with a lot of rules and regulation as against the liberal social climate of students of who reside outside the school campus. Finally, students who reside on-campus seldom come in regularly contact with people and organisations preaching the message of prevention and HIV testing.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made based on the result obtained.

1. It is strongly recommended that facilities for HIV/AIDS screening be situated at strategic locations within the school facilities and in the surrounding communities.
2. Fellow students should be recruited to spread the message of HIV screening, both the dangers involved in not knowing a status, as well as the benefits in knowing.
3. Greater awareness should be created and sensitization programmes organized across all level, departments and units of the institution to help spread the message of HIV screening.
4. Religious leaders should be carried along in the message of HIV/AIDS screening.
5. During special days such as World AIDS Day, the university management should collaborate with relevant organisations to provide free counselling and testing for the university community including undergraduates.
6. The University Radio station should develop jingles, talkshows and plays aimed at motivating students to take advantage of screening services within the university.
7. Specialized and target message should be developed for undergraduate students in order to motivate them for HIV screening.

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