Role of Electronic Media on Intervention and Control of HIV/AIDS among the Young People in Teso Broad Casting Service Radio and Soroti Municipality, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of electronic media in the intervention and control of HIV/AIDS among young people in Teso Broadcasting Service Radio and Soroti Municipality, Uganda. The flexibility and participatory nature of folk media render predetermined evaluation strategies almost inapplicable. Moreover, for community members to truly appreciate any change in behavior, they should be empowered to set their own indicators and determine in their way how these indicators will be measured and documented. It is on this note that the study calls for well-informed, reliable, and vigilant media to support and enhance the flow of HIV and AIDS/TB information to the audiences, to overcome the challenges the health reporters face, and to improve the quality of reporting. More so, journalists and editors should give special attention to systematically planning for human interest story coverage rather than be constrained to covering event-oriented news issues. The quality of coverage can be improved by enhancing the technical training for journalists that helps them get empowered to handle complex stories more comprehensively. Finally, it is crucial for the media houses to incorporate HIV and AIDS TB co-infection issues coverage in their editorial policies as a major editorial line which may force reporters not to neglect the issues. Finally, advocacy and educational efforts should aim at sensitizing stakeholders, media managers, policymakers, NGO experts, and health professionals to treat health issues, especially HIV and AIDS-TB, within the broader context of development.
Keywords: Developing country, Electronic media, HIV/AIDS, Intervention, Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

The acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) pandemic is an infectious disease caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that has created a global catastrophe. It is a condition when the immune system begins to fail and leads to life-threatening opportunistic infections. The existence of HIV/AIDS poses a serious challenge to human beings and its impact on a country is tremendous. HIV is a retrovirus that can lead to AIDS and is considered a severe global health problem. The pandemic has affected most countries in the world[1]. In 2010, the total number of people living with HIV was 34.0 million with an adult prevalence rate of 0.8%, with which women's prevalence rate was 0.6%, newly infected with HIV was 2.7 million, the number of deaths due to AIDS was 1.8 million. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the number of people living with HIV rose 250% from 2001 to 2010[2]. Every day, over 6800 persons become infected with HIV and over 5700 persons die from AIDS, mostly because of inadequate access to HIV prevention and treatment services. In many developing countries, HIV prevalence was above 1%, but in none of the developed countries, HIV prevalence has ever crossed the 1 % mark[3]. Among adolescents, girls are more vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS, especially through heterosexual intercourse with others than their male counterparts. All these potential factors fuel the rise in HIV acquisition and transmission[4]. If this situation continues, Uganda will face a crisis, as a developing country, it does not have the resources to tackle it. It will be unable to mitigate the harmful impact of widespread HIV/AIDS, especially being unable to afford the medication costs. Since a cure or vaccine is unlikely in the near future, efforts to prevent the HIV epidemic must focus on public awareness.

Several countries, including Thailand and Uganda, have successfully decreased the spread of HIV by aggressive efforts in this regard. Consequently, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive prevention program to control the spread of HIV/AIDS in Uganda[5].

In this critical situation, public awareness can play a dominating role in preventing HIV/AIDS epidemic[6]. Useful and fruitful media campaigns are strongly suggested for creating knowledge and awareness to control the spread of HIV and AIDS. Mass awareness campaigns on HIV/AIDS could improve the critical situation. The STDs are increasing the likelihood of HIV transmission as well as having other reproductive health consequences for every married woman[6]. It is important to explore and identify the relations of those factors which AIDS awareness modifies significantly in the context of Uganda among every married woman.

The media's main role in society is to inform, entertain, and educate the masses to shape public opinion on important issues of life like political, economic, and social aspects of the society and the world at large, this has led to more enlightened societies. Most of the people who are engaged in high-risk behaviors do not know how HIV is transmitted and are not aware that their behavior puts them at risk[7]. The ability of people's knowledge about HIV/AIDS or the mode of its transmission as well as its prevention is very limited[8]. Uganda is geographically vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, due to its high prevalence. The epidemic is severe in this country. However, knowledge about this virus and its transmission still remains incomplete[9]. This article examines the role of electronic media in the intervention and control of HIV/AIDS among the young people in Teso Broadcasting Service Radio and Soroti Municipality, Uganda.

The history of AIDS in Uganda

Uganda's first AIDS control programme was set up in 1987 to educate the public about how to avoid becoming infected with HIV. The programme promoted the ABC approach (abstain, be faithful, use condoms), ensured the safety of the blood supply and started HIV surveillance[10]. Strong political leadership and commitment to tackling the rampaging AIDS epidemic was a key feature of the early response to AIDS in Uganda. Prevention work at the grassroots level also began in this era, with a multitude of small organisations educating their peers about HIV. One of the first community-based organisations formed was TASO, The AIDS Support Organization, which was run by sixteen volunteers who had been personally affected by HIV/AIDS. TASO later became the largest Indigenous AIDS service organisation providing HIV/AIDS services in Uganda and Africa, and providing emotional and medical support to many thousands of people who are HIV positive[11]. The second phase of the Ugandan HIV epidemic ran from 1992 to 2000. During this period the HIV prevalence fell dramatically, from a peak in 1991 of around 15 percent among all adults, and over 30 percent among pregnant women in the cities to around 5 percent in 2001[12]. It is thought the government's ABC prevention campaign was partly responsible for the decline in prevalence. However, as treatment was not widely available in Uganda during the time the high numbers of AIDS-related deaths also contributed to the reduction in the number of people living with HIV[12]. The Ugandan government's prevention initiatives continued throughout the nineties with high levels of funding from both the government and international donors such as the World Bank. In 1998, the government ran a trial to test the feasibility of rolling out antiretroviral treatment to people in developing countries. The third phase of HIV/AIDS in Uganda has seen the stabilization of prevalence from 2000-2005 and reports of a slight increase in prevalence since 2006[9]. Free antiretroviral drugs have been available in Uganda since 2004. It is thought that the introduction of HIV drugs may have led to complacency about HIV as AIDS is no longer an immediate death sentence. Many experts have also speculated that Uganda's shift in prevention policy away from ABC towards US-backed abstinence-only programmers may also be responsible for an increase in risky behavior, as comprehensive sex education and condom promotion are no longer mainstream[13].

Folk Media Role in The Control Of HIV/AIDS In Uganda

Despite their power to capture people's imagination and subsequently change behaviors, the use of folk media in health education campaigns has not been fully described in Western literature. These media (or the messages they convey) are often thought of as folktales, myths, and other fantasies that are individual misrepresentations of social events and occurrences and therefore have no or limited educational value. On the contrary, folk media are collective and imaginative constructions of the mind that figuratively explain aspects of rural folkways and at the same time delight their recipients. Because folk media address local interests and concerns in the language and idioms that the audience is familiar with and understands, they are appropriate communication channels for populations in rural areas[14]. The power of folk media to change behavior makes it an appropriate complement to the HIV/AIDS behavior change communication project being implemented in Ghana. The CCHI project is designed to use folk media in the context of modern behavioral change strategies. The Sabido method is one strategy that has been effective in numerous countries in bringing about positive changes in reproductive health attitudes and behavior and in promoting the adoption of other health measures. The

CCHI project in Ghana will combine folk media with the Sabido method of broadcasting long-running serialized radio dramas to portray characters who will evolve to adopt positive reproductive health behaviors, such as condom use, family planning practice, breastfeeding, and early treatment of STDs[14]. Development of the dramas requires a period of formative research to assess the characteristics and resources in the target community, cultural influences on the target behavior, and local practices and customs. Theoretical principles of attitude formation and behavior change will be strictly adhered to in the development of characters and the storyline[15]. The Ghana project is currently in the formative research stage. Specific folk media that can be used as part of this strategy include audio-based methods for the radio dramas and visual arts for selected community-based activities that will be undertaken to augment the radio broadcasts. In societies where the level of literacy is low, visual arts can be powerful HIV/AIDS education channels. They often have a specific purpose. Traditional visual forms may include designs on fabrics and clothes, carvings, and paintings. Puppetry is also a form of drama with considerable potential for health education, especially because it is possible for the puppets to "talk" about sensitive topics that would otherwise be unacceptable for an actor to discuss in a drama[14].

Radio is a powerful and irreducible information and entertainment medium in most developing countries. Because it is affordable and accessible, radio is the most popular medium in Ghana, especially with the recent upsurge in the use of regional and local FM radio stations. Portable battery-operated radio sets are frequently brought to farms and other rural locations, even in the remotest parts of Ghana. This availability gives radio the capacity to be heard by a large, diverse audience. Folk media such as storytelling, drama, poetry recitals, proverbs, and music promoted on the radio will appeal to rural audiences and potentially influence them to adopt responsible, healthy behaviors[16]. The use of FM radio also offers opportunities for interactive participation by residents. Community groups and institutions, including traditional leaders, religious groups, youth associations, and men's and women's groups, will be asked to promote listenership, discuss priorities, and monitor and assess the project. To complement the stories broadcast during the radio soap opera, community drama troupes will periodically enact some episodes of the serial to raise issues for discussion by all community members[14]. Technical personnel from CCHI and partner organizations will be available to explain any issue that may require clarification. Community members will also be encouraged to develop some of the themes into songs and stories to be sung and recounted during listenership group meetings, festivals, and other community gatherings. Furthermore, communities will be assisted in developing puppetry presentations based on the theme of the serial, as a complementary medium to develop and sustain listener interest as well as generate community discussions[17].

METHODOLOGY
Research Design and Area of Study

The research design that was used for the study was a cross-sectional survey. The study was conducted at Radio Teso offices, selected Heads of Departments including the Human Resources in Soroti Municipality area which is located in Soroti District.

Sample Size

The sample size for the study is 2020. From the sample size of 220 respondents, 120 participants were subjected to a stratified sampling approach while the remaining 80 participated in the systematic approach. The 120 respondents chosen for the stratified approach were further divided into different small groups(strata) of 30 women, 30 men, 25 opinion leaders, and 35 youth/teenagers' respondents. Similarly, the 80 respondents of the systematic approach were divided into strata of 10 respondents. The first respondents were selected randomly from the first 10 and thereafter every 5th respondentwas automatically included in the sample. At Radio Teso, the 20 participants comprised 2 managers, the head of programs (I). 5 serious journalists who have worked at Radio Teso for over 8 years, 4 journalists with at least five years of working experience at Radio Teso, and 8 journalists randomly selected.

RESULTS
Table 1: Respondents' responses on whether media owner influence their work in any way

Response	positively	negatively	No response	Total
Frequency (f)	9	6	5	20
Percentage (%)	45	30	25	100

From the table above, it was observed that media owners indeed do wield influence on the content their media houses produce and disseminate. It is observed that 45% of the respondents agreed that their work was in a way influenced by their employer, while 30% disagreed with the question. The 25% of the respondents refused to answer the question. Media professionals were propped to further explain why those who thought media owners

do influence their work did so and to what extent. They pointed out that media owners start up media houses for various reasons among them being for political and economic influence. Thus, they will ensure that their media outlets do produce content that reflects or helps them achieve their goals. Also, media has influence on society and if an owner strategizes well, he or she will end up influencing society through his media content. They agreed that media owners to a larger extent influence their work and content in general since they are the bosses.

Table 2: Respondents' responses on the influence of external forces on media content

Response	Yes	No	response	Total
Frequency (f)	11	6	3	20
Percentage (%)		30	15	100

From Table 2 above, the majority of the respondents (55%) agreed with the issue that forces other than the media owners do influence content as opposed to 30% of the respondents who disagreed with a question. The researcher further wanted to know the extent, to which those who agree with the question, do think these forces influence the content and how. Respondents pointed out that forces like the government, advertisers and to a small extent audiences do have some influence on the content produced. The government was said to come up with laws that strictly control the content produced and if these harsh laws are not followed, the media house is likely to be acted upon either legally or illegally. The researcher established that advertisers pay bills for the media houses and thus their wishes will in most cases followed. It was also pointed out that audiences of a media house can direct what kind of content to be produced since they are the consumers of this content. If it does not appeal to them, they will not take it leading to media houses producing content of appeals to audiences.

Table 3: Respondents' responses on how the media affects the quality of HIV/AIDS content produced

Response	Yes	No,	No response	Total
Frequency	12	6	2	20
Percentage	60	30	10	100

The researcher wanted to know how profit motives affect the quality of content produced by the media. From the responses, most of them said the effect is much witnessed in a media house that has a chain of media outlets where to cut costs, the media owner directs that the story be reused by various media outlets under his name. That is to say, a single story will be edited or translated to fit the medium, be it print or broadcast. Another instance noticed by the researcher is where media owners reduce the number of journalists and those that are left are directed to do a lot of work for the media owner to make more money while giving out as little as possible. This affects the quality of content as journalists are overworked and thus forced to take shortcuts that will in turn affect their work quality.

Table 4: Respondents' responses on the distribution of radio listenership

Radio station	Respondents	Percentage
Teso Broad Casting Service	70	35
K FM	60	30
UBC	20	
Capital FM	50	25
Total	200	100

The respondents pointed out that they watch various channels for different reasons and occasions. The 35% that do watch C.B.S said they do so because it is more believable and its news is more detailed and well-balanced compared to the others while those (30%) who prefer K FM do so because it is much more balanced and its arrangement of programs is mature. For those who prefer Capital FM did so because its appearance and way of presenting programs like news are more appealing and interesting to them and also it is far more entertaining as it has a lot of entertainment programs. UBC was less preferred because it is owned or funded by the government and thus most respondents saw it as a government mouthpiece and may not be very objective when it comes to matters touching the government in the wrong way.

Table 5: Respondents' responses on how radio influences them

Does television content influence audiences?	Yes	No	No response	Total
Response	152	60	8	220

Percentage	76	30	4	100

Most respondents (76%) agreed that television content affected them while 30% disagreed with the question and the researcher did not get the response of 4% of the respondents. The researcher went further and asked how television content affected respondents and to what extent. They pointed out that media influences people and the television effect is higher since it combines both visual and audio mediums. They said that most of their actions are a result of what they watch on TV. The way most of them dress, eat, their buying/shopping decisions i s influenced by the media and more so TV. This is because the content on most TV channels was from the West and with it comes the Western culture which has changed their way of life in a major way. They further pointed out that when it comes to making political decisions, television played a major role as it guided their voting decisions by portraying some candidates to be better than others on various fronts of political capabilities.

Table 6: Respondents' responses on media ownership

Respondents take	Good	Bad	No response	Total
Frequency	40	170	10	220
Percentage	18.2	77.3	4.5	100

The respondents (77.3%) did not like the kind of media ownership in Uganda today, 18.2% did favour it while 10 respondents did not respond. When probed further by the researcher, respondents pointed out that the aspect of a few owners controlling the media is not good for the development of the industry and the country at large. The same question was asked the media professionals and most of them too did not like the aspect that media is owned by few people as it affects their work since owners, with different interests' direct journalists to produce and disseminate content that is aimed at achieving the interests of their bosses. They pointed this ownership has affected their profession as it makes it hard for them to follow the codes of ethics like objectivity since owners subject them to situations where they will have to break or bend the ethics. Finally, they noted that most of them cannot easily advance professionally as non-professionals brought into the media have taken up their opportunities.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

There is a critical need for relevant and meaningful information dissemination on HIV AIDS and TB in the media. However, the media must be sufficiently resourced to ensure its journalists are well-skilled and committed to serving the public. Many of the participants of the study concluded that enhancing the media's ability to cover public health issues effectively is essential. The challenge for media is vivid[18]. It is the challenge to recognize the problems posed by HIV AIDS and TB infections, understand the challenges the threat of these diseases can create to the socioeconomic and political well-being of a country, and the challenge of harnessing their resources to do what the media do best communicate with people[19]. This study has compiled a set of recommendations addressed mainly to media gatekeepers and owners, health professionals, PLWHA, nongovernmental organizations, and policymakers to help enhance the quality and consistency of coverage devoted to HIV AIDS, and TB infections. From the study, it is evident that the challenges encountered are in the media coverage of HIV and AIDS-TB issues. The study tries to suggest different approaches to HIV and AIDS-TB co-infection reporting that will take better advantage of the resources of the media and its professional members.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The flexibility and participatory nature of folk media render predetermined evaluation strategies almost inapplicable. Moreover, for community members to truly appreciate any behavior change, they should be empowered to set their own indicators and determine in their way how these indicators will be measured and documented. It is on this note that the study calls for well-informed, reliable, and vigilant media to support and enhance the flow of HIV and AIDS/TB information to the audiences, to overcome the challenges the health reporters face, and to improve the quality of reporting. More so, journalists and editors should give special attention to systematically planning for human interest story coverage rather than be constrained to covering event-oriented news issues. The quality of coverage can be improved by enhancing the technical training for journalists that helps them get empowered to handle complex stories more comprehensively. Finally, it is crucial for the media houses to incorporate HIV and AIDS TB co-infection issues coverage in their editorial policies as a major editorial line which may force reporters not to neglect the issues. Finally, advocacy and educational efforts should aim at sensitizing stakeholders, media managers, policymakers, NGO experts, and health professionals to treat health issues, especially HIV and AIDS-TB, within the broader context of development.

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