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3rd International AIDS Society Conference on **HIV** Pathogenesis and Treatment

Rio de Janeiro - July 24 - 27, 2005

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AND VULNERABILITY OF FEMALE STREET HAWKERS TO HIV/AIDS PANDEMIC IN LAGOS METROPOLIS: IMPLICATIONS FOR HIV TRANSMISSION CONTROL AMONG CHILDREN IN NIGERIA

IAS Conf HIV Pathog Treat 2005 Jul 24-27;3rd: Abstract No. MoPp0202

Oyefara J.L.

Department of Sociology, University of Lagos, Akoka, Yaba, Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION: This paper examines the sexual behaviour, HIV/AIDS knowledge and vulnerability of female street hawkers to HIV/AIDS pandemic in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria.

METHODS: In order to achieve these objectives, 126 female street hawkers were sampled in cross-sectional survey and 6 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted to generate data from respondents. Purposive sampling method was utilized to select the respondents who are female children below 18 years.

RESULTS: Data on sexual behaviour reveal that 79.4% of respondents are sexually active, while 62.6% of them initiated sexual intercourse at 11 years or below. There is significant relationship between age and being sexually active at $P < 0.01$. In particular, respondents in ages 14-17 years are more likely to be sexually active compared with their counterparts in ages 8-10 years. Data on knowledge about HIV/AIDS show that all the respondents have heard about the pandemic. Specifically, 64.3% and 35.7% of respondents mentioned sexual intercourse and blood contact as major routes HIV transmission respectively. Information on the use of condom shows that only 7.1% of the respondents use condom during sexual intercourse. There are significant relationships between current age, religious affiliation and use of condom at $P < 0.01$. Young female street hawkers between ages 8-10 years and Christians are less likely to use condom compared with their counterparts who are between ages 11-17 years and non-Christians. FGDs data show significant relationships between poverty level of the families, parental

neglect and poor parent-child communication in the sexual behaviour and level of use of condom of the respondents.

CONCLUSIONS: In conclusion, female street hawkers are highly vulnerable to HIV infection in Nigeria. Therefore, government and NGOs working on the prevention of HIV/AIDS in the country should focus special attention on children most especially the street hawkers in Nigerian cities.

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MoPp0202

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