



Knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practices related to HIV/AIDS among employees in the legal services industry in South Africa

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Abstract

- **Background:** The main aim of the present study was to describe the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practices related to HIV/AIDS among employees in the legal services industry in three provinces in South Africa.
Methods: A second-generation surveillance approach was used. Fieldworkers approached participants at selected companies and asked them permission to complete a questionnaire and to provide a dry blood spots (DBS) specimen for HIV testing. A total of 421 participants (lawyers, legal secretaries, and clerks) agreed to be interviewed in the survey.
Results: The levels of knowledge and attitudes held by the participants were very high. Over a tenth of the participants (13.2%) had two or more sexual partners (18.3% for males and 3.9% for females), and the large majority (86.2%) had only one regular sexual partner each. More male participants (7.8%) as compared to females (0.8%) indicated that they had sex with people who were 10 years younger than themselves. Condom use was more consistent in non-regular relationships as compared to regular relationships. The majority of respondents (88.6%) reported consistent (every time) condom use with non-regular partners and over half (52%) reported consistent condom use with a regular partner. Only a third (37.5%) of respondents who had one sexual partner used a condom at last sex, as compared to over two-thirds (67.9%) having two sexual partners, while 61.1% of those having three or more sexual partners reported condom use at last sex. The majority of the participants also exhibited positive attitudes towards people living with HIV/AIDS. While the level of awareness of VCT services was also found to be high (84.5%), the large majority of the participants (71.1%) reported that they had been tested for HIV in the past.
Conclusions: There is a need to promote safer sex practices especially reducing the number of sexual partners among males in the sector.

BACKGROUND

- Apart from basic demographic characteristics such as age, gender, race and occupational classification as being important determinants of HIV infection, there are also several socio-cultural and behavioural factors that are believed to be driving the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa.

OBJECTIVE

- The main aim of the present study was to describe the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practices related to HIV/AIDS among employees in the legal services industry in three provinces in South Africa.

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METHOD

- A second-generation surveillance approach was used.
- Fieldworkers approached participants at selected companies and asked them permission to complete a questionnaire and to provide a dry blood spots (DBS) specimen for HIV testing.
- A total of 421 participants (lawyers, legal secretaries, and clerks) agreed to be interviewed in the survey.

RESULTS

Knowledge of HIV/AIDS

- Table 1 shows that respondents in this study were generally very knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS.
- However, they too held many of the same myths or misconceptions: Patients with TB also have HIV; A person can get HIV by sharing a cigarette; and Coughing and sneezing spreads HIV

Table 1: Knowledge of HIV/AIDS among respondents from legal services firms (n = 421)

Variable/ Sex	True %	False %	Don't know %
Having sex with a virgin can cure AIDS			
Males	0.8	97.7	1.6
Females	1.4	95.5	3.1
Having sex with more than one partner can increase a person's chance of being infected with HIV			
Males	99.2	0.8	0
Females	97.3	1.7	1.0
A person can be infected with HIV and still look healthy			
Males	96.1	1.6	2.3
Females	92.4	4.1	3.4
Patients with TB also have HIV			
Males	4.7	83.5	11.8
Females	12.7	72.2	15.1
Once one has started taking antiretroviral treatment for HIV/AIDS one has to take it forever			
Males	78.9	2.3	18.8
Females	70.4	4.1	25.4

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Variable/ Sex	TRUE %	FALSE %	Don't know %
There is a cure for AIDS			
Males	2.3	91.4	6.3
Females	8.6	84.9	6.5
AIDS is caused by witchcraft			
Males	1.6	95.2	3.2
Females	3.8	93.5	2.7
HIV infection is prevented by using condoms			
Males	96.9	2.4	0.8
Females	89	7.6	3.4
A person can get HIV by using a cup or plate that has been used by a person with HIV/AIDS			
Males	2.3	95.3	2.3
Females	3.1	95.2	1.7
Sharing a cigarette			
Males	7	79.7	13.3
Females	9.3	75.9	14.8

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Variable/ Sex	TRUE %	FALSE %	Don't know %
Sitting on the same toilet seat			
Males	3.9	93.8	2.3
Females	4.8	89	6.2
Unprotected anal sex			
Males	89.8	6.3	3.9
Females	92.8	1	6.2
Contact with infected blood			
Males	98.4	1.6	0
Females	97.9	1.7	0.3
Touching someone ho has AIDS			
Males	1.6	97.7	0.7
Females	1	97.9	1.1
Coughing and sneezing spreads HIV			
Males	4.7	85.9	9.4
Females	3.8	86.5	9.7

Attitudes towards HIV/AIDS

- Table 2 shows that the overwhelming majority of respondents generally held very positive towards HIV/AIDS-related issues including PLWHA.
- The only negative or ambivalent attitudes found were that a large proportion of respondents (61%) were either unsure or said that they would want to keep the HIV positive status of a family member a secret and one half of respondents (50%) were either unsure or said that they would not have a problem with having protected sex with a partner who has HIV/AIDS.

Table 2: Responses to individual attitudinal statements about HIV/AIDS by respondents (n = 421)

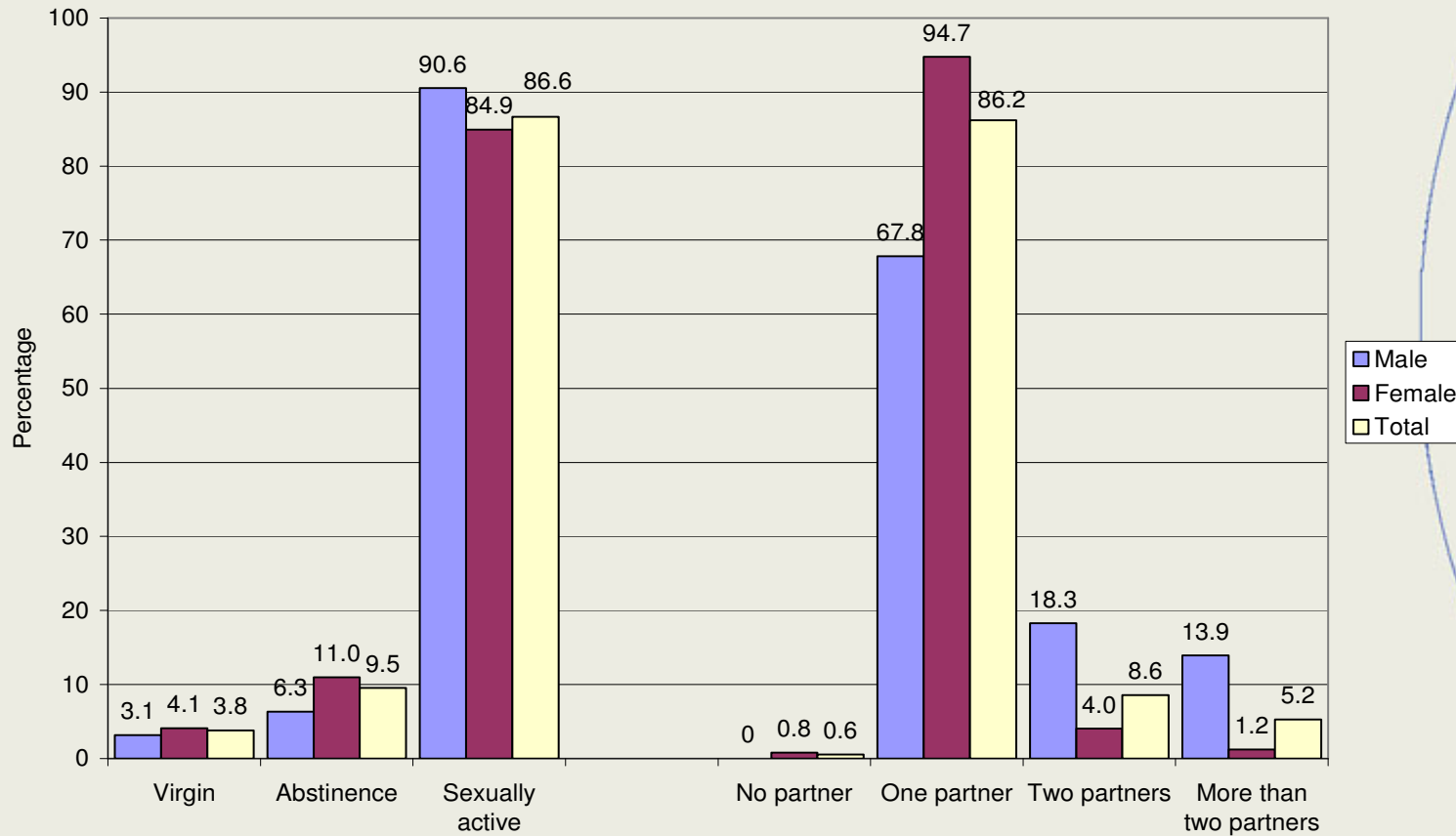
Attitudinal statement	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
If I knew that a shopkeeper or food seller had HIV, I would still buy food from them	74.5	13.6	11.9
I would be willing to care for a family member with AIDS	96.7	0.5	2.9
I would not have a problem having protected sex with a partner who has HIV/AIDS	50.2	36.1	13.6
It is a waste of money to train or give a promotion to someone with HIV/AIDS	4.1	92.1	3.8
I would want to keep the HIV positive status of a family member a secret	40.7	44.5	14.8
HIV positive children should be kept separate from other children as they might infect each other unintentionally	10.5	78.8	10.7
A person would be foolish to marry a person who is living with HIV/AIDS	16.6	68.5	14.9

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Sexual activity and the number of sexual partners

- Figure 1 shows the large majority of respondents (86.6%) reported being sexually active as expected of normal adults,
- About one tenth of the respondents (9.5%) were sexually abstinent during the previous year and 3.8% of the respondents indicated that they were virgins.
- The right panel of the figure shows that the large majority of the respondents (86.2%) reported that they had one sexual partner especially nearly all of the females (94.7%) while only two thirds of males (67.8%) did so.
- The study also found that a much higher percentage of males reported that they had two partners (18.3%) or more than two partners (13.9%) compared to their female counterparts (4.0% and 1.2% respectively).

Figure 1: Sexual activity and number of partnerships in the past 12 months by sex



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Intergenerational sex (age mixing)

- The overwhelming majority of respondents (93%) had partners who were within 10 years of their age.
- When the remainder were analysed by sex of respondent, it was found that nearly one tenth of males (8%) had a partner who was 10 years younger than themselves.
- The situation was opposite among females whereby 6% reported that they had a partner who was 10 years older than themselves.
- More interesting however was the finding that no male respondents had a sexual partner who was 10 years older than himself while only 0.8% of the females had a partner 10 years or more younger than themselves.

Consistent condom use

- It was found that condom use was more consistent in non-regular relationships as compared to regular relationships.
- In casual or non-regular sexual relationships in the past 12 months, the majority of respondents (88.6%) reported consistent (every time) condom use with non-regular partners and slightly over half (52%) reported consistent condom use with a regular partner.
- Condom use at last sex act varied according to the number of sexual partners.
- Only, a third (37.5%) of respondents who had one sexual partner used a condom at last sex, as compared to over two-thirds (67.9%) having two sexual partners, while 61.1% of those having three or more sexual partners reported condom use at last sex.

Awareness of where to obtain VCT services

- Table 4 shows that the majority of respondents (84.4%) knew where to obtain voluntary and HIV testing (VCT) services.
- Furthermore, Africans (92.3%) and Coloureds (80%) had higher awareness of where to obtain VCT services than Whites (70.8%) and Indians/Asians (63.3%).

Table 4: Awareness of where to obtain VCT services among respondents from the legal services firms

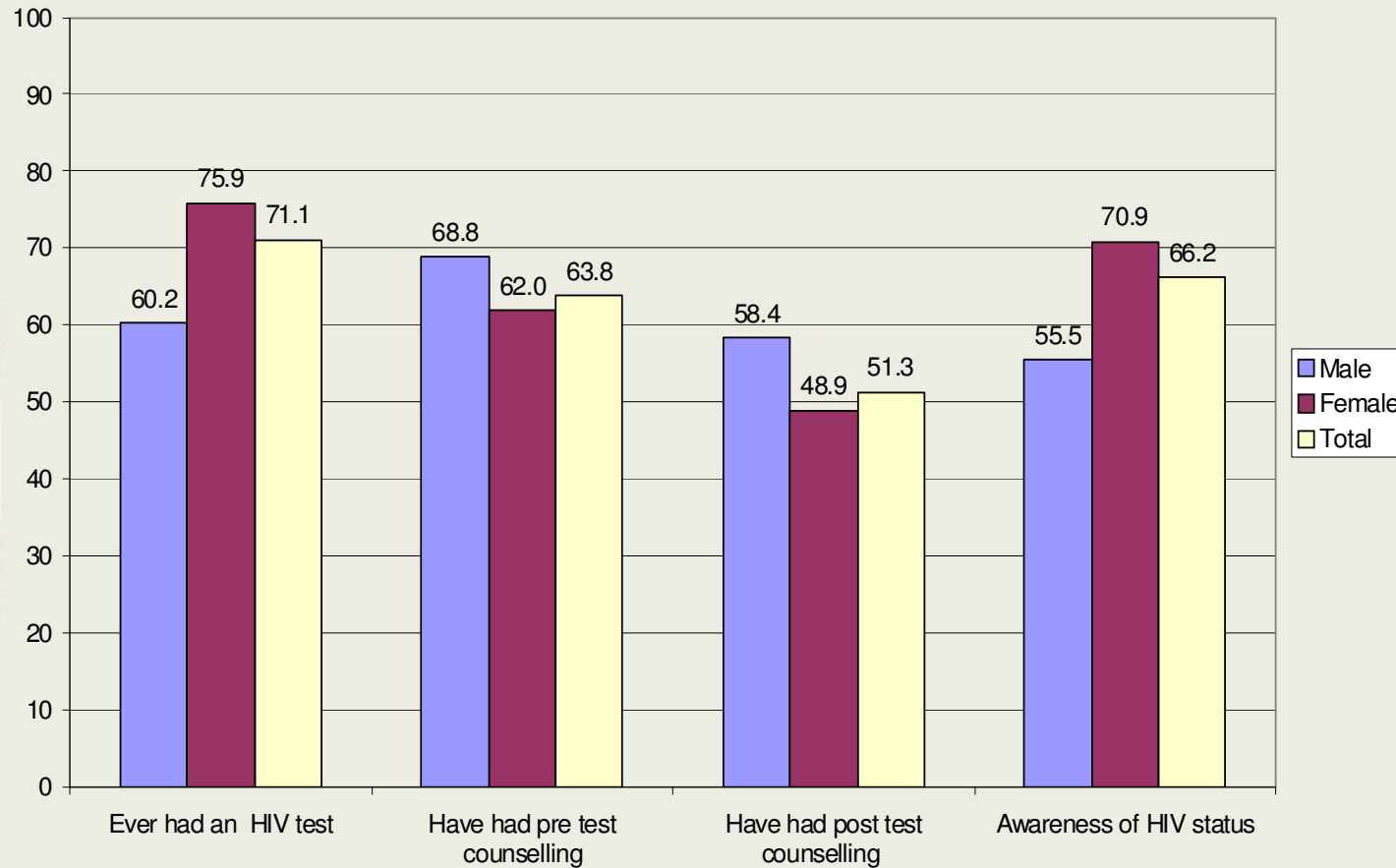
Variable	n	%
Total	416	84.4
Sex	127	86.6
Male	289	83.4
Female		
Age group		
24 and less	47	83.0
25-49	327	84.4
50 and more	42	85.7
Province		
Western Cape	57	70.2
KwaZulu Natal	71	81.7
Gauteng	288	87.8
Race		
African	260	92.3
White	96	70.8
Coloured	30	80.0
Indian or Asian	30	63.3

HIV test history and awareness of HIV status

- Figure 2 shows that 71.1% of the respondents had been tested with more females than males having done so; and two thirds of them (66%; i.e., about 5% fewer of those tested; and this is also true for both sexes) had been informed of the results of the tests and were thus aware of their status.

Awareness of HIV Status among respondents from the legal services firms

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CONCLUSIONS

- **More basic HIV/AIDS health education is required to reinforce basic ABC strategies of HIV/AIDS prevention and to dispel the few myths or misconceptions found such as the clarifying the relationship between TB and HIV, and the lack of a link between smoking or coughing and sneezing in HIV transmission**
- **The findings suggest the need to further promote reduction of sexual partners and consistent condom use as strategies to reduce risks of HIV infection especially among men**
- **Positive attitudes towards PLWHA were found except disclosure of status of a family member**
- **Possible intervention point: stigma reduction to promote disclosure**
- **The level of HIV testing and awareness of HIV status at about 71% and 66.2% respectively found among respondents in this study were relatively higher than the levels found in the general population at about 30%**

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