

The University of Zambia's Response to HIV and AIDS

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The University Response to HIV and AIDS was founded in 2003 with the Vice Chancellor appointing a multi-disciplinary committee to spearhead the coordination, publicity, student and staff interventions, research and partnerships. The concept note on Strengthening the Management of HIV and AIDs at the University of Zambia itemised priorities such as the stepwise approach to develop policy guidelines, strategic direction and annual plans along with implementation of key interventions and attracted the immediate attention of interested partners such as the Norwegian Student Association (SAIH) , USAID, CIDRZ and others. The development from project to institutionalised response took five years. In the publication, African Social Research, number 53 and 54, mainstreaming of the HIV and AIDS response, together with policy development, curriculum, services such as voluntary counselling, male circumcision and sexual harassment and HIV positive hearing impaired are discussed as part of the evolution of HIV and AIDS response.

The multidisciplinary nature of the committee supports not only the medical concerns, but provides a broader outlook to the many interventions that are ongoing, built on the strong foundation of the institutionalised and systematic approach to implementation . The School of Medicine naturally participates with good curriculum focus on the medical issues along with psychosocial counselling conducted in clinical settings. Of all the schools in the University of Zambia the most active in teaching HIV and AIDS are the Schools of Humanities and Social Sciences (60.0%), Education(67.9%), and Medicine(82.6%). Where do all the other students obtain their knowledge on HIV and AIDS? Certainly, there is no shortage of peer influence at university and the ubiquitous internet is availed to all.

Why is it important to have a local university response to the epidemic? Universities are usually located in cities which have a social life characterised by the insatiable search for entertainment which includes alcohol, drugs, sex, peer presence and others, particularly young people who are the majority population in any university. The university is therefore a microcosmos of the country and if seroprevalence of HIV is significant, the same will be reflected among the university population. Research is therefore necessary to quantify and qualify issues in this apparently “closed” community which has far reaching effects on the nation's development.

A number of studies revealed that students are sexually active in almost the same measure they abstain from sex for example the Knowledge and Attitude and baseline surveys in 2005 and 2006 provide important information for planning interventions on campus. Globally, occurrences of sexual harassment have been reported at both workplaces and in education institutions and have both physical and psychological consequences. Given the grave nature of sexual harassment, baseline and follow up studies on Sexual Harassment were conducted with an assumption that sexual harassment is contrary to any University's values and moral standards, which recognize the dignity and worth of each person if sexual harassment, exists at UNZA, it would subvert the mission of the University and offend the integrity of the University community. The studies suggest that indeed Sexual harassment is a problem at the University of Zambia and other institutions of High Education in Zambia.

Eleven years since the Response team was in place a number of interventions appropriately addressing needs of the students have been established, but those for the University as a workplace are still scanty. This issue of the

Medical Journal of Zambia addresses the role of research KAP baseline in informing program planning at inception, findings on sexual Harassment, discussion on criminalising of HIV and AIDS and a common STI, syphilis among university students. All these have an effect on the sexual and reproductive health of students and staff and their families and have implication on programming for the University Response to HIV and AIDS.

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