

## PSYCHO-SOCIAL THERAPY FOR ADULTS WITH HIV/AIDS IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGISTS

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### ABSTRACT

The existence and rapid spread of HIV/AIDS poses a serious challenge to every nation across the globe. The global experiences and recent studies revealed that HIV/AIDS is a life-threatening disease and a respecter of nobody and therefore, people react to it in strong ways. This paper looked at the role of psychologists in addressing adults with HIV/AIDS using psychosocial therapy. The concept of psychosocial therapy, adult and HIV/AIDS were examined. The paper went further to discuss the various ways of HIV/AIDS transmission and the traumatic expression of adults with HIV/AIDS. Some of the psychosocial methods psychologists could adopt in addressing HIV/AIDS were also discussed. Conclusion was drawn and recommendations proffered as a way forward. Among them, is that adults should be given access to quality education as education contributes to reducing HIV/AIDS transmission.

**Key words:** Psychosocial, Therapy. Adult, HIV/AIDS, Psychologists.

### INTRODUCTION

Health is a key factor in the lives of an individual and good health is pivotal to human happiness and well-being. It is on this premise that Goal 3 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 is concerned with ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. Health according to World Health Organization (WHO) (2013) is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. Though, physical health is very crucial for the overall well-being of a person.

A lot of diseases affect human beings; some are more devastating and deadly than others. One of these diseases is HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS meaning, Human Immune Deficiency Virus /Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome is currently one of the devastating health conditions affecting millions of people throughout the globe. Okolo (2013) opined that more than 60 million people have died of AIDS world-wide and in 2010, an estimate of 34 million people were living with HIV, 2.7 million newly infected and 1.8 million AIDS related deaths. Okolo further stated that Sub- Sahara Africa remains most severely affected with one in every 20 adults in the region which accounts for 69 percent of people living with the disease globally. Statistics have shown that Nigeria rank second with approximately 3.1 million Nigerians living with HIV/AIDS. Avert (2011) pointed out that the total number of adults (15- 49years) living with the disease is 3,400,000. Similarly, UNAIDS (2012) added that among the adults living with HIV/AIDS world-wide, 10 percent of them are 50 years and above. This assertion points to the fact that adults are the worse hit by the disease.

Successive governments have adopted different measures in a bid to addressing the scourge of HIV/AIDS. In Nigeria, the disease was discovered in 1986 and Nigeria government has taken steps in combating HIV/AIDS. One of the steps was the launching of Global Programme on AIDS (GPA). The GPA was the first global organization to focus on HIV/AIDS. The organization introduced HIV prevention initiatives like condom promotion, syringe, sex education for young people and blood safety measures (UNAIDS, 2012). In 1995, the GPA was replaced by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. The National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA) (2013) noted that the National AIDS Advocacy Committee was formed in 1987 to cater for the HIV/AIDS related issues. The use of Anti- retroviral drugs was also introduced for victims of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. In spite of the above measures taken, HIV/AIDS continue to have adverse effect on the victims. Olayinka and Idogho (2006) observed that people living with HIV/AIDS are subjected to frustration, anxiety, shame, segregation, discrimination and even labelling which may keep them in subservient position. It is on this background that the study anchored on the role of psychologists in addressing victims of HIV/AIDS using psycho- social treatment or therapy.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **Psycho-social Therapy**

Psycho- social is a term relating to the interaction between social and psychological factors. According to Mirrian Webster Dictionary (2012), psycho –social is concerned with the mental development of a person. The psycho- social approach looks at individual in the context of the combined influence that psychological factors and the surrounding social environment have on their physical and mental wellness and ability to function. Psycho – social therapy is also called counselling. It is a process of meeting with a therapist to resolve problematic behaviour, beliefs, feelings, relationship, issues and somatic response (Wikipedia Encyclopaedia, 2016).

A therapist is a licensed mental health professional who helps clients improve their lives, develop better cognitive and emotional skills, reduced symptoms of mental illness and cope with various challenges. In the content of this paper, a therapist is a psychologist that provides a variety of treatment and rehabilitation to adults with HIV/ AIDS.

#### **Who is an Adult?**

The word adult has no single definition; every society defines the term from its own perspective. That is why the concept of adulthood varies from one society to another. One who may be regarded as an adult in one community may not be regarded as such in another community. Some use the biological parameter in defining an adult, while others use the chronological, historical, economic and social parameter in defining who an adult is. Ibeh, (2008) defined an adult as one who has achieved full physical development and is expected to have the right to participate as a responsible home maker, worker and member of a society. Nzeneri (as cited in Obidiegwu, 2013) defined an adult as a person who is physically and psychological mature and who is economically and politically responsible. Looking at the above definitions of an adult, two key words exist, which is maturity and responsibility. For the authors, an adult is matured by amount of maturity and responsibility exhibits. UNESCO (as cited in Onyenemezu, 2012) gave a recommendation of whom an adult is as: a person regarded as such by society to which he or she belongs. From the definition of UNESCO, we may now see the concept of an adult as culture referenced. This means that every culture defined the term from its own perspective. It depends on who a particular society considers to be an adult in that society.

### **What is HIV/AIDS?**

HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system, which is our body's natural defence against illness. A virus is a smallest of all the disease-causing organisms, much smaller than bacteria. The minute nature of virus makes it much increasable in an ordinary microscope (Dossier, 1986). According to Avert (2011), HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system, if untreated; a person's immune system will eventually be completely destroyed. Omolayo and Mokuolu (2002) noted that a person infected with HIV gradually loses immune functions along with certain immune cells called CD4T lymphocytes or CD4T Cells, (technical word for white blood cells that fight against diseases) causing the person vulnerable opportunistic infections. AIDS on the other hand, refers to a set of symptoms and illnesses that occur at the very final stage of HIV infection. HIV develops into AIDS if untreated, the virus also progresses in the absence of anti-retroviral therapy (ART) – a drug therapy that slows or prevent the growth of AIDS. Avert (2011) defined AIDS as a serious health problem which destroys the immune system of the body leading to the body inability to combat infection. AIDS is the most severe phase of HIV infection. Okolo (2013) stressing the deadly nature of AIDS, noted that AIDS is physically disfiguring, socially damaging, psychologically devastating, sexually transmitted and affecting babies, teens, youths and adults. It can be deduced that HIV/AIDS are deadly diseases and must be avoided by all and sundry.

### **Methods of HIV/AIDS Transmission**

HIV/AIDS is spread only in certain body fluids from a person infected with HIV. These fluids are blood, semen, pre- seminal fluids, rectal fluids, vaginal fluids and breast milk. It could also be through having sex or sharing injection drug equipment, such as needles with someone who has HIV. Omolayo and Mokuolu, (2002) added that HIV /AIDS can be transmitted through skin piercing instrument during treatment with drugs, medications, vaccines, contaminated blood transfusion, organ transplant and biting during fights. It has also been observed that the most frequent mode of transmission of HIV is through sexual contact with infected person. Majority of all transmission worldwide occurs through heterosexual contacts (sexual contacts between people of opposite sex), although the pattern of transmission varies across countries. For instance in United States as at 2009, most sexual transmission occur in men who have sex with fellow men ( homosexuals), and also through bisexual contacts ( a person having sexual contact with man and a woman without discrimination. In Nigeria, the major way of transmission is through unprotected sex with an infected person. Other ways may include blood transfusion, piercing instrument used by an infected person, organ transplant, biting during fight among others. Omolayo and Mokuolu (2002) gave other methods of HIV transmission as vertical, prenatal and postnatal. Vertical transmission occurs when a woman transmits the virus to her foetus during pregnancy. Prenatal is when the virus is transmitted through delivery while postnatal is transmitted from mother to child during breastfeeding. On the other hand, the authors added that HIV cannot be transmitted through saliva, sweat, eating utensils touching, casual kissing, mosquito (insect bite) and sharing a bathroom or swimming pool with an infected person.

### **Traumatic Expression of Adults with HIV/AIDS**

Many adults with HIV/AIDS when first found out their health status, there is always a psychological trauma. Olayinka and Idogho (2006) observed that people living with HIV/AIDS are subjected to frustration, anxiety, shame, prejudices, segregation, discrimination and even stigmatization. The authors maintained that the negative attitude formed by infected people as a result of misconception towards the dreaded disease leads to frustration, fear, criticism, ridicule, rejection and denial by their friends and relatives. This implies that if a family member is diagnosed HIV positive, the entire family may face

rejection from the community. Sheeth (2012) added that HIV diagnosis is more devastating and traumatic to an infected adult than any other group. This is because the infected adult may begin to think about his family, much especially the children and spouse. The author further noted that a range of emotions which follow diagnosis manifest in different ways for different people. Anger, fatigue, grief, guilt, anxiety, fear and uncertainty fill the minds of those afflicted people. The researchers equally observed from the literature that when a person is newly diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, the person may feel a deep sense of grief and loss. Such a person may begin to grieve when thinking about being diagnosed with a potentially debilitating illness that can threaten his or her life or impair his or her functioning in the society. Other emotional responses to testing positive in HIV/AIDS include: shock, disbelief, panic, fear, guilt, despair, hopelessness and numbed.

### **The Role of Psychologists in addressing adults with HIV/AIDS using Psycho social Method**

A psychologist is a mental health professional who evaluates and studies behaviour and mental processes. Psychologists therefore, are professionals trained to help people learn how to cope more effectively with life issues. The group of psychologists the writer mean in this research are Geront- psychologists that specialise in adults' life problems. Psychologists could use the following methods in addressing adults with HIV/AIDS:

**Awareness and Enlightenment Programmes.** Here, psychologists may consider creating awareness and enlightenment programmes on non-stigmatization of adults with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. This can be done using different mass media such as television, radio, internet, Facebook, magazine, newspaper, fliers among others. WHO (2013) pointed out that the awareness campaign programme on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria has taken a new form. This includes; organizing programmes on protection and exposure to the virus. There is also the adoption of community-based approach which involves awareness rising and behaviour change towards adults with HIV/AIDS particularly on the mode of transmission at community level. This will go a long way in helping victims of the virus to have a sense of belonging in the community.

**Counselling Programme:** This is another method used by psychologists in assisting adults with HIV/AIDS to cope with the disease. Counselling is an organized provision of professional assistance and guidance in resolving personal or psychological problems. It is an organized process of delivering talking therapy that allows persons to talk about their problems and feelings in a confidential environment. Kadurumba and Uzoka (2008) defined counselling as a process of helping an individual or group of individuals to solve various problems. According to UNAIDS (2012), HIV counselling programme is a critical and essential gateway to HIV prevention, treatment care and support services which is administered in various forms and models. Psychologists who are also counsellors organize counselling programmes for adults with HIV/AIDS either individually or in group to instil hope to the hopeless adults.

**Health Education Programme.** Health education programme is an important tool in addressing the scourge of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. Adult clinical psychologists could organize health talks at different times on healthy living. Health education programmes are organized process for the provision of health care needs. It empowers physicians, families, churches, local communities to save lives and relieve suffering through health promotion and prevention of their most common and serious health conditions (WHO, 2013). Through health education, adults with HIV/AIDS are educated on how to live with the disease for a

longer period through good nutrition. The adults are also taught how to develop positive mindset.

**Psychosocial Support:** Psychosocial supports can be provided by the government and non-governmental organizations through the efforts of the psychologists to the victims and their families. This will help them cope more effectively and so enhance their quality of life. Psychosocial support helps victims to heal psychological wounds and rebuild social structure. It helps change them into active survivors rather than passive victims.

## CONCLUSION

From the above discourse, it can be concluded that HIV/AIDS is a chronic and devastating disease that affect millions of people across the globe, particularly the adults. Despite numerous efforts made by successive governments in Nigeria to address the dreading disease, it is still in alarming rate. This paper, therefore, suggests that psychologists have a role to play by using psycho-social therapy such as counselling programme, awareness and enlightenment programme, health education programme and psychosocial support as a means of addressing adults with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. This will go a long way in helping the adults to live healthily with the virus and not dwelling on anti- retroviral drugs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made as a way forward in minimizing HIV/AIDS among adults:

1. The adults should be given access to quality education as education contributes to reducing HIV/AIDS transmission. Education builds adult self-esteem and capacity to act on HIV/AIDS prevention messages.
2. Training programmes should be organized by psychologists to educate the adults with HIV/AIDS on how to live with the disease.
3. Government should also provide financial assistance to psychologists and the affected adults (caregivers) in order to provide sufficient care and support to the victims.
4. Adequate counselling should be given to adults living with the virus by psychologists as this will provide opportunities for open door communication among the victims (adults).

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