

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Such behavioural change is only possible if people are informed and educated.<sup>1</sup> The AIDS epidemic is having a profound effect on economic and social development.<sup>3</sup> An estimated 1,700 South Africans are infected with HIV every day. At the end 2002 there were probably 5.36 million HIV+ people in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa is worst hit by this pandemic with an estimated 70.25% of the total cases in the world at the end of 2001.<sup>5</sup> HIV / AIDS is and will continue to take a severe human and economic toll.<sup>6-7</sup> On the other hand, even amongst low socio-economic groups it is found that better disease management occurs when individuals are better educated.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.1 Literature review

It seems as if the only method of bringing the HIV pandemic under control is by changing practices that facilitate its spread.<sup>9</sup> Free availability of condoms and training in 'condom negotiation skills' are important elements in curbing the spread of the disease.<sup>10, 11, 12</sup> In spite of having all the knowledge, people do not make the all-important changes to safeguard them against contracting HIV and might even be reluctant to change attitudes and ideas.<sup>10, 13</sup> People usually change when those around them are changing, for example their peers or significant others.<sup>14</sup> Changes in attitudes and practices are usually taking longer than knowledge levels to improve.<sup>15</sup> All efforts should be focussed on implementing means to curb the spread of the pandemic especially increasing levels of knowledge about transmission of the disease.<sup>16</sup>

Such behavioural change is only possible if people are informed and educated in respect of HIV / AIDS. Uganda is a good example of this fact. Uganda had the highest incidence of HIV / AIDS in Africa. An active AIDS awareness campaign with presidential commitment assisted in a complete turnaround making Uganda today the country with the lowest AIDS incidence in Africa.<sup>17</sup> The latest indications are that HIV prevalence among young adults continues to fall in Uganda.<sup>4</sup>

AIDS is a disease that knows no racial or class boundaries. In fact, it is the conduct of individuals that creates a risk for him/her in respect of this disease or protects him/her from it.<sup>18</sup> Inaccurate information and misperceptions regarding the illness cause fear and alienation of people with the disease.<sup>18, 19, 20</sup> Sufficient HIV / AIDS information and training appear to diminish fear and hysteria regarding the disease.<sup>18, 19, 21</sup> Individuals suffering from a disease also tend to have high levels of knowledge about their own disease.<sup>22</sup> With the high HIV positive prevalence rate in Gauteng it is to be expected that any plant located in this province might have a similarly high prevalence rate and therefore high knowledge levels about HIV / AIDS.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the following benefits can be gained by implementing a structured HIV / AIDS policy and HIV / AIDS awareness programme in any company

- improved quality of life for employees with HIV / AIDS;<sup>21</sup>
- increased productivity;<sup>21</sup>
- increased awareness and knowledge of HIV / AIDS;<sup>21</sup> and

- increased awareness and knowledge of the possible impact of the epidemic.<sup>21</sup>

AIDS is in the first place everyone's responsibility in meeting the following responsibilities:

- Making yourself available for training in respect of AIDS.<sup>23</sup>
- Limiting the risk of infection.<sup>18, 19, 24</sup>
- Giving assistance to those who are infected with AIDS.<sup>18, 19, 23</sup>

HIV / AIDS is not a notifiable disease and can only be reflected as a normal illness and / or disability in the Employee Assistance Policy of companies. The Employment Equity Act should be resonated in companies' Employee Assistance Policy to ensure that reasonable accommodation is made for disability.<sup>25</sup> Such a policy that encapsulates HIV / AIDS is intended to assist managers in

- creating a work environment geared to manage the complexities caused by employees infected by HIV / AIDS;<sup>26</sup>
- responding to the concerns of employees who may request management's assistance;<sup>18, 19</sup>
- recognising that a supportive and caring response is an important factor in maintaining the quality of life for an employee who has HIV or AIDS;<sup>18, 19</sup> and
- minimising the spread of the pandemic.<sup>18, 19</sup>

Managers and employees should be sensitive to the special needs of employees and assist them by demonstrating personal support and referring them to counselling services, when necessary.<sup>18, 19</sup>

Employees grouped together as peers have been the subjects of research in many programmes attempting to curb the spread of this pandemic.<sup>27</sup> Sponsoring an education programme for employees has proved to be the most effective method. It appear to be also of utmost importance that managers are informed and able to assist in the management of people living with HIV / AIDS.<sup>18, 19, 28</sup>

Training of peer educators should be undertaken.<sup>27</sup> Employees should be elected and trained to serve as sources of information and support to fellow employees.<sup>11, 27</sup> In many instances the peer educator could also be the representative for a department / section on the central steering committee on HIV / AIDS. They have proved to be an important mechanism to distribute the information (written and otherwise) in any Company.<sup>11, 27</sup> They might also be the catalyst for handling health issues back in their community or place of residence.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, health workers including doctors are generally poor communicators and in our modern era, contrary to what took place historically, health education programmes should not be build solely around them anymore.<sup>29</sup>

Treating other sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) effectively has proved to reduce the infectiousness of the HIV infected person, as well as the vulnerability of the non-infected person having sexual intercourse with an infected individual.<sup>12</sup> Sexually transmitted diseases cause the viral load to rise temporarily, making the person more infectious, whereas STD's also cause breaks in the mucosal membranes making the non-infected person more vulnerable.<sup>24</sup> Since no cure of HIV / AIDS

presently exists, the emphasis is rather on prevention than curative services in the fight against this pandemic.<sup>29, 30,</sup>

AIDS does not present a risk to the health or safety of co-workers or customers.<sup>18, 19</sup>

In the light of current medical and scientific evidence, the company should recognise that AIDS is a life-threatening illness, which is not transmitted through casual personal contact under normal working conditions.<sup>18, 19</sup> Colleagues are expected to continue normal working relationships with employees with HIV or AIDS.<sup>25</sup>

Specially designed posters and pamphlets can enhance employees' awareness of HIV / AIDS.<sup>18</sup> Management and the human resource personnel should be involved in encouraging and motivating employees to attend AIDS awareness sessions.<sup>19</sup> The main focus should be on HIV / AIDS education, which includes the clarification of myths and encouraging employees towards a safer lifestyle.<sup>18, 19</sup> Pamphlets and condoms should be easily available and accessible.<sup>18</sup> The influence of the mass media, positive regarding health promotion as well as negative influences, should never be underestimated.<sup>29, 30</sup> To elaborate further on the earlier remark that HIV / AIDS is everyone's responsibility, it is clear that vested interests of groups such as policymakers, decision makers, pressure groups and consumer groups should be set aside in order to benefit the campaign against this pandemic.<sup>29</sup>

The virus is not passed on through touching or shaking hands, the sharing of offices or utensils or saliva or tears.<sup>18, 19</sup> The touching of objects used by an infected person such as cups, glasses, food, towels, toilet seats, door handles or door knobs

or the use of a swimming pool cannot lead to infection with the HI-virus.<sup>18, 19</sup> It is therefore unacceptable for other employees to refuse to work with an HIV-infected employee. Such refusal will be unreasonable, scientifically unjustified and may place the refusing employee's own employment situation at risk.<sup>25</sup>

The Commission of the Republic of South Africa requires the protection of certain

An employee's health condition is a private and confidential matter.<sup>18</sup> An employee with AIDS or HIV infection is under no obligation to disclose his/her condition to a manager or any other employee.<sup>25</sup> Managers are expected to protect the confidentiality of all information regarding an employee's health condition, including employee's HIV status.<sup>25</sup>

An employee with AIDS or HIV infection is expected to meet the same performance requirements that apply to other employees, with reasonable accommodation where necessary.<sup>25</sup> If an employee becomes unable to perform his/her job satisfactorily, managers should accommodate such employees, to enable them to meet established performance criteria.<sup>25</sup> Reasonable accommodation may include, but is not limited to, flexible or part-time working schedules, leave of absence, work restructuring or reassignment. This will be done within the context of job accommodation and work transitional programmes.<sup>31</sup>

1.2.2. MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The company should gather information regarding AIDS and HIV infection on an ongoing basis. If any significant developments occur, the policy should be modified accordingly.<sup>18, 19</sup> Fair labour practice implies the protection of employees in the workplace against stigmatisation and discrimination by colleagues, unions,

employers or clients.<sup>18, 19, 25, 31</sup> Information and education have proved to be essential to maintain a climate of mutual understanding, necessary to ensure this protection and sensitivity.<sup>18, 19</sup>

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa requires the protection of certain fundamental rights and human dignity.<sup>32</sup> The Employment Equity Act requires the elimination of unfair discrimination.<sup>25</sup> The Labour Relations Act requires the elimination of unfair labour practices and the adherence to a Code of Good Practice.<sup>31</sup> The mentioned legislative imperatives all pertain to the fair treatment of people, regardless of their HIV status, in the workplace.

In terms of the Employment Equity Act, pre-employment testing for AIDS is generally prohibited.<sup>33</sup> It will be deemed an unfair dismissal to dismiss or to not employ an employee, merely because he/she is HIV-positive or has AIDS. If however, the employee's capacity to work is effected by his/her illness, the Incapacity Procedure set out in the Code of Good Practice on Dismissal published in terms of the Labour Relations Act,<sup>31</sup> may be followed. The reason for dismissal is thus capacity to work, not HIV status.

## **1.2 Motivation for the study**

HIV / AIDS poses one of the greatest challenges to business development in Southern Africa and affects people at all levels of economic and social life. The workplace provides an excellent environment to implement a comprehensive HIV /

AIDS programme and is indeed a challenge to the management of organisations to do so. This challenge does not simply rest on a voluntary moral obligation on the part of an employer, but is also guided by the Codes of Good Practice in the Labour Relations and Employment Equity Acts.<sup>19, 25</sup>

## 2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of the study was to evaluate the efficacy of the intervention programme in combating HIV / AIDS in the workplace, using KAP questionnaires to evaluate changes before and after an intervention. A refractory industry, manufacturing heat resistant bricks, was targeted. The specific objectives were to:

- 2.1 Establish the baseline knowledge, attitudes and practices profile of the company's employees.
- 2.2 Ascertain the reliability of the measures.
- 2.3 Rollout the full intervention programme.
- 2.4 Determine the knowledge, attitudes and practices profile of the company's employees after 6 months of the intervention.

The following hypotheses were tested:

- 3.1.1 Knowledge, attitudes and practices are positively related.
- 3.1.2 Women have more knowledge than men.