



DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNICATION PLAN TO PROMOTE HIV PREVENTION AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS OF PALAWAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to develop a communication plan to promote HIV prevention among undergraduate students of Palawan State University. Four groups of respondents participated in this study. There were 380 student-respondents who answered the Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) survey; 12 students who were interviewed to substantiate and validate the highly quantitative nature of the KAP analysis; and four key informants from health-related organizations and institutions that helped the researcher in designing the prototype communication plan. The KAP analysis found out that though majority of the respondents are knowledgeable about basic facts on HIV, there were still a considerable number of students who are unaware of the difference between HIV and AIDS, and the absence of a cure for the infection. Furthermore, while majority of the respondents exhibited favourable attitude towards HIV prevention in general, most of them have also expressed reluctance in living with PLHIV. Most of them also keep good practices related to HIV prevention. However, more than half of them also claimed that to have engaged in sexual activities without protection. Through the key informant interviews, the researcher and the interviewees were able to establish data for the following major components of the communication plan: Situational Analysis, Audience Identification, Message Formulation, and Identification of Communication Strategies.

Keywords: *Health Communication, HIV/AIDS Awareness, Policy Intervention, Communication Planning*

1. INTRODUCTION

The DOH-Bureau of Epidemiology also presented the HIV epidemic trends in the country from the year 1984 to the year 2017. The trend suggests that the age bracket comprising the largest proportion of diagnosed cases have become younger. Specifically, between year 2001 to year 2005, it was individuals aged 35 to 49 years. Then, from 2006 to 2017 most cases are recorded among individuals within the 25 to 34 years age bracket. Moreover, the proportion of HIV-positive cases belonging to the 15 to 24 year age group has also increased. It was 25% in 2006 to 2010, and 29% in 2011 to 2017. In the HARP 2017 report, 385 cases which comprise the 30% of the total number of reported cases were youths in the 15-24 year age group. All of them were infected through sexual contact either male-female sex, male-male sex, or sex with both male and female.

Young people have been identified as among the vulnerable groups when discussing about the spread of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). According to STOP AIDS (2016), their elevated risk of infection has been attributed to various factors including significant physical, emotional, and behavioural changes brought about by their adolescence. The transition between childhood and adulthood is described as a critical period of development normally characterized by exploring peer relationships, gender identities, as well as sexuality. For this reason, the UNICEF stressed that intervention programs designed for HIV prevention for key populations should be initiated among young people's age group.



2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Four groups of respondents participated in this study. There were 380 student-respondents who answered the Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) survey; 12 students who were interviewed to substantiate and validate the highly quantitative nature of the KAP Analysis; and four key informants from health-related organizations and institutions that helped the researcher in designing the prototype communication plan.

A self-administered questionnaire served as the data gathering tool in evaluating the respondents' HIV related knowledge, attitude, and practices, as well as their media consumption habits. The questionnaire was composed of three major parts.

The first part dealt with the respondents' demographic profile. In this part, they were not required to input their names. The second part was aimed at assessing the media consumption habits of the respondents. For better organization, it was sub-divided into three sub-parts namely: availability and use of communication channels; current sources of HIV-related information; and channel preference and perceived credibility. The third part was a survey on the knowledge, attitude, and practices of the respondents regarding HIV prevention. The items included in this portion were mainly adopted from the KAP survey questionnaire developed by Wondemagegn Mulu, Bayeh Abera, Mulat Yimer in their 2013 study entitled Knowledge, Attitude and Practices on HIV/AIDS among students of Bahir Dar University. It was partly modified to accommodate other items or statements that the researcher found necessary and more relevant.

In the KAP survey, knowledge was assessed using a 10-item questionnaire which included information on the basics of HIV, its modes of transmission, and preventive measures. On the other hand, respondents' attitude was measured using their answers to another 10-item questionnaire that specifically dealt with their attitude towards HIV-related stigma and discrimination, people living with HIV, and use of condom. Lastly, to describe their practices towards HIV and HIV prevention, respondents were asked to complete a 10-item questionnaire about using condom, engaging in unprotected sex and other high-risk sex (under the influence of drugs or alcohol), as well as subjecting one's self to HIV testing.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the KAP analysis, it was found out that though majority of the respondents are knowledgeable about basic facts on HIV; there were still a considerable number of students who are unaware of the difference between HIV and AIDS, and the absence of a cure for the infection. Furthermore, while majority of the respondents exhibited favourable attitude towards HIV prevention in general, most of them have also expressed reluctance in living with People Living with HIV (PLHIV). Most of them also keep good practices related to HIV prevention. However, more than half of them also claimed that they have engaged in sexual activities without using condom. The internet was found to be the most accessible communication channel among student-respondents followed by social media and television, respectively. These are also the communication channels preferred and considered credible by most respondents in terms of receiving HIV-related information.

Through the key informant interviews, the researcher and the interviewees were able to establish data for the following major components of the communication plan: Situational Analysis, Audience Identification, Message Formulation, and Identification of Communication Strategies. These are sub-processes in the two major phases of Communication Planning namely: Communication Assessment and Communication Strategy Design.



In the communication plan, Palawan State University students were identified as the primary target audience, while school administrators and teachers handling NSTP and Anthropology courses were the secondary target audience. The following messages have also been formulated for the communication plan: (1) Know the Virus, (2) Know Your Status, (3) Everyone Can Get HIV, (4) Be Safe, Use Condom Correctly and Consistently, (5) Be Compassionate, Do Not Discriminate, (6) You are Important in HIV Prevention. For the communication channels and strategies, the researcher and other stakeholders have come up with the following: (1) Internet and Social Media IEC campaigns, (2) Interpersonal Communication, (3) Youth Advocate Program, and (4) Curriculum Mainstreaming and Teachers' Training.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study the following conclusions were drawn:

While most of the respondents are considered knowledgeable about basic facts on HIV, a considerable number of young people who subjected themselves to KAP analysis failed to distinguish HIV from AIDS. Almost half of them also believe that a cure for AIDS is already available. Some have even claimed to have not heard yet of Anti-Retroviral Therapy.

In terms of attitude, a favourable attitude on HIV prevention among majority of the respondents has been noted. However, specific findings revealed that there were young people who are not willing to share their room with an HIV positive peer. This inappropriate perception towards PLHIV is a result of common misconceptions about the virus' modes of transmission.

In general, respondents keep good practices related to HIV prevention. However, more than half of them also claimed that they have engaged in sexual activities without using condom. The correct and consistent use of condoms is an effective protection against HIV during sexual acts, but young people refuse to use them, again because of misconceptions about condoms.

Online platforms specifically the internet and social media were the most accessible and frequently utilized communication channels among Palawan State University students. This is a manifestation of a shift from traditional media consumption to online digital platform.

Online platforms, along with television, are also among the respondents' preferred channels of communication in terms of receiving HIV-related information. These channels were also perceived by young people to be credible sources of contents about HIV prevention. Respondents have also been exposed to messages related to HIV prevention primarily through these channels. Majority of the information relayed through these channels are on HIV statistics and HIV causes and prevention.

The different elements presented in the communication plan are not independent from each other. They are purposively designed to interact and influence each other in order to accomplish the objectives set in the plan. A communication plan to be considered effective should not fail to analyze the prevailing situation and the factors surrounding it by establishing a baseline data generated directly from the different stakeholders. Audience analysis was also an imperative undertaking in order to examine the intended users' communication needs, as well as their knowledge, attitude, and practices related to the HIV issue in the province. This process is particularly useful in developing communication strategies to address the problems that have been identified during the situational analysis. Another factor that influenced the choice of communication strategies was the key messages that will be disseminated in the communication plan.



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