

## Background and Objectives

South Africa faces a severe HIV epidemic and young people are heavily affected. Although AIDS awareness among young people in Africa is generally quite high and much research has been conducted on peer education as an intervention for the promotion of HIV/AIDS awareness, little is known about how targeted audiences and peer educators themselves perceive this method. This study provides some insights into peer education as a HIV prevention strategy. The aim of the study is to investigate perceptions of peer educators and targeted audiences about the importance of peer education.

## Context and Study Design

**Context:** The study was conducted at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the largest tertiary institution in a province which is in the midst of a crippling HIV epidemic with a prevalence level of 37.5% which is approximately 10% higher than the national average (Makubalo et al., 2003). The researcher chose to focus on students at this higher education institution as this was the most convenient way to access the 15-24 years age group which bears peak incidences of HIV.

**Sampling and data collection:** In-depth interviews were conducted with a small but focused sample of 20 students and 10 peer educators aged 18 to 24 years. Cluster sampling was used to select the 20 students to ensure that the sample represented students from all faculties at the campus. The open ended questionnaire schedule allowed respondents to express their feelings and opinions about peer education (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Interviews were conducted in English, tape recorded and transcribed. The necessary ethical clearance was granted from the University of KwaZulu-Natal ethics committee and informed consent forms were given to all respondents as part of the ethics requirements.

**Data Analysis:** Thematic analysis (Hayes, 2000) was used to analyse the transcriptions, as it involves the sorting of data into themes. The qualitative data analysis package NVivo was used for the initial stages of coding and direct quotations were also used to illustrate particular findings.

### Positive Attitudes towards Peer Education

- ✘ Students perceive peer education as a key HIV strategy for reaching young people.
- ✘ Students' definitions of peer education are consistent with views available in peer education literature.
- ✘ Their knowledge about the various components of this method of intervention was thorough.

## Key findings

### Peer educators also benefit from the programme

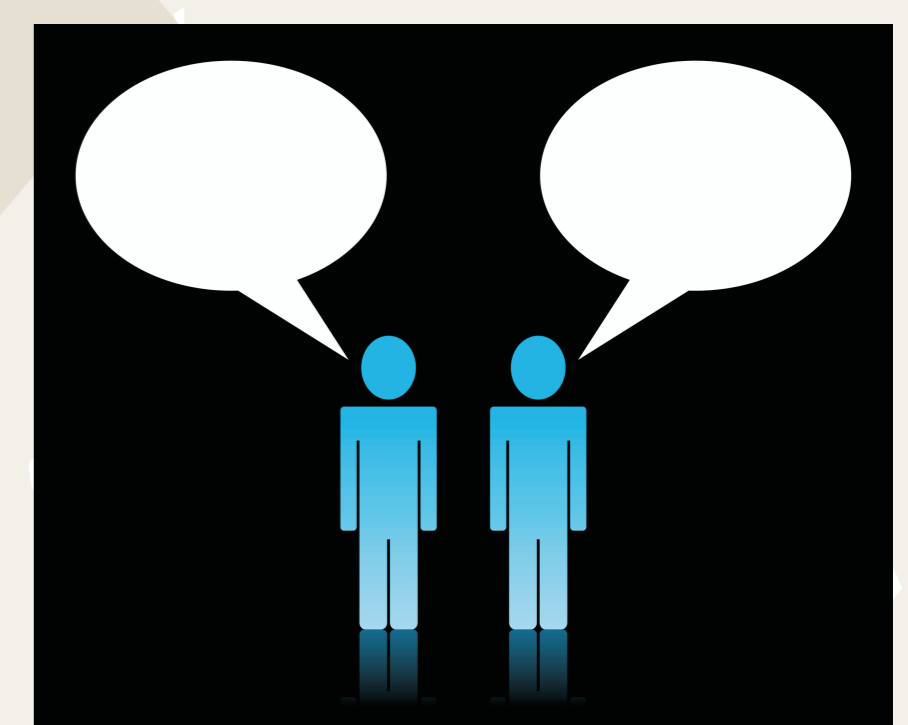
- ✘ They gain good personal communication skills.
- ✘ Exposure to the programme helped them acquire experienced-based information for their studies.
- ✘ Acquire skills and experience that would help in shaping their career prospects.

### Poor Attendance at Peer Education Activities

- ✘ Few students report that they had been exposed to peer education at their college.
- ✘ Poor timing of activities e.g forums were done in the evenings thereby failing to cater for off campus students

### Barriers that impede participation in the peer education programme

- ✘ Lack of knowledge of activities.
- ✘ Concerns about the credibility of the source of the information.



## Conclusions and Recommendations

- ✘ The study filled the gap that exist in the research on peer education which has typically focused on the effectiveness of it on changing medium term sexual behaviour, but without relating it to the views of targeted audiences and peer educators themselves about the method.
- ✘ As peer education stands out as a popular tool in the global efforts to fight the epidemic, there is need to seriously consider findings from both peer educators and their targeted audience so as to develop a peer education programme that endeavors to address the needs of both groups.
- ✘ However, there should not be an exclusive focus on HIV prevention but also treatment, care and support.
- ✘ Need for more innovative and interesting ways of motivating students to be more involved in peer education programmes which can include turning the usual forums into social events by encompassing entertainment in the form of games, quizzes and competitions.
- ✘ In a nutshell, this research has managed to reveal an understanding of peer education from the perspectives of those who will be conveying the message and those who will be receiving the message. It is anticipated that this research may yield useful insights for future peer education programme planners in the area of peer led HIV prevention as well as generating debate about potential measures that future programmes might have to take to enhance their possibility of success.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to express our thanks to students who participated in this study for sharing their experiences with us. We thank the UKZN Howard College Campus HIV Support Unit who granted us permission to undertake this study within their unit.

### References

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2. Hayes N 2000 *Doing Psychological Research*. Buckingham. Open University Press.
3. Makubalo L, Netshidzivhani P and Mahlasela L 2003 *South Africa National HIV and Syphilis Antenatal Sero-Prevalence Survey* (2003).