HIV/AIDS INTERVENTIONS BY CONSTRUCTION FIRMS IN THE WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE SURVEY DATA

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Abstract
HIV/AIDS infection in the workforce is a threat to the South Africa construction industry. A web-based questionnaire survey of construction firms in the Western Cape explored workplace HIV/AIDS interventions. Extending previous quantitative analysis, thematic analysis is used to explore the qualitative verbatim comments offered by survey participants. Five themes are identified: understanding the problem of HIV/AIDS in relation to the firm; interventions by the firm; barriers to interventions; success of interventions; and future intentions. Many firms are still in denial regarding the threat of HIV/AIDS. Interventions focus primarily on awareness and prevention campaigns, with less attention given to treatment programmes. Some firms, notably larger firms, have developed HIV/AIDS policies, and have implemented or outsourced awareness, prevention and treatment programmes as a good business model. Barriers to interventions relate to lack of senior management support, risk of breaches of confidentiality, stigma, and anticipated cost. Success of interventions is uneven, but firms not currently mounting intervention programmes indicate their intentions to do so in future. A cascading and unified national, industry-level and organisational strategy is needed. Firms successfully managing their HIV/AIDS response should share their experience with those firms struggling to respond or which are not yet doing so at all.

Keywords
HIV/AIDS, workplace interventions, thematic analysis, construction industry, South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The construction industry is one of the most adversely affected economic sectors in South Africa in terms of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Department of Public Works (DPW), 2004), but has also been identified as the least responsive (Bureau for Economic Research / South African Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS (BER/SABCOHA), 2004). The industry's vulnerability to the pandemic, and the reasons for its slow response, are documented by Meintjes et al. (2007) who point to the fragmented nature of the industry, an emphasis on cost and production, the predominance of small construction firms, and ambivalent political leadership as major stumbling blocks.

The South African government cannot combat the pandemic alone, and calls have been made for greater involvement by the private sector (Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 2007). In other words, the construction industry cannot rely wholly on