

P3.2. Internet as a Veritable Instrument of Behavioral Change Communication among Youth People in Osun State, Nigeria - **MO Afolabi**, Living Hope Care, Ilesa, Nigeria; **AO Fatusi**, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria; **KT Ijadunola**, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria; **AO Adewuya**, Lagos State University, Ikeja, Nigeria
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Background/Significance: Internet has become a fast and effective means of exchange of information. Young people in Nigeria utilize this medium for activities like chatting (instant messaging with loved ones), watching pornographic sites and engaging in financial scams. Internet remains an untapped resource for creating and disseminating youth sexual/reproductive health information and HIV/AIDS awareness. Websites that are HIV/AIDS related and youth-friendly can cater for young peoples' quests for answers on subjects ranging from abstinence, safer sex and contraception. Interactive online forums such as Go Ask Alice! (<http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu>) are able to provide a virtual safe space for young people where their identity and ability to ask questions freely are guaranteed. Websites such as these are able to create a youth-friendly atmosphere that facilitates frank and open sustainable discussions that may, in other circumstances, be difficult to initiate or sustain. Another example of a youth friendly AIDS website is the AVERT (AIDS Education and Research Trust) website which is based in the United Kingdom, that has an extensive user-friendly homepage (<http://www.avert.org>) aimed at providing easy access to HIV/AIDS related material for young people. Such websites are not only few in Nigeria, but they are also grossly under-utilized.

Methodology: Young people in Esa-Oke, Ilesa and Osogbo, all in Osun State were interviewed on the frequency and utilization of internet services. Esa-Oke is a rural settlement; Ilesa is a sub-urban area while Osogbo is an urban setting. The study participants were all in tertiary institutions and were aged 15-24 years. Major public internet cafes in the three sites were visited and young people patronizing these centres were asked about websites that have been visited in the past two weeks and if they know of any website that provided HIV-related information. Majority of the participants were not aware of such websites. Many of the youths said that they came to the café to show their friends that they 'belong'. Some claimed that they watched sexual activities on the internet, so as to acquire enough experience to satisfy their spouses when they get married. Penis and breast enlargement were also cited as opportunities they would want to benefit from. However, a substantial number of these youths expressed dislike for these websites but still visit them, so that they will not be ridiculed by peers as being old-fashioned. They were educated through interactive discussions on HIV/AIDS related websites and how to access health information from them. They expressed enthusiasm in embracing this new information. Monitoring visits were made to evaluate progress and technical support was provided to sustain this new behaviour. The owners of the café were also educated on how internet can promote healthy developments of their clients.

Lessons Learned: The youths adopted the slogan of ALICE! ALICE!! in preference to YAHOO! YAHOO!! which connotes youths who indulge in internet scams. The café owners put bold inscriptions in conspicuous areas of the cafe to discourage visiting 'porn' sites and threatened to revoke airtime if any youth was caught violating the instructions.

Recommendations: There is a need to develop more local websites with specific goals of delivering health-related information to young people. Follow-up research is also required to establish a youth-friendly internet guide that will incorporate skill building activities and HIV/AIDS prevention strategies.