

**Essay Title**

The OCI Foundation's Anti-cervical Cancer Bill: Rationale, Potential Obstacles, and Solutions to the Integration of Anti-cervical Cancer Teachings into the Secondary School Curriculum

**Medical Students' Association (MSA)** Ilorin Medical Students' Association  
(ILUMSA)

**Author's Name** BELLO, Hussein Adoto

**Full mailing address** N/A

**Phone number** 08062300927

**Email address** [Bellohussien210@gmail.com](mailto:Bellohussien210@gmail.com)

## **Introduction**

Cervical cancer is a life-threatening disease that is wreaking havoc on women worldwide. With breast cancer (38.7%), cervical cancer accounts for 55.1% of cancer cases in women in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>. To stem the tide of cervical cancer in the country, the Onyeabuchi Chris Ifedora (OCI) Foundation facilitated a bill to introduce anti-cervical cancer education into the Nigerian secondary school curriculum<sup>2</sup>. This essay explains what the Bill is about, why anti-cervical cancer education should be integrated into the Nigeria senior secondary school curriculum and highlights the factors that could influence the integration.

## **Cervical cancer in Nigeria**

Coming down with cancer of any shade is not a pleasant reality for anyone, but for women in Nigeria, the cancer burden is high and particularly deadly. Sixty-six percent of cancer cases recorded in Nigeria between 2009 and 2010 occurred in women<sup>3</sup>. About 7 in 10 women diagnosed with cancer in Nigeria died in 2021<sup>4</sup>. Diagnosis is often late and at a point where interventions are more palliative than curative. Treatment is also expensive. Beyond these factors, Nigeria's estimated cancer burden and mortality could be underrated, as some patients seek treatment from traditional healing homes and religious centres rather than hospitals<sup>5</sup>.

The country's high cancer burden and mortality, despite a control plan, indicates a problem. Nigeria is one of the nine countries in Africa with policies against cancer<sup>6</sup>. The government, for instance, has a National Cancer Control Plan (NCCP) for 2018 to 2022<sup>7</sup>. It outlines seven priority action areas to reduce the incidence and prevalence of cancer in Nigeria. However, there are gaps in the implementation of this plan, such as funding, access to care, and integration and coordination with other federal and state health programmes<sup>3</sup>. These gaps create

a need for feasible, scalable, and sustainable alternatives to prevent and reduce cancer incidence<sup>8</sup>, especially in Nigeria<sup>9</sup>.

## **OCI Foundation's Anti-Cervical Cancer Bill**

The OCI Foundation's Anti-Cervical Cancer Bill is a legislative proposal to introduce anti-breast and cervical cancer education into the curriculum of secondary schools in Nigeria. The Bill was initiated as part of the foundation's Arm Our Youths (ArOY) Health Campaign. The ArOY campaign kicked off in 2019 to reduce the burden and stigma of breast and cervical cancer in Nigeria<sup>2\*</sup>. To achieve the three strategic aims of the campaign, the OCI Foundation facilitated the introduction of the Anti-Cervical Cancer Bill at the Nigerian House of Representatives.

The objects of the Anti-Cervical Cancer Bill mirror the aims of the ArOY campaign. One, they recognize the adoption of its tenets "as a novel, wide-reaching, cost-effective and sustainable way of tackling the two cancers." Second, the Bill aims to raise the number of secondary school students with an accurate understanding of the risk factors, early symptoms, and preventive measures for breast and cervical cancer. The provisional target is to equip more than 80% of students taking the course with sufficient knowledge within the first 12 months of implementation in each cohort. Third, by increasing students' understanding of the two cancers, the Bill aims to get at least 50% of students to perform monthly breast self-examination (BSE) within the same period. The final goal of the Bill is to sustain the gains made via the campaign through consistent and progressive teachings to students across the three senior classes in secondary schools.

## **The rationale for the OCI Anti-Cervical Cancer Bill**

Schools are a great place to initiate health promotion programmes. More than 62% of Nigerians above age 15 are literate<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, school-based interventions could reach many young women at risk of cervical cancer. Studies within and outside Nigeria show that educational interventions improve women's knowledge of cervical cancer, risk factors, signs and symptoms, and prevention<sup>\*\*</sup>; these interventions only need to be repeated or sustained long enough to reduce the burden of cancer in the country.

In the case of cervical cancer, it helps to target at-risk individuals very early. Early age at first sexual intercourse is strongly associated with an increased risk of cancer<sup>15</sup>. In Nigeria, the median age of women at sexual debut is 16 years; more than 45% of women report having their first intercourse before age 15 and 17<sup>16</sup>. Students in senior secondary schools are within this age demography<sup>17</sup> and are at an increased risk of contracting the human papillomavirus (HPV), the causative agent of cervical cancer.

In addition, most of these women do not know that cervical cancer is associated with sexual exposure<sup>9</sup>. A 2017 study showed that more than 70% of female senior secondary school students in South Eastern Nigeria have never heard of HPV: only 30% knew about its transmission through unprotected sexual intercourse<sup>18</sup>. This low awareness of cervical cancer makes women liable for contracting HPV and developing the disease.

Therefore, targeting young women in senior secondary schools presents an excellent opportunity to educate them against the risk factors for cervical cancer and improve their knowledge, attitude, and practices against the disease. Anti-cervical cancer education will motivate young women to undergo cervical cancer screening and vaccination against cervical cancer.

## **Potential obstacles to the integration of anti-cervical cancer education into the senior secondary school curriculum**

Integrating anti-cervical cancer teachings into Nigerian secondary schools will not be a walk in the park. Of course, NERDC can develop the curriculum and pass it on to schools; the challenge emerges when it is time for the schools to adopt the curriculum in their operating processes.

The first obstacle is funding. The NERDC needs to organize workshops for educators and stakeholders who prepare to learn materials for the course and for teachers who deliver the learning materials to students. Schools need competent staff and learning aids, such as 3D anatomical models, to teach the lesson effectively. However, budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria is below the benchmark recommended to deliver quality education<sup>19</sup>. Insufficient funding creates a financial strain on schools, education ministries, and agencies to mobilize personnel and material resources for implementing anti-cervical cancer education in senior secondary schools.

Another potential obstacle is the availability of quality teachers to present anti-cervical cancer education to students. Many science teachers in Nigerian secondary schools do not understand the subjects they teach and may not deliver their lessons effectively<sup>20</sup>. A recent study showed that civic education teachers do not engage in lifelong learning to keep up with the demands of the subject, nor do they engage their students as well as they should<sup>21</sup>.

Furthermore, schools may struggle to integrate anti-cervical cancer education into their already packed curriculum without undermining the teaching of other relevant topics in the same subject. It is already difficult for educators to fit classes into their timetables, allocate

time for them, and cover the syllabus for each term. Introducing new topics for anti-cervical cancer education could be an additional challenge.

## **Recommended solutions for the integration of anti-cervical cancer education into the senior secondary school curriculum**

Developing and integrating courses into secondary school curricula is often a top-to-bottom affair in which government ministries establish the policies and send them down to schools and educators to implement. However, for anti-cervical cancer education to be integrated successfully into the senior secondary school curriculum, teachers, proprietors, and administrators involved in the day-to-day running of the schools should be included in the development of the curriculum. The inclusion would improve the chances of its successful implementation.

Secondly, the government should leverage webinars and online classes to train the trainers; that is, to train teachers who will go on to teach their peers and students. For instance, anti-cervical cancer education content should be prepared and made available as videos and downloadable documents for the guided, self-paced education of teachers and other related stakeholders. Virtual education will thus reduce the cost and time needed to integrate anti-cervical cancer education into the secondary school curriculum.

Moreover, the government can partner with non-governmental organizations and donor agencies to train teachers, donate learning materials to schools, or provide them at subsidized costs. This public-private partnership will help schools unable to access ICT facilities implement anti-cervical cancer education curricula in their schools. On the other hand, the school can engage government-approved laboratories and hospitals for cervical cancer

screening and vaccination as part of extracurricular efforts to translate the knowledge into practice.

## **Conclusion**

Cervical cancer is an existential threat to women in Nigeria. For many, to contract cervical cancer is to unwittingly sign up for a slow, painful death. Government control measures are laudable yet inadequate and relatively inaccessible. Alternative measures like school-based interventions present a simple yet effective step that could turn the tide against cervical cancer. The OCI Foundation's Bill to introduce anti-cervical cancer education into the secondary school curriculum is the right step in this direction. However, for the Bill to be integrated successfully, obstacles in terms of funding and human and material resources need to be removed. At the same time, stakeholders could leverage technology and partnerships to smoothen the process. The road to cervical cancer eradication is long, and Nigeria's means are small. But with innovations like the OCI Foundation's Bill, Nigeria may attain the impossible. She only needs to use it right.

## **References**

1. Global Cancer Observatory, 2021. Nigeria
2. OCI Foundation. The Arm Our Youths (ArOY) Health Campaign  
<https://ocifoundation.org/the-arm-our-youths-campaign/>
3. Eguzo K, Ramsden VR, Ekanem U, Olatunbosun O, Walker V, Mpofu C. Review of cancer control policy in Nigeria and comparison with selected African countries: implications for future policy making. *Ibom Medical Journal*. 2020 Jan 1;13(1):1-11.

4. ICO/IARC Information Centre on HPV and Cancer [Internet]. HPV Information Centre. Human Papillomavirus and Related Diseases Report: Nigeria; Available from: [https://hvpcentre.net/statistics/reports/NGA\\_FS.pdf](https://hvpcentre.net/statistics/reports/NGA_FS.pdf) [Accessed 15 September 2022].
5. Ifediora C, Veerman L, Azuike E, Ekwochi U, Obiozor W. Impact of Integrating Anti-cervical Cancer Teachings Into the Curriculum of High Schools in Nigeria. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-1586705/v1>
6. ICO/IARC Information Centre on HPV and Cancer [Internet] Available at: <https://hvpcentre.net/statistics/reports/XWX.pdf> [Accessed 15 September 2022].
7. Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health. National Cancer Control Plan 2018 – 2022. Available at:
8. Tangcharoensathien V, Tuangratananon T, Vathesatogkit P, Suphanchaimat R, Kanchanachitra C, Mikkelsen B. Noncommunicable diseases: a call for papers. Bull World Health Organ. 2018 Mar 1;96(3):147. doi: 10.2471/BLT.18.208843. PMCID: PMC5840638.
9. ICO/IARC Information Centre on HPV and Cancer [Internet] Nigeria Human Papillomavirus and Related Cancers, Fact Sheet 2021. Available at: [https://hvpcentre.net/statistics/reports/NGA\\_FS.pdf](https://hvpcentre.net/statistics/reports/NGA_FS.pdf) [Accessed 10 September 2022].
10. Ifediora CO. Re-thinking breast and cervical cancer preventive campaigns in developing countries: the case for interventions at high schools. BMC Public Health. 2019 May 3;19(1):503. Doi: 10.1186/s12889-019-6890-2. PMID: 31053073; PMCID: PMC6500011.
11. Friday O, February 9, 2022. NGO begins anti-cancer health campaign. Available at: <https://punchng.com/ngo-begins-anti-cancer-health-campaign/> [Accessed 15 September 2022].



12. Ikpefan F. Bill against breast, cervical cancers teachings scales second reading.  
Available at: <https://thenationonline.ng/bill-against-breast-cervical-cancers-teachings-scales-second-reading> [Accessed 15 September 2022].
13. Abiodun OA, Olu-Abiodun OO, Sotunsa JO, Oluwole FA. Impact of health education intervention on knowledge and perception of cervical cancer and cervical screening uptake among adult women in rural communities in Nigeria. *BMC Public Health*. 2014 Aug 7;14:814. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-14-814. PMID: 25103189; PMCID: PMC4133628.
14. Ampofo AG, Boyes AW, Khumalo PG, Mackenzie L. Improving knowledge, attitudes, and uptake of cervical cancer prevention among female students: A systematic review and meta-analysis of school-based health education. *Gynecol Oncol*. 2022 Mar;164(3):675-690. Doi: 10.1016/j.ygyno.2021.12.021. Epub 2022 Jan 5. PMID: 34998599.
15. Louie KS, de Sanjose S, Diaz M, Castellsagué X, Herrero R, Meijer CJ, Shah K, Franceschi S, Muñoz N, Bosch FX; International Agency for Research on Cancer Multicenter Cervical Cancer Study Group. Early age at first sexual intercourse and early pregnancy are risk factors for cervical cancer in developing countries. *Br J Cancer*. 2009 Apr 7;100(7):1191-7. doi: 10.1038/sj.bjc.6604974. Epub 2009 Mar 10. PMID: 19277042; PMCID: PMC2670004.
16. Yaya S, Bishwajit G. Age at First Sexual Intercourse and Multiple Sexual Partnerships Among Women in Nigeria: A Cross-Sectional Analysis. *Front Med (Lausanne)*. 2018 Jun 8;5:171. doi: 10.3389/fmed.2018.00171. PMID: 29938205; PMCID: PMC6002498.
17. Slap GB, Lot L, Huang B, Daniyam CA, Zink TM, Succop PA. Sexual behaviour of adolescents in Nigeria: cross sectional survey of secondary school students. *BMJ*.

2003 Jan 4;326(7379):15. Doi: 10.1136/bmj.326.7379.15. PMID: 12511453; PMCID: PMC139494.

18. Ifediora CO, Azuike EC. Knowledge and attitudes about cervical cancer and its prevention among female secondary school students in Nigeria. *Trop Med Int Health*. 2018 Jul;23(7):714-723. doi: 10.1111/tmi.13070. Epub 2018 May 29. PMID: 29737004.
19. Nwafor NE, Uchendu EE, Akani CO. Need for adequate funding in the administration of secondary education in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Educational Research*. 2015 Oct 9;14(2):119-24.
20. Omorogbe E, Ewansiha JC. The challenge of effective science teaching in Nigerian secondary schools. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*. 2013 Sep 3;2(7):181-188.
21. Obiagu A. Influence of teacher's characteristics on civic education implementation in Nigeria. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*. 2019 Jun 27;2(2):1-20.