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SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AND CONDOM USE AMONG NIGERIAN SOLDIERS IN ILORIN, KWARA STATE, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

Background/Objective: Studies have shown that military personnel are aware and knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS and its impact on combat preparedness and efficiency. However, this knowledge did not appear to have translated to reduced risky sexual behaviours. This study, therefore aimed at determining the sexual behaviour and condom use among Nigerian Army personnel in Ilorin, Nigeria.

Materials and methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study using a multistage sampling technique to select 400 participants. A pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire was administered.

Results: Out of 386 respondents (response rate 96.5%) males constituted 91.2%. Two hundred and seventy two (70.5 %) were married while 42 (15.4%) of the married did not live with their spouses. A significant proportion of the respondents (45.5%), especially those within the age of 18 to 34 years ($p=0.000$), those who had participated in foreign military operations ($p=0.030$) and those who did not live with their spouses ($p=0.000$) engaged in pre/extramarital sexual activities. Regular condom use among the respondents was low.

Conclusion/Recommendations: There was a high risky sexual behaviour with irregular condom use among the study population. A continuous information, education and communication on HIV/AIDS to effect safe sex behaviours and regular condom use among this population are recommended.

Key Words: Sexual, Behaviour, Condom, Nigerian, Soldiers, Ilorin

INTRODUCTION

By the dictates of their profession, military personnel are at higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (including HIV/AIDS) than the general population¹. Their frequent mobility, involvement in international peacekeeping operations, intravenous drug use, patronage of commercial sex workers and proneness to injuries which may necessitate urgent blood transfusion make them more at risk.^{2,3,4} The higher vulnerability to HIV/AIDS could

probably also be attributed to the fact that, globally, the military culture, at least until recently, had traditionally fostered the habit of heavy smoking, high alcohol consumption and increased risk-taking⁵.

The Nigerian Army (comprising about 80,000 personnel) is saddled with the Constitutional roles of defending the nation from external aggression, maintaining its territorial integrity and securing its borders on land, sea and air⁶. In addition, the

personnel also participate in international peacekeeping missions in many conflict-ridden countries in Africa. Their duties demand optimum physical fitness which is could be sustained by the adoption of healthy lifestyle. Considering the adverse impact of HIV/AIDS on military preparedness and effectiveness, concerted efforts have been made by the Nigerian military authorities to arm their personnel with the needed information.

Researches have shown that soldiers are well aware and sensitized on HIV; its modes of transmission, risk factors for transmission, prevention and control measures.^{7,8,9} However, there is dearth of research on Nigerian soldier's sexual behaviours and use of condoms especially in casual sex. This study therefore aimed at determining the sexual behaviours and condom use among this population.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Site

This study was carried out in Sobi Barracks, in Ilorin East Local Government Area of Kwara State. The barracks is made up of 3 autonomous military units; Headquarters 22 Armoured Brigade, 222 Battalion and the Nigerian ArmSchool of Education. With a total of about 1703 soldiers, the barracks has a well staffed Medical Centre, a "Mammy market", 2 primary schools and a day secondary school. The barracks is a multiethnic one, with seemingly

homogenous representation of all religious and ethnic groups in Nigeria. It has 2 messes (one each for the Commissioned Officers and Non Commissioned Officers and a soldier's Canteen) where the personnel recreate after work. The barracks has an HIV Control Committee which is headed by the Doctor in charge of the Medical Centre with other members drawn from the 3 autonomous military units.

Methodology

A minimum sample size of 384 was obtained using the appropriate formula and a sexual behavioural prevalence of 50%. To allow for a non-response of 4%, four hundred soldiers were sampled for the study. A multistage sampling strategy was used. An initial sampling proportionate to sizes of the three army units was followed by systematic sampling technique using each unit's register as a sampling frame and a calculated sampling interval. Then the respondents in each of the units were randomly selected using the ballot method.

Self-administered, semi-structured and pre-tested questionnaires were administered to the selected soldiers in order to determine their sexual behaviours, perception of condom and its use in casual sex. The administered questionnaires were collated and analyzed using EPI Info 2002 version software package. Frequency distribution and cross tabulations were done. Appropriate test statistics were used where

necessary at 95% confidence limit.

RESULTS

Out of the four hundred questionnaires administered, 386 were returned, giving a response rate of 96.5%. The age range of the respondents was 18 and 60 years with 241 (62.4%) of them within 18 and 34 years. There was a significant difference between the mean age of the male respondents and that of females ($p=0.0027$). Males constituted 91.2% of the respondents. Two hundred and seventy two (70.5%) were married and out of these 42 (15.4%) did not live with their spouses. Two hundred and twelve (54.9%) respondents were Christians while 174 (45.1%) were Muslims. About 92.5% had at least secondary education. (Table 1)

One hundred and seventy four (45.5%) respondents engaged in pre/extramarital sexual

activities. Out of this, 129 (33.7%) were within the age of 18 and 34 years ($p=0.000$). There were significant relationships between respondent's participation in foreign military operations ($p=0.030$), marital status (0.002), not living with spouses ($p=0.000$) and engagement in pre/extramarital sex (Table 2). Among the 174 respondents who engaged in pre/extramarital sexual activities, 107 (61.5%) use condoms regularly. For respondents who were within 18 to 34 years of age 79 (45.4%) used condoms regularly while 32(18.4%) and 18(10.3%) either used it occasionally or did not use it at all. Among the married respondents who engaged in casual sex, only 41.4% of them used condoms regularly. There were no significant relationships between the respondent's educational qualification, rank and marital status and condom use.

TABLE 1: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Characteristics	No of respondents (N =386)		Total
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
•Sex Distribution	352(91.2)	34(8.8)	386(100)
•Age distribution (years)			
18-24	51(13.2)	9(2.3)	60(15.5)
25-34	164(42.5)	17(4.4)	181(46.9)
35-44	99(25.6)	5(1.3)	104(26.9)
45-54	28 (7.3)	3(0.8)	31(8.1)
55-60	10 (2.5)	-	10(2.5)
Mean ages	33.5 ±5.4	30.5± 6.8	P value =0.003
•Religious distribution			
Christianity	189(49.0)	23(6.0)	212(55.0)
Islam	163(42.1)	11(2.8)	174(44.9)
•Educational levels			
Primary	26(6.7)	3(0.8)	29(7.5)
Secondary	255(66.1)	28(7.3)	

Post-secondary	71(18.3)	3(0.8)	283(73.3)
•Rank distribution			74(19.2)
Corporals and below	213(55.2)	24(6.2)	
Senior Non-Commissioned Officers	126(32.6)	9(2.3)	237(61.4)
Commissioned Officers	13(3.4)	1(0.3)	135(34.9)
•Marital status			14(3.6)
Single	95(24.6)	13(3.4)	
Married	254(65.8)	18(4.7)	108(28.0)
Widowed	-	-	272(70.5)
Divorced	3(0.8)	1(0.3)	-
Separated	2(0.5)	-	4(1.1)
•Live with spouse			
Yes	217(77.8)	13(4.8)	2(0.5)
No	37(13.6)	5(1.8)	
			230(82.6)
			42(15.4)

DISCUSSION

The age range of the surveyed population was 18 to 60 years and this reflects the minimum entry and retirement ages in the Nigerian Army. The preponderance of males (91.2%) among the respondents reflects the fact that the military is a male-dominant profession. Two hundred and forty one respondents (62.4%) were within the highly vulnerable age group of 18 to 34 years. This is an important target age group in the military that needs to be continuously sensitised on HIV/AIDS because of their probable

increased mobility, increased risky sexual behavior and substance use.^{2,4,7,8} Out of 272 (70.5%) married respondents, 42 (15.4%) did not live with their spouses. That less than one-sixth of the married respondents did not live with their spouses could be attributed to the frequent redeployment of soldiers without a prompt accommodation so that their families could join them.^{1,2} This temporary family separation removes the contact with their spouses and regular sexual partners thereby encouraging sexual escapades and other harmful activities as a way of relieving boredom or easing tension.

TABLE 2: PRE/EXTRAMARITAL SEXUAL ACTIVITIES AMONG THE RESPONDENTS

Characteristics	Pre/extramarital sexual activities		Total	X ²	P value
	Yes (%)	No (%)			
•Pre/extramarital sexual activities	174(45.5)	208(54.5)	382		
•Age distribution (years)					
18-24					
25-34	46(12.0)	13 (3.4)	59		
35-44	83 (21.7)	95(24.9)	178		
45-54	31 (8.1)	73(19.1)	104	38.96	0.000
55-60	9 (2.4)	22(5.8)	31		
•Educational levels	5(1.3)	5(1.3)	10		
Primary					
Secondary	13(3.4)	15(3.9)	28		
Post-secondary	127(33.2)	152(39.8)	279		
•Distribution by Rank	34(8.9)	41(10.9)	75	0.01	0.000
Corporals and below					
Senior Non-Commissioned Officers	103(27.0)	130(34.0)	233		
Commissioned Officers	62(16.2)	73(19.1)	135	2.16	0.339
•Marital status	9(2.4)	5(1.3)	14		
Single					
Married	61(15.9)	46(12.0)	107		
Divorced	108(28.3)	161(42.5)	269	12.28	0.002
Separated	3(0.8)	1(0.3)	4		
•Live with spouse	2 (0.5)	-	2		
Yes					
No	81(21.2)	146(38.2)	227	21.96	0.000
•Involved in foreign operations	93(24.3)	62(16.2)	155		
Yes					
No	73(19.1)	65(17.0)	138		
	101(26.2)	143(37.4)	244	4.70	0.030

Nearly half of the surveyed respondents (45.5%), with 33.7% of them in the age group 18-34 years engaged in premarital / extramarital sexual activities. Equally evident was the fact that a significant proportion of the respondents with secondary education (33.2%) and those who

were involved in foreign operations (41.4%) also engaged in pre/extramarital sexual activities ($p < 0.05$).

These findings corroborated surveys in other military communities, which revealed

TABLE 3: CONDOM USE AMONG RESPONDENTS WHO ENGAGED IN PRE/EXTRAMARITAL SEXUAL ACTIVITIES.

Characteristics	Regular use	Occasional use	Do not use	Total	X ²	P value
•Frequency of condom use	107(61.5)	44(25.3)	23(13.2)	174		
•Age distribution (years)						
18-24	26(14.9)	13(7.5)	7(4.0)	46	3.10	0.795
25-34	53(30.5)	19(10.9)	11(6.3)	83		
35-44	21(12.1)	8(4.6)	2(1.1)	31		
45-54	4(2.3)	4(2.3)	1(1.1)	9		
55-60	3(1.7)	-	2(1.1)	5		
•Educational levels						
Primary	6(3.4)	4(2.3)	3(1.7)	13	6.71	0.152
Secondary	87(50.0)	23(13.2)	17(9.8)	127		
Post-secondary	14(8.0)	17(9.8)	3(1.7)	34		
•Distribution by Rank						
Corporals and below	56(32.2)	29(16.7)	18(10.3)	103	6.54	0.161
Senior Non-Commissioned Officers	45(25.9)	13(7.5)	4(2.3)	62		
Commissioned Officers	6(3.4)	2(1.1)	1(0.6)	9		
•Marital status						
Single	34(19.5)	19(10.9)	8(4.6)	61	1.78	0.410
Married	71(40.8)	24(13.8)	13(7.5)	108		
Divorced	2(1.1)	-	1(0.6)	3		
Separated	-	1(0.6)	1(0.6)	2		

that young soldiers and those who were deployed for foreign operations were more likely to engage in risky sex than the older ones, or those who never participated in foreign operations.^{12,13,14}

Condom promotion: its frequent and correct use in risky sex is an important intervention in HIV/AIDS prevention and control.

Among those who engaged in pre/extramarital sexual activities, the overall prevalence of regular condom use was 61.5%. Regular condom use among

respondents within the age range 18-34 years was low (45.4%) while 10.3% of them did not use it. However, consistent condom use was higher among respondents with secondary education although this was not significant ($p=0.301$). This finding on condom use among the surveyed respondents is in agreement with a previous study among military personnel in Nigeria, which showed that about 72.7% of the respondents were aware that condom use could be protective against HIV/AIDS, but

only 55% of them reported using condom with non-regular partners¹⁴. Although reduction in sexual sensation, outright non-interest in condoms and its messiness have been documented for low condom use among civilian populations^{15,16}, further research is necessary to ascertain the reasons for its irregular or non-use among this surveyed population..

CONCLUSION

Pre/extramarital sexual activities were high and frequent condom use among these respondents was low. A continuous information, education and communication on HIV/AIDS to effect safe sex behaviours and regular condom use among this population are recommended.

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