Tswana-Speaking Students’ Perception of HIV / AIDS and Poverty

Implications for public communication

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Research questions

What are Tswana speaking students’ perceptions of the causal relationship between HIV/AIDS and poverty?

- Is poverty a direct cause of AIDS?
- How strong are their convictions?
- Is poverty merely a “catalytic agent” for HIV/AIDS?
- Who should be responsible for combating HIV/AIDS?
- What should be done about the problem?
- What are the implications for public communication?
Demographic detail: Place of study

- Potchefstroom: 6%
- Kimberley: 14%
- Mafikeng: 80%
Demographic detail: Gender

- Men: 31%
- Women: 49%
- Inconclusive: 20%
Symbolic Convergence Theory or Fantasy Theme Analysis

- Fantasy themes
- Fantasy type
- Fantasy chain
- Rhetorical vision

- Dramatis personae
- Setting
- Action and saga
- Rhetorical community
Symbolic Convergence Theory or Fantasy Theme Analysis

Fantasy themes

Fantasy types

Fantasy themes

Fantasy types

Rhetorical vision
Results

Poverty (74%)
- 17% One of causes
- 42% Agree
- 11% Agree strongly
- 4% Agree tentatively

Not poverty (26%)
- 14% Not the cause
- 12% Catalytic Agent

One of causes
Agree tentatively
Agree
Agree strongly
Reasons for sexual activities

**Fantasy type**: “Selling of one’s body”: 81%

**Fantasy themes:**

- Young girls who want food and clothes
- Children sleep with sugar daddies: to pay school fees
- Parents use children as prostitutes to provide for family needs
- Women want to afford expensive clothes and luxuries
- Single mothers want to provide for their children
- Prostitutes: earn a fulltime living
Reasons for sexual activities

Fantasy type: Ignorance or illiteracy: 42%

Fantasy themes:

- No proper education, especially for rural children
- Parents do not inform their children
- Still many people do not believe AIDS exists
Reasons for sexual activities

Fantasy type: Rape: 14%

Fantasy themes:

- Due to criminality
- A young child or virgin will cure them from the disease
- To spread AIDS, because they “don’t want to die alone”
Reasons for sexual activities

Fantasy type: Hopelessness and fatalism: 6%

Fantasy themes:
- Do not care about the consequences of behaviour
- Sex is the only pleasure in an environment of poverty
Reasons for sexual activities

**Fantasy type:** Alcohol and drug abuse: 5%

**Fantasy themes:**
- They lose their inhibitions and do not care
- They do not know what they are doing
Reasons for sexual activities

**Fantasy type:** Unfaithfulness of couples: 5%

**Fantasy themes:**

- Husbands work far from home
- Lack of commitment and morals: simply unfaithful
WHO should do something?

Fantasy type: The government: 59%

Fantasy themes:
- African countries should join hands: 17%
- Departments of health should be responsible: 5%
- The president himself should lead the way: 3%
WHO should do something?

Fantasy type: The community: 18%

Fantasy themes:

- Community members and individuals should take responsibility: 18%
- Community and government should jointly combat HIV/AIDS: 11%
WHAT should be done?

Fantasy type: Eliminate poverty:

Fantasy themes:

- Create jobs: 39%
WHAT should be done?

Fantasy type: Educate people:

Fantasy themes:

- Give free education for all: 29%
- Organise information campaigns, especially in rural areas: 20%
- Empower and develop the society: 11%
WHAT should be done?

Fantasy type: Provide drugs and medical care

Fantasy themes:
- Provide cheaper drugs: 8%
- Equip clinics and hospitals better: 7%
- Develop a cure for AIDS: 7%
- Distribute condoms in a better way: 7%
- Improve birth control: 3%
- Give better motivation to visit clinics: 3%
WHAT should be done?

A B C of prevention

- Abstain: 6%
- Be faithful: 12%
- Condomise: 17%
Quotations from essays

- “If people in Africa works, there will be no poverty and HIV/AIDS.”
- “I blame the country by not giving people jobs to work in order to avoid HIV/AIDS.”
- If, the problem of poverty will have been solved; Africa will be free from Aids.
- “I think government conduct people to raise aids because it does not want to create jobs for people to get better life. They are the one who conduct aids to increase.”
Aspects of drama

Dramatis personae

- Young girls: 12 - 24 years
- Married and/or single mothers
- Men: richer, older, sugar daddies, foreigners, truck and taxi drivers, mine workers
- Parents who misuse their children
- The condom
- The government
Aspects of drama

Setting

- Rural areas
- Urban areas:
  - street corners, shebeens, night clubs
- Homes
- Hostels and prisons
Aspects of drama

Rhetorical Community

- Governmental actors
- Political parties: ANC and DP
- Scientists and scientific institutions
- NGO’s
- The media
Aspects of drama

Action And Saga

- Calamity

- “And some students the only way to pay their fees at school they practice these prostitution because they don’t have a choice, whether they practice safe or unsafe they don’t mind because they don’t have a choice.”

- “The other thing that causes HIV/AIDS is older men use money to sleep with younger children. These younger girls don’t have a choice; they just have to go along with this.”
“They know that selling their bodies is risky, **but they do not have an option**. The only way to survive is to go through with that kind of job that does not need any experience.”

“The unmarried woman had no other option except only to have many men in their lives to provide money.”

“Lastly they are poor, **so, the only way left to survive** is to market men, to sell your body to them.”
Aspects of drama

Poverty is not the cause

- “By saying poverty causes HIV/AIDS could be a way of defending ourselves in our failure to combat HIV/AIDS epidemic.”
- “I do not mean to be stereotyped but that is how the minds of Africans operate – we always try to find something or someone to blame.”
- “The moral norm demanding sexual abstinence is lost.”
Aspects of drama

Poverty is not the cause

- "HIV and AIDS are caused by man’s inability to abstain and be pure."
- "To many, love is sex, not commitment."
- "To say Aids is related to poverty is a big mistake. Aids are not caused by poverty but by men who failed to control their sexual behaviour. Men should learn to have control and respect for women."
- "Instead of poverty causing HIV/AIDS, HIV/AIDS is causing poverty."
Summary

Poverty is the cause (74%)
- Innocent victims
- External circumstances
- Cannot do much about it

Poverty is not the cause (26%)
- Responsible for own actions
- Internal circumstances
- Can do something about it
Summary

- The respondents’ gender and place of study did not play a significant role in the different visions.

- The core of the difference between the visions, is the perception that people are the victims of the evil of poverty, and that the Government should eliminate it to solve the pandemic.
Summary

- The other vision encompasses the perception that the lack of morals, respect for women and control over the sex drive cause the disease.

- The high level of convergence indicates that fantasy chaining has been taken place, and that the HIV/AIDS is a salient and often discussed issue.
Recommendations

What? - Content

- Shallow messages will not turn the tables
- Reverse the drive from external factors to internal motivational factors
- Distinguish between scientific facts and persuasion
- Address the role of the condom
Women should be empowered to negotiate the use of condoms

Address the role of poverty and causality
Recommendations

How?

- Address more demarcated target audiences
- Launch long-term campaigns in a holistic way
- Target audiences should participate
- Use narratives and dramas
- Use their mother tongue
Recommendations

Who?

- Use willing HIV+ persons as speakers
- Audience should identify with speaker
- Follow an audience-centred approach
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