

Investigating the association between Intimacy and HIV Vulnerability among University Teacher Trainees

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Abstract:

The study reveals research findings from a study conducted on 557 university students undergoing teacher training. The investigation analyses the relationship between both emotional and passion-related intimacy; and HIV vulnerability, on the basis of Robert Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love which proposes that emotional intimacy and passion are two of the three components of Love (Sternberg, 1988). The findings from the investigation reveal that teacher trainees from the Dar es Salaam University College of Education (DUCE) were more intimate than their counterparts at Makerere University College of Education and External Studies (MUCEES) and the relationship between intimacy and HIV vulnerability is both positive and non significant ($r=0.036$, $p=0.393$). This calls for more sensitisation of university students on dangers and challenges of intimate relationships, especially those related to health, and specifically, HIV.

Keywords: Intimacy, Emotional Intimacy, Passion, HIV, Vulnerability

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I. INTRODUCTION

Emotional intimacy is believed to be an affective consequence of both emotional feelings and intimate practices, and in addition, it is also argued that emotional intimacy is an experience that human beings crave for and long to encounter (Woltitz, 1993). Emotional intimacy has also been viewed by Gaia (2002) as a vital element of any adult relationship, with specific relevance to relationships that are characterised by romantic feelings. Such intimacy or feeling of a significant connection to another living being is an essential ingredient of the emotional wellbeing. The ways in which human beings form and sustain emotional intimacy include open and truthful communication, by expression of cognitive experiences such as thoughts, but most importantly, fulfilment of emotional urges of the significant other (Lowndes, 1996). Giddens, (1992) suggests that emotional intimacy may include freedom of expression of oneself without fear of being negatively judged. This also includes the comfort and freedom to express one's feelings without a nagging fear of retaliation. It should also be noted that emotional intimacy does not necessarily translate or result into physical intimacy or sexual activity, but may do so in certain circumstances (Kabatereine, 2005). Intimacy and sex are important parts of human existence but the former eludes in circumstances characterised by lack of hope and presence of negative attitudes (Kasiram, 2006). Giddens (1990) seems to also highlight that emotional feelings may mean different things to different people but what he stresses is that usually, emotional intimacy is about affective experiences that lead to physical or/and sexual intimacy.

In most romantic unions, sexual consummation is an inevitable and well documented element but its correlation with affect in relationships that have lasted longer is rather complex (Gonzaga, 2006). Some researchers such as Jankowick and Fisher (1992) have argued that what most people call love is a driving force for several behaviours

which might include sexual and other related behaviours and actions. Emotional intimacy may also typically develop after physical bonds have been established and likewise, physical bonds may either increase or decrease emotional bonds (Kabatereine, 2005). According to some researchers, love or affect has two aspects, that is, biochemical and social aspects. It is argued that the former is through body reactions as stimulated by sexual forces (Lowndes, 1996), while the latter, that is, the social dimension is through the dialogue that results from repetitive sexual attractions and unions (Giddens, 1990).

Therefore, emotional intimacy usually results into sexual or physical intimacy and in itself, is a risk that may make one vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. Sexual intimacy is an experience of receiving and sharing of affection, touching, physical closeness and/or sexual activity (Kabatereine, 2005). People who are emotionally and sexually intimate enjoy physical closeness, share closeness of feelings with affection, experience them over time with understanding of mutual support, and expect continuity of those experiences in the relationship. However, emotional intimacy can exist without sexual intimacy and vice versa. Young people may be physically ready for sexual relationships but not ready for emotionally mature intimate relationships (Gonzaga, 2006). This hence increases their vulnerability to HIV infection. Therefore, the study's main objective was to investigate the relationship between intimacy and HIV vulnerability among university teacher trainees.

II. THE STUDY

The study aimed at investigating and further analysing the relationship between intimacy and HIV vulnerability among university teacher trainees. The indicators of intimacy were emotional intimacy as characterised by attributes such as

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support, sharing, trust, communication, value, confort and understanding; while passion was characterised by attributes such as excitement, deep thoughts, attraction, idealisation, romance, physical closeness, adoration, passion and fantasy. HIV vulnerability was marked by both knowledge based and behaviour based vulnerabilities. The data were analysed using Means, Medians, Standard deviations, p values and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The independent variable was intimacy while the dependent variable was HIV vulnerability.

III. METHOD

This was a purely quantitative study aimed at correlating intimacy and HIV vulnerability, which required statistical analysis. It was a cross sectional and correlation survey study. The respondents were 557 in total (262 from Makerere University-MUCEES and 295 from Dar es Salaam University College of Education-DUCE) selected using systematic random sampling.

IV. FINDINGS

This section deals with the presentation and description of intimacy as an independent variable. It shows how respondents reacted to individual items of the questionnaire pertaining to intimacy. These are presented using frequency counts and their respective percentages including average responses on each item. Intimacy was the independent variable under study. The responses on intimacy were scored on a five point likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1) but responses that were expressed as Strongly Agree and Agree were merged into Agree (A) and those that were expressed as Strongly Disagree and Disagree were merged into Disagree (D). Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement on each of the items formulated to elicit their level of intimacy. Items 1-15 were items on emotional intimacy while items 16-30 were items on passion. Therefore, intimacy was marked by both emotional intimacy and passion. According to Sternberg (1988:315), intimacy means the feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness in loving relationships. Sternberg goes on to argue that intimacy includes within its purview those feelings that give rise to the experience of warmth in a loving relationship.

V. TOTAL INTIMACY

The study on intimacy as an independent variable also sought to establish the total measures of intimacy in terms of mean, median, standard deviation and p value. These findings are presented in Table 1. Table 1 shows the average total intimacy for both universities.

	DUCE			MUCEES			Total			p-value
	Mean	Std. Dev	Med	Mean	Std. Dev	Med	Mean	Std. Dev	Med	
Total emotional intimacy	61	11.9	64	56.8	12.6	58	59	12.4	61	0.000
Total passion	55.9	12.1	58	54.5	12.9	57.5	55.3	12.5	58	0.184
Total intimacy	116.9	22.8	121	111.3	23.8	115	114.3	23.4	118	0.005

**Significant at 0.01 level

Table 1: Average Level of Total Intimacy among Teacher Trainees at DUCE and the MUCEES

In Table 1, intimacy was measured using two attributes namely; emotional intimacy and Passion. Regarding emotional intimacy, respondents at DUCE had an average score of 61 (S.D=11.9 and median=64) compared to that of their counterparts from MUCEES whose average was 56.8 (S.D=12.6 and median=58), implying that teacher trainees from DUCE had a higher emotional intimacy than their counter parts from MUCEES and the differences in the two averages were statistically significant ($p < .01$). This means that the level of emotional intimacy among students DUCE is significantly high compared to that of teacher trainees at MUCEES.

As far as the sub section of passion was concerned, DUCE respondents had an average score of 55.9 (S.D=12.1 and median=58) while the average score for MUCEES students was 54.5(S.D=12.9 and median=57.5), implying that DUCE respondents were stronger on passion than MUCEES respondents. Nonetheless, the observed differences in the two averages were not statistically significant ($0.184 > 0.01$) which means that, the level of passion was the same for teacher trainees at the two universities. This may be because of other factors and has happened by chance.

Turning to total intimacy, the total intimacy for respondents from DUCE was 116.9(S.D=22.8 and median=121) while that of MUCEES was 111.3(S.D=23.8 and median=115) and the differences in the two means were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), implying that the former are significantly more intimate than the latter.

The broader conclusions from these findings on intimacy seem to show that the university teacher trainees are more emotionally intimate in areas of active support of their partners, warm relationship, and recipients of emotional support, givers of emotional support, communication, value and closeness. However, they are lower in emotional intimacy in areas of counting on partner, being counted on, sharing, comfortable relationship, understanding, being understood, trust and sharing of deeply personal information with partner. On the other hand, as far as the passion attribute of intimacy was concerned, it did not have significant results and it was noted that they were noticeably higher on in areas of referring their relationships as romantic and finding their partners personally attractive. However, they were lower in score in areas of excitement and idealisation. It was noted that the university student-teachers averagely do not find their partners indispensable, so they did not adore their partners that much, since they reported that there are probably other things in their lives more important than their partners, things and persons that might make them happier than their partners. It was noticed, basing on these conclusions and total intimacy measures that the university student-teachers' emotional intimacy was higher than their passion, but on average, they were high on intimacy as a whole, despite the internal differences within the two different attributes of intimacy, that is, emotional intimacy and passion.

		Total intimacy	Total vulnerability
Total intimacy	Pearson Correlation	1	.036
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.393
	N	557	557
Total vulnerability	Pearson Correlation	.036	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.393	
	N	557	557

**Correlation significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 2: Correlation between Total Intimacy and Total Vulnerability

Table 2 shows the finding on the correlation between Intimacy and Vulnerability to HIV infection. From table 2, intimacy was positively related to vulnerability to HIV infection ($r=0.036$, $n=557$ and $p=0.393$). This implies that the more intimate one is, the more vulnerable he/she is to HIV infection, that is, when levels of intimacy increase, HIV vulnerability levels increase too. Nonetheless, the fact that the value of the correlation is small is indicative of a weak relationship between intimacy and vulnerability to HIV infection. The probability value (p value) of the correlation as given by 0.393 was greater than the level of significance value (0.05) at which the null hypothesis was tested. This means that despite the existence of a positive correlation between intimacy and vulnerability to HIV infection, the observed relationship is not significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between intimacy and vulnerability to HIV infection was upheld. In other words, there is no statistically significant relationship between intimacy and vulnerability to HIV infection for this particular group of respondents.

VI. DISCUSSION

Basing on a null hypothesis, this study aimed at assessing the relationship between intimacy and HIV vulnerability among emerging adults that are undergoing teacher training in universities. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis revealed two vital realities, that is, that the relationship between intimacy and HIV vulnerability is positive and that it is also non significant statistically ($0.393 > 0.05$), a finding that led to the upholding of the null hypothesis. These findings are parallel to those done by Taylor (2000), Giddens (1992) and Santrock (2008) who argue that intimacy and vulnerability are synonymous with one another because the former lowers risk perception. However the positive relationship between intimacy and HIV vulnerability seems to rhyme with similar studies conducted by Barnett et al., (2002), Aral et al., (1988) who argue that such a relationship is possible due to the existence of multiple sexual partners, and external attribution tendencies (Taylor, 2002, Lindan&Allen, 1991). On the other hand, health vulnerabilities such as those related to HIV are unforeseen

consequences (Gebhardt&Kuyper, 2003) and university students may become vulnerable due to new found freedoms that distort their cognitions about health dangers surrounding them (Paul&Hayes, 2002). This positive relationship may also happen due to heightened trust, reduced risk perception and the blinding effect of intimacy. However, these findings contradict those of Abel and Chambers (2004) and Lejuez et al., (2003) who assert that some times, intimacy and HIV vulnerability are inversely or negatively interconnected especially among high esteem individuals and in situations of high risk perception so it becomes a question of how well emerging adults in universities can protect themselves from such a health danger while enjoying the benefits of intimacy so that their education goals are not negatively affected of even ended prematurely.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The relationship between intimacy and HIV vulnerability is positive ($r=0.036$) among emerging adults undergoing teacher training in universities, therefore, an increase in intimacy is related to an increase in HIV vulnerability. At the same time, the relationship between intimacy and HIV vulnerability is not statistically significant ($p=0.393$) as the null hypothesis had projected. This calls for training and sensitisation for university students on the dangers of intimacy and how they ought to handle their intimate relationships in order to avoid the unwanted and undesirable consequences especially HIV infection

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