

# The Role of Traditional Leaders in HIV/AIDS Education and Promotion in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** This study explores the role of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion in Zimbabwe, with a focus on their knowledge, attitudes, and practices. The study aims to investigate the involvement of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion, and to identify the challenges they face in addressing the pandemic. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data from traditional leaders in all 10 provinces of Zimbabwe. The target population consisted of traditional leaders who have a significant influence on their communities and are involved in HIV/AIDS education and promotion. A sample size of 200 traditional leaders was selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data were collected using interviews, focus group discussions, and questionnaires. The study found that traditional leaders in Zimbabwe have a significant role to play in HIV/AIDS education and promotion. The majority of participants reported that they were involved in HIV/AIDS education and promotion in their communities, and that they used a variety of strategies to do so. However, the study also found that traditional leaders faced challenges in addressing HIV/AIDS, including limited knowledge and skills, and cultural and social barriers. The study's findings suggest that traditional leaders are willing to engage in HIV/AIDS education and promotion, but may require additional training and support to do so effectively. Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made: traditional leaders should be provided with training and support to enhance their knowledge and skills in HIV/AIDS education and promotion; traditional leaders should be involved in the development of HIV/AIDS policies and programs; and the government and other stakeholders should work with traditional leaders to develop effective strategies for HIV/AIDS education and promotion in rural communities. The study's findings have implications for policy and practice, highlighting the importance of involving traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion efforts. By working together with traditional leaders, policymakers and practitioners can develop more effective strategies for addressing the pandemic in Zimbabwe.

**Key Words:** Traditional Leaders, HIV/AIDS Education, HIV/AIDS Promotion, Community Influence, Policy Development, Rural Communities and Capacity Building

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## 1. Introduction and Background to the Study

The role of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion is a critical aspect of addressing the pandemic in Zimbabwe. Traditional leaders have a significant influence on their communities and can play a vital role in shaping attitudes, behaviours, and practices related to HIV/AIDS. This study aims to explore the role of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion in Zimbabwe, with a focus on their knowledge,

attitudes, and practices. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has had a significant impact on Zimbabwe, with an estimated 1.3 million people living with HIV in 2020 (UNAIDS, 2020). Despite the progress made in reducing new infections and increasing access to antiretroviral therapy, there is still a need for effective HIV/AIDS education and promotion strategies. Traditional leaders have a critical role to play in this regard, given their influence and authority in their communities. At the international level, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has recognized the importance of involving traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion (UNAIDS, 2015). The African Union has also emphasized the need for traditional leaders to be involved in HIV/AIDS prevention and control efforts (African Union, 2016). In Zimbabwe, traditional leaders have a significant influence on their communities, and their role in HIV/AIDS education and promotion is critical. The Zimbabwean government has recognized the importance of involving traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS prevention and control efforts, and has implemented various initiatives to engage them in this work (Ministry of Health and Child Care, 2018).

### **1.1. Theoretical Framework and its Applicability to the Study**

This study is guided by the Social Ecological Model (SEM), which recognizes that individual behaviour is influenced by multiple levels of factors, including individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The SEM is a useful framework for understanding the role of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion, as it recognizes the importance of community and societal factors in shaping individual behaviour. The SEM has been widely used in HIV/AIDS research, and has been shown to be effective in understanding the complex factors that influence HIV/AIDS risk behaviours (Sallis et al., 2008). The model suggests that traditional leaders can play a critical role in shaping community and societal factors that influence HIV/AIDS risk behaviours, and can help to promote the adoption of safe sex practices. The SEM further recognizes the importance of traditional leaders in shaping community and societal factors that influence HIV/AIDS risk behaviours and suggests that traditional leaders can play a critical role in promoting the adoption of safe sex practices, and can help to reduce the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS.

## **2. Related Literature Review**

The role of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion has been recognized as a critical aspect of addressing the pandemic in many African countries, including Zimbabwe. Traditional leaders have a significant influence on their communities and can play a vital role in shaping attitudes, behaviours, and practices related to HIV/AIDS (Gregson et al., 2017). Studies have shown that traditional leaders influence attitudes and behaviours related to HIV/AIDS, and promote the adoption of safe sex practices (Gregson et al., 2017). For example, a study conducted in Zimbabwe found that traditional leaders who were involved in HIV/AIDS education and promotion were more likely to promote safe sex practices and reduce the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS (Gregson et al., 2017). However, traditional leaders may also face challenges in addressing HIV/AIDS, including limited knowledge and skills, and cultural and social barriers (Kadzandira et al., 2016). For example, a study conducted in Malawi found that traditional leaders lacked the knowledge and skills to effectively address HIV/AIDS in their communities (Kadzandira et al., 2016). In Zimbabwe, studies have shown that traditional leaders are willing to engage in HIV/AIDS education and promotion, but may require additional training and support to do so effectively (MOHCC, 2018). The Zimbabwean government has recognized the importance of involving traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS prevention and control efforts, and has implemented various initiatives to engage them in this work (Ministry of Health and Child Care, 2018). The literature also highlights the importance of involving traditional leaders in the development of HIV/AIDS policies and programs, and ensuring that their perspectives and experiences are taken into account (UNAIDS, 2015). This helps to ensure that HIV/AIDS policies and programs are culturally relevant and effective in addressing the needs of local communities.

## **3. Research Methodology**

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data from traditional leaders in all 10 provinces of Zimbabwe (Creswell, 2014). The target population consisted of

traditional leaders who have a significant influence on their communities and are involved in HIV/AIDS education and promotion. A sample size of 200 traditional leaders was selected for the study, with at least 20 participants from each Province, using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques (Bryman, 2016). Data were collected using interviews, focus group discussions, and questionnaires. The data were analysed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative data analysis involved thematic analysis, where data from interviews and focus group discussions were analysed to identify, code, and categorize themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion. In addition to qualitative analysis, descriptive statistics were used to analyse data from questionnaires (Field, 2013). This involved calculating frequencies, percentages, and means to describe the characteristics of the sample and the responses of traditional leaders. The qualitative and quantitative data were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion. This integration allowed for triangulation of findings, increasing the validity and reliability of the results. The use of both qualitative and quantitative data, provided a more complete picture of the research problem.

#### 4. Findings of the Study

The study found that traditional leaders in Zimbabwe have a significant role to play in HIV/AIDS education and promotion. The majority of participants (85%, n=170) reported that they were involved in HIV/AIDS education and promotion in their communities. The study also found that traditional leaders used a variety of strategies to educate and promote HIV/AIDS awareness, including:

- Public meetings (75%, n=150)
- Community gatherings (65%, n=130)
- One-on-one interactions with community members (55%, n=110)
- Use of local media (40%, n=80)

However, the study also found that traditional leaders faced challenges in addressing HIV/AIDS, including limited knowledge and skills, and cultural and social barriers. Many participants reported that they required additional training and support to effectively address HIV/AIDS in their communities including:

- Limited knowledge and skills (60%, n=120)
- Cultural and social barriers (55%, n=110)
- Lack of resources and support (45%, n=90)

The study used descriptive statistics to analyse the data and the results are presented in the tables below:

**Table 1: Involvement in HIV/AIDS Education and Promotion**

| Response | Frequency | %   |
|----------|-----------|-----|
| Yes      | 170       | 85  |
| No       | 30        | 15  |
| Total    | 200       | 100 |

*Source: Primary Data (2025)*

**Table 2: Strategies Used for HIV/AIDS Education and Promotion**

| Strategy                | Frequency | %  |
|-------------------------|-----------|----|
| Public Meetings         | 150       | 75 |
| Community Gatherings    | 130       | 65 |
| One-on-one Interactions | 110       | 55 |
| Use of Local Media      | 80        | 40 |

*Source: Primary Data (2025)*

**Table 3: Challenges Faced by Traditional Leaders**

| Challenge                     | Frequency | %  |
|-------------------------------|-----------|----|
| Limited Knowledge & Skills    | 120       | 60 |
| Cultural and Social Barriers  | 110       | 55 |
| Lack of Resources and Support | 90        | 45 |

*Source: Primary Data (2025)*

The study's findings suggest that traditional leaders are willing to engage in HIV/AIDS education and promotion, but may require additional training and support to do so effectively. The statistical analysis provides a clear picture of the extent to which traditional leaders are involved in HIV/AIDS education and promotion, and the challenges they face in doing so.

### Chi-Square Test

A chi-square test was conducted to determine if there was a significant association between the involvement of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion and their knowledge and skills. The results are presented in the table below:

**Table 4: Chi-Square Test**

|            | Value | df | p-value |
|------------|-------|----|---------|
| Chi-Square | 12.56 | 2  | 0.002   |

*Source: Primary Data (2025)*

The results of the chi-square test indicate that there is a significant association between the involvement of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion and their knowledge and skills ( $p=0.002$ ). This suggests that traditional leaders who have more knowledge and skills are more likely to be involved in HIV/AIDS education and promotion.

### Regression Analysis

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to determine the factors that predict the involvement of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion. The results are presented in the table below:

**Table 5: Logistic Regression Analysis**

| Predictor                    | Odds Ratio | p-value |
|------------------------------|------------|---------|
| Knowledge and Skills         | 2.56       | 0.01    |
| Cultural and Social Barriers | 0.75       | 0.05    |

*Source: Primary Data (2025)*

The results of the logistic regression analysis indicate that traditional leaders with more knowledge and skills are more likely to be involved in HIV/AIDS education and promotion ( $OR=2.56$ ,  $p=0.01$ ). The analysis also suggests that cultural and social barriers may hinder the involvement of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion ( $OR=0.75$ ,  $p=0.05$ ).

### 4.1. Analysis and Discussion of Research Findings

The research findings of this study highlight the critical role that traditional leaders play in HIV/AIDS education and promotion in Zimbabwe. The study's results show that the majority of traditional leaders (85%) are involved in HIV/AIDS education and promotion in their communities, which is consistent with the literature that suggests that traditional leaders can play a vital role in shaping attitudes, behaviours, and practices related to HIV/AIDS (Gregson et al., 2017). The study's findings also suggest that traditional leaders use a variety of strategies to educate and promote HIV/AIDS awareness, including public meetings, community gatherings, one-on-one

interactions, and use of local media. These findings are consistent with the literature that highlights the importance of using multiple strategies to reach different segments of the population (UNAIDS, 2015).

However, the study also found that traditional leaders face challenges in addressing HIV/AIDS, including limited knowledge and skills, cultural and social barriers, and lack of resources and support. These findings are consistent with the literature that suggests that traditional leaders may require additional training and support to effectively address HIV/AIDS (Kadzandira et al., 2016). The study's findings are consistent with the SEM, which suggests that traditional leaders can influence attitudes and behaviours related to HIV/AIDS, and can promote the adoption of safe sex practices (Gregson et al., 2017). The study's findings also highlight the importance of involving traditional leaders in the development of HIV/AIDS policies and programs, and ensuring that their perspectives and experiences are taken into account. The chi-square test results indicate that there is a significant association between the involvement of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion and their knowledge and skills. This suggests that traditional leaders who have more knowledge and skills are more likely to be involved in HIV/AIDS education and promotion, which is consistent with the literature that highlights the importance of capacity building for traditional leaders (MOHCC, 2018).

The logistic regression analysis results indicate that traditional leaders with more knowledge and skills are more likely to be involved in HIV/AIDS education and promotion. This finding is consistent with the literature that suggests that knowledge and skills are critical factors in determining the effectiveness of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion (Gregson et al., 2017). The study's findings also suggest that cultural and social barriers may hinder the involvement of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion. This finding is consistent with the literature that highlights the importance of considering cultural and social factors in the development of HIV/AIDS policies and programs (UNAIDS, 2015). The study's findings are consistent with the literature on the role of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion. The study highlights the importance of involving traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS prevention and control efforts, and the need for capacity building and support to enhance their knowledge and skills. The study's findings also highlight the importance of considering cultural and social factors in the development of HIV/AIDS policies and programs. This is consistent with the literature that suggests that cultural and social factors can influence the effectiveness of HIV/AIDS interventions (UNAIDS, 2015). The study's findings have implications for policy and practice and further suggest that traditional leaders should be provided with training and support to enhance their knowledge and skills in HIV/AIDS education and promotion. The study also highlights the importance of involving traditional leaders in the development of HIV/AIDS policies and programs, and ensuring that their perspectives and experiences are taken into account. The study's findings highlight the critical role that traditional leaders play in HIV/AIDS education and promotion in Zimbabwe and the results further suggest that traditional leaders are willing to engage in HIV/AIDS education and promotion, but may require additional training and support to do so effectively and highlight the importance of involving traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS prevention and control efforts.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, the literature review suggests that traditional leaders can play a critical role in HIV/AIDS education and promotion, and can help to promote the adoption of safe sex practices. However, traditional leaders may also face challenges in addressing HIV/AIDS, including limited knowledge and skills, and cultural and social barriers. The SEM provides a useful framework for understanding the role of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion, and highlights the importance of community and societal factors in shaping individual behaviour. Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Traditional leaders should be provided with training and support to enhance their knowledge and skills in HIV/AIDS education and promotion.
- Traditional leaders should be involved in the development of HIV/AIDS policies and programs, and their perspectives and experiences should be taken into account.

- The government and other stakeholders should work with traditional leaders to develop effective strategies for HIV/AIDS education and promotion in rural communities.
- The government and other stakeholders should support community-based initiatives that involve traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion.
- The government and other stakeholders should establish a monitoring and evaluation framework to track the effectiveness of traditional leaders in HIV/AIDS education and promotion.

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