

# Meaning in Life and Information Behavior of People Living with HIV/AIDS in Oyo State Nigeria

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## Abstract

The research was designed primarily to examine the influence of meaning in life on information behavior of people living with HIV in Nigeria. This study adopted the survey research design. Using questionnaires administered through purposive sampling techniques, data was obtained from one hundred and fifty-three people living with HIV/AIDS registered at Adeoyo Hospital in Ibadan, Oyo state Nigeria. The overall mean age was 30 (SD=1.08). Two hypotheses were tested in the study. The result revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between meaning in life and HIV/AIDS information behavior ( $r=0.455, p<.05$ ). Also, an independent t-test showed that the difference between males and females based on information behavior was not significant ( $t=1.633, df=151, p=.104$ ). Efforts to promote HIV prevention and enhance adherence to anti-retroviral drugs among those already infected require information about the epidemic which can only be properly used through the strengthening of meaning in life of individuals and more importantly people living with HIV/AIDS.

**Keywords:** Meaning in Life; AIDS; HIV; Information; Information Behaviour

## Introduction

Every human wonders why things are the way they are; a human being dreams; has some feelings and acts in some rational or irrational way. Every human contemplates about actions and the consequences of those actions, and is in turn influenced by those contemplations.

A search for meaning in life usually begins in childhood and spans through adolescence to old age. Youth is a period marked by dedication to oneself and systems of belief that reflect compelling purpose [1]. Studies have shown that lack of meaning in life may include self-absorption, depression, addictions, hopelessness, leading to destructive behaviour, inability to bear life threatening illness, and inability to sustain stable interpersonal relations [2]. On the positive side, high meaning leads to a number of desired outcomes, achievement, high self-esteem [3], maintenance of well-being in difficult times, effective coping and reduction of stress, hope in extreme situations and improved quality of life [4].

People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) face tremendous challenges, including lower sense of significance, stigmatization, work discrimination, lack of freedom and unavoidable suffering. PLWHA may lack motivation for living and lower levels of information satisfaction due to lack of freedom as a result of stigma, social neglect and depression [5]. Negative attitudes associated with HIV/AIDS may serve as limitations, bringing additional inability to discovering meaning in life. For example, meaning in life may encourage PLWHA to seek information that may increase self-care, adherence to antiretroviral (ARV) therapy and other support. High meaning in life may provide evidence on the aspect of life PLWHA may seek information on and how they handle obstacles HIV/AIDS brings, including delay in cognitive and physical access to care [6] and information availability due to isolation.

Some previous studies have concentrated exclusively on the concept of meaning in life. Others have related the concept to one or more psychological constructs. The present study examines the relationship

between meaning in life, a psychological concept and information behaviours, a group of concepts in information science. This is because while it is important to know perceptions of meaning in life of PLWHA, it is also important to know how the perception translates into HIV/AIDS information need, seeking, sharing, production and communicative activities among this community of people. The absence of meaning may serve as barrier to PLWHA's quest for search for information resources including limitation to their freedom, motivation to seek support and change in attitude which may subsequently affect information seeking, sharing, production, use and communicative activities.

## Objectives of the study

The relationship between information behaviours and meaning in life among PLWHA in Nigeria has not been well established. It is the objectives of this research to

1. Examine the relationship between meaning in life and HIV/AIDS information behavior of people living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria.
2. Examine gender differences in meaning in life and information behaviours among people living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria.

## Research hypotheses

1. There is a significant relationship between meaning in life and information behavior of people living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria.
2. There will be any difference between male and female persons living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria in information behaviour?

## Literature Review

### Meaning in life

Reker and Wong [7] defined meaning in life as the cognizance of order, coherence and purpose in one's existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals and an accompanying sense of fulfillment. Sense of

meaning in life gives individuals sense that lives are valuable and important and go beyond what we can immediately see. This understanding has cognitive dimension and influence what individuals think of themselves, how they view the world, and how they relate with the schemes of things round them. This perception of meaning is instrumental to the formation of the right perspective for experiences of life.

Swann et al. [8] also related this perception of meaning in life to a strong set of related memories that coalesce into continuous narrative, defensible theories about how the world works and people's ability to test theories of how they are perceived by others. Steger et al. [9] opined that apart from the cognitive component of meaning, which provides the structure on which people derive their aspirations and recognize the goals that makes their lives important to them, there is also a motivational component of meaning which is related to the value attached to one's life goals or mission. These two components have been regarded as what makes meaning different from psychological functioning. Cognitive component helps to understand the world while the motivation component relates to how people perform under certain circumstances and in different contexts.

Absence of meaning in life can trigger hopelessness. For example, Mascaro [10] found that a sense of meaning was negatively related to depressive symptoms, depression and hopelessness, and positively related to meaning fulfillment, hope, and internal locus of control. Debats [11] supported the prediction that relationships are the most frequent sources of meaning in life. Simms [12] observed that mental health and wellbeing comprise of meaning in life besides other variables. King et al. [13] linked meaning in life with positive emotions and life satisfaction. This understanding helps suggest ways by which meaning in life can be improved among different categories of people, especially people living with critical health conditions.

### Information and information need

Information need highlights the purpose for which information is sought. Taylor [14] describes information need in terms of its specificity in cognition while Wilson described it as an awareness of a state of "not knowing" –or some conceptual incongruity in which the learner's cognitive structure is not adequate to the task. Information need is said to exist when the person's cognitive structure is not adequate to the task [15]; when a person recognizes that something is wrong in his or her state of knowledge and wishes to resolve the anomaly [16]; when the current state of knowledge is less than needed [17]; when internal sense runs out [18]. There are three categories of information needs. At one end is the unexpressed need or inexpressible need for information; at the other end is the expressible or clearly defined need for information; and in the middle is the conscious need, that is realized and ill-defined description of the information needs. Each of these categories may suggest how to identify what information will be needed and how it can be provided to alleviate health challenges of people living with one form of health condition or the other.

### Information seeking behaviour

Information seeking can be defined as any activity of an individual that is undertaken to identify a message that satisfies a perceived need [17]. Ellis [19] made a list of some characteristic actions that form information seeking behavior as: starting, browsing/chaining/monitoring, differentiating, extracting, verifying and ending. Wilson [20] viewed information seeking behavior in the context of an information need arising out of a situation such as a person's environment, social roles and individual characteristics. At the same time, this context comes with barriers that need to be overcome before information seeking takes place. Wilson [21] opined that information search behavior is a subset of information seeking behaviour and information seeking behavior is

in turn only a subset of information behavior. Savolainen [22] defined information seeking information in the context of way of life (defined as order of things, which is based on choices that individuals make, ultimately oriented by the factors constituting habitus, "things" standing for various activities taking place in the daily life of the individual including not only job but also necessary reproductive tasks, such as household care and voluntary activities).

Information use is a concept that has been defined in many different ways. Elayyan [23] referred to it as the study of the gathering stage of use rather than the use to which information is put once it has been collected. In this sense, Elayyan [23] regarded information use as what an individual actually uses or applies. This use may be a satisfied need or the result of information seeking, browsing or accident. Dervin [24] viewed this use as the ways in which people put answers to questions. Choo [25] views information use as a dynamic, interactive social process of inquiry that may result in the making of meaning or the making of decision.

Mc-Cay-Peet and Toms [26] regarded information use as intrinsic because it involves an understanding and integration with the existing knowledge base - a process of inquiry and debate with no visible indicators besides personal knowledge base. Although, Choo [25] directed use to the context of organization, some aspects are equally applicable to individual decision making. Kunz [27] defined information use as the actual frequency of use of a particular information channels such as books, journals, colleagues, Internet, newspaper etc. Information use can then be viewed as a behavioural outcome of personal and non-personal information sources. Mc-Cay-Peet and Tom [26] argued that information use is the factor that drives other information behavior and it represents the ultimate purpose for which information is needed and sought. Wilson [20] also noted that information is used in social situations and when information is used, a relationship obtains between information and the information purposes of the individual.

To sum up, this research investigates the role of meaning in life in the lives of PLWHA and how it affects their information behaviour. Meaning in life is believed to have the potential to enhance the need, seeking, sharing, production and use of information and information resources. It may produce a trigger for information need, prompting individuals to engage in information search to achieve the purpose of dealing with life events that can make life worth living. For example, HIV information needs represent gaps in the existing knowledge of PLWHA about their state of health. Meaning in life may even be useful in bringing to consciousness the already dormant needs, thus serving as a motivational factor for information needs.

### Methodology

This study adopted sample survey research design. The study was carried out in ADEOYO Maternity Teaching Hospital, a state-owned hospital in Ibadan, Oyo State. The hospital accommodates PEPFAR/APIN PLUS where the study was conducted. A total of 153 people living with HIV/AIDS participated in this research. They were selected during their medical visitation to PEPFAR/APIN PLUS, ADEOYO maternity teaching hospital. The instrument used for this research, is a well structured questionnaire.

Meaning in life was measured by meaning in life scale which was developed by Steger et al. [9], scale consisting of 10 items. The original response format ranges from absolutely untrue (scored 1) to absolutely true (scored 7). However, the modified response format adapted ranges from strongly disagree (scored 1) to strongly agree (scored 5). Items 1, 4, 5, 6 and 9 measure presence of meaning in life in an individual while items 2, 3, 7, 8 and 10 measure search for meaning in life. Item 9 was reverse coded. Cronbach's alpha for the scale in this study was 0.88.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	Sig.	Remark
Meaning in life	153	37.6776	7.27659	.455**	.000	Significant
Information behavior	153	37.7472	.61855			

**Table 1:** Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Meaning in Life with Information Behavior (N=153)

HIV/AIDS Information Behaviour	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Df	Mean Diff.	T	Sig.	Remark
Males	58	3.8512	0.58929	151	0.16744	1.633	.104	Not sig.
Females	95	3.6838	0.63037					

**Table 2:** T-Test showing the Mean Difference between Male and Female PLWHA on Information Behavior

### Validity and reliability of data collection instrument

In ensuring the validity and reliability of data instrument, the researcher made use of standardized measure of meaning in life. Instruments used to measure elements of information behavior comprising information needs; information seeking behavior, information use have been developed and proven to possess face validity and content validity and were only adjusted for in this study to make up for certain differences in the population sample of this study through pilot study.

### Results

As shown in table 1, there is a significant positive correlation between meaning in life and HIV/AIDS information behaviour. Thus, the higher the meaning in life of the participants, the higher their HIV/AIDS information behaviour ( $r=0.455, p<.05$ ).

The result in table 2 shows that a significant difference does not exist between male participants and female participants in information behavior with means 3.8512 and 3.6838 for males and females respectively. The mean difference between the two groups was 0.16744 and 95% confidence interval for the estimated population mean difference is between -.03510 and .36999. The effect size was small ( $d=0.27$ ). An independent t-test showed that the difference between the groups was not significant ( $t=1.633, df=151, p=.104$ ).

### Discussion

The result obtained using Pearson Product Moment Correlation in Table 1 reveals that there is a significant relationship between meaning in life and information behavior. This finding should not come as a surprise, feelings that life makes sense, having a sense of purpose, and having a self-understanding of oneself and one's life hold direct relationship with positive information behavior. This positive information behavior would involve desiring to know as much as possible about HIV/AIDS, searching and using information sources that relates to HIV/AIDS.

Beginning with HIV/AIDS information need, there is a link between high meaning and HIV/AIDS information needs. Individuals who report high meaning in life should also report high HIV/AIDS information needs. That is, they should be more desirable of HIV/AIDS information and express positive outlook to its use. For example, meaning in life should make PLWHA have a more positive perception of the world and perhaps better HIV/AIDS information seeking behavior. In a study on the impact of HIV-related stigma on psychological well-being (a correlate of meaning in life) of PLWHA, Li et al. [28] found that emotional social support remains a protective factor against depression. High-meaning people living with HIV/AIDS should also report high serendipitous HIV/AIDS information seeking. They should consider information that

relates to HIV/AIDS novel and worthy of use when they come across such information through chance encounter.

Although, male participants showed more information behavior, the difference was not impressive (Table 2). This is similar to the findings of Edwards and Holden [29] who reported that the hypothesis that meaning acts as a buffer between males and females was only partially supported. It is usually believed that men are likely to engage in more information behavior than women because they are believed to be more stable emotionally. However, considering the age and marital status of the female participants, one can easily peruse the reason why they were not different from male participants in this factor. About 55.8% of the women living with HIV/AIDS in this study were above thirty-three years and in marriage situation. They were more stable due to their age and usually had the support of someone close, such as a spouse. These factors gave the females unlimited access to information, leaving no difference between them and the men.

### Limitations

This study has some limitations. This study was conducted in just one hospital making generalization difficult. Future research could use more hospitals in Nigeria in order to have a larger participation of PLWHA in Nigeria. Interview method may also have served as another method among lowly educated people living with HIV/AIDS but was not used in the study. Moreover, we cannot totally rely on self-reported high meaning in life observed among this group of individuals, majority of those who reported high meaning in life were more likely trying to appear desirable and were actually reporting psychological distress. Lastly, the study population is small because of the sample size compared to the number of PLWHA in Nigeria. Therefore, some true differences among PLWHA may not be detected. A larger sample size should be used in the future.

### Conclusion

This study examined meaning in life and information behavior of people living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. One hundred and fifty-three PLWHA sampled through purposive sampling completed a well-structured questionnaire. The results showed that there was a positive relationship between meaning in life and information behavior. Also, there was no difference between male and females based on information behavior. The findings of the study are important for mapping out the psychological and social factors that may influence HIV/AIDS information behavior among this population and their likely influence on the success or otherwise of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs.

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