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Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS and Health (SAHA)

Research to inform HIV/AIDS prevention, care and impact mitigation

The mission of SAHA is to conduct research to inform HIV/AIDS prevention, care and impact mitigation. It remains one of the largest research programmes in the HSRC, with close to 50 full-time equivalent staff members in Pretoria and Cape Town.

SAHA's contribution to capacity building is significant, with almost one third of the total number of research trainees in the HSRC. The programme has also exceeded its publications target, achieving 2,23 publications per senior researcher.

The programme strives to undertake cutting-edge, scientifically sound and innovative research.

It has two primary goals: first, to conduct research that is policy relevant and responds to current challenges facing South Africa; and second, to conduct assessment, monitoring and evaluation of programmes that aim to improve the lives of South Africans.

The main research themes are highlighted in the box below:

Priority research area	Thematic thrusts
<p>Behavioural and social aspects of HIV/AIDS aims to understand the key socio-cultural, political, economic and demographic determinants of vulnerability to HIV infection, risky behaviour, and factors that influence care and mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory-based and reduction of gender-based violence behavioural risk reduction interventions for the prevention of HIV transmission • HIV/AIDS impact assessment in the private security and legal services industry • Comparative research on orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) • Understanding stigma and discrimination • Positive prevention
<p>Epidemiology, strategic and health policy focuses on applied epidemiological, policy and strategic research that addresses the needs and challenges of the country and beyond</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparing oral fluid to dried blood spots for HIV testing among children • HIV/AIDS programme impact assessment and contribution to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals • Estimates and measurement of HIV incidence in SA • Technical support in Eastern Cape on prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV • Medical transmission (infection control practices) in health facility settings • HIV national household surveys • Monitoring and evaluation
<p>Health system research focuses on evaluation of national health policy interventions, access to health services and indigenous health practices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controlled study of HIV/AIDS/STI/TB intervention with traditional healers • Global ageing and adult health • Social exclusion and its contribution to health inequalities • Evaluation of primary healthcare models • Evaluation of the impact of disability grants • Evaluation of Soul City/De Beers HIV training partnerships in five diamond mining towns

Completed projects

The following major research projects were completed during the year under review:

Strategy for the care of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC)

In 2002, the WK Kellogg Foundation awarded to the HSRC a five-year grant worth US\$5 million. The aim of the project was to develop evidence-based models of successful practice that would help strengthen the capacities of households and communities to respond to the challenge of the growing number of OVC in the SADC region. In each of the three countries that participated in the project (Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe) two sites were identified. Both qualitative and quantitative survey studies were conducted to determine baseline information, using the same generic tools in all three countries. This project was a good case study of 17 communities of practice, with numerous beneficiaries, establishing a direct link between research and implementation.

Alcohol screening and brief intervention in the Limpopo Province.

The aim of the study was to provide health professionals at primary healthcare level with a simple tool to identify people at risk of alcohol consumption and to apply a brief intervention to reduce the risk. The intervention was integrated into primary care facilities in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. Consequently, screening of alcohol problems and the intervention has been approved by the national Department of Health as an important strategy to reduce risky drinking and prevent alcoholism.

Evaluation of the EU/DoH Health Partnership programme

The overall purpose of this study, commissioned by the national Department of Health, was to conduct baseline and feasibility studies to ensure more accessible, affordable, and quality primary healthcare (including HIV/AIDS) for the poorest communities in five target provinces; namely Gauteng, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern and Western Cape. It also highlighted lessons and made recommendations for ongoing and future primary healthcare programmes. SAHA conducted an interim evaluation of this programme and has developed a conceptual and operational monitoring and evaluation framework to support PHC programmes in these provinces.

Evaluation of national drug policy impact

This study investigated the impact of South Africa's national drug policy on pharmaceuticals in

South Africa ten years after implementation, with emphasis on the Western Cape and Limpopo provinces. The findings point to a tendency to over-prescribe antibiotics: 68,1% of the drugs prescribed on the day of visit to public hospitals were antibiotics compared to 31,9% at private surgeries. The WHO considers usage figures exceeding 30% as unacceptably high. The study was widely reported as shown by the media excerpt below.

Viability of the Marriages and Divorces series

The purpose of the study commissioned by Statistics South Africa was to assess the viability of this series of the Division of Health and Vital Statistics of Statistics South Africa. Some of the key recommendations are highlighted in the figure below:

- Continuation of the series, but improving the quality and usefulness of the series
- Dedicated mailbox for incoming divorce forms
- A database package that allows data entry programmes to be written to perform consistency checks
- The publication of the series should remain in the Division of Health and Vital Statistics.

Substance-abuse trends in South Africa

A review, commissioned by the national Department of Social Development, synthesised available epidemiological data on substance use and treatment admissions in South Africa since 1994. Tobacco use was found to be on the decline in South Africa, but alcohol-drinking patterns seemed to have stayed similar over time. Harmful drinking in pregnant women was 2,5% nationally, higher in urban areas (4,1%), among coloureds (11,6%) and in the Northern Cape Province (24,9%).

Facts 'n Figures

More than 68% of drugs prescribed at public hospitals in two provinces on the day of visit were antibiotics, compared to nearly 40% at private surgeries

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Trends show an increase in substance abuse treatment admissions, and increased use of cannabis, heroin, cocaine, crack and methamphetamine.

Although the prevalence of illicit drug use in South Africa is relatively low compared to the USA and Australia, policies need to be designed to reduce the levels of sub-populations at higher risk.

Good HIV/AIDS practices in the education sector in Commonwealth Africa

Key findings from a review of education-sector responses to HIV/AIDS in Commonwealth Africa, 2006

- Pockets of excellence were found in all countries but not wide-scale implementation.
- Most countries have education-sector policies and strategic plans on HIV and AIDS but implementation is generally weak.
- Inadequate attention given to:
 - interventions targeting teachers and parents
 - pre-school and higher education sectors
 - out-of-school youth
 - monitoring and evaluation
 - programmes for orphans and vulnerable children tending to focus on feeding programmes and neglect other important needs.

Illicit drug use in South Africa is relatively low compared to the USA and Australia

Prevention of mother to child transmission, Eastern Cape

The study has shown that the socio-economic context presents a formidable barrier to the provision of PMTCT services, and that poor roads, an under-developed transport system and poor telecommunications are significant obstacles to access, even with available free healthcare services. This is exacerbated by

understaffed and under-developed healthcare facilities. Several supportive interventions have been introduced as part of the study, which include ready made Nevirapine packs, traditional birth attendant evaluation, staff training and supportive activities and some infrastructural interventions.

Daily diary study to examine behaviour of HIV-positive people

One of the main objectives of the study was to examine the relationship between consuming alcohol prior to sex, and subsequent unprotected sex among a sample of 82 HIV-positive people in Cape Town. The participants were

recruited from HIV clinics and support groups. Participants were asked to keep a daily diary and were interviewed daily for 6 – 12 minutes. It was found that over half (58%) of unprotected sex acts were with partners either perceived to be HIV-negative or whose HIV-serostatus was unknown. The study found a positive correlation between unprotected sex and greater volume and frequency of alcohol consumption.

A follow-up study will develop a sexual risk-reduction intervention to address alcohol use in the context of sexual behaviour. The intervention is aimed to assist HIV-positive individuals to reduce their sexual risk behaviour.

Impact of completed research

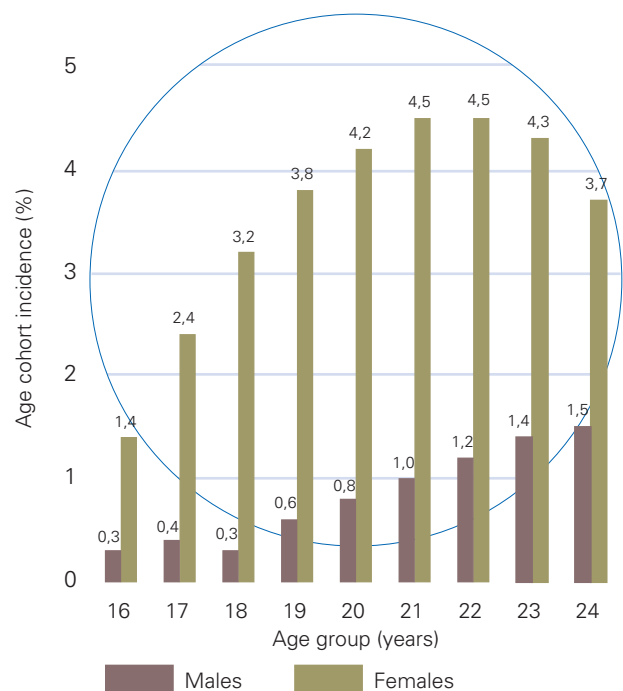
The most significant impact has been in the development of South Africa's new National Strategic Plan on HIV, AIDS and STIs, 2007 – 2011. SAHA staff contributed extensively in sectoral workshops and consultative meetings, and its research features prominently in the Plan.

The results of the 2005 South African national household survey on HIV prevalence, incidence, behaviour and communication were quoted in the 2006 International AIDS Conference in Toronto, and the advice of SAHA researchers is sought in all major national events.

International AIDS Conference 2006, Toronto

SAHA staff presented a cumulative total of eight posters and one oral presentation at the Toronto conference, and also presented and participated in the SAHARA satellite session.

HIV incidence estimates by single year of age in 15-24 year old age cohorts



HIV incidence measures provide new insights

A paper published in the *South African Medical Journal*, entitled *The national HIV incidence measures – new insights into the South African epidemic*, has been the subject of much attention from the media and has generated considerable positive publicity for the HSRC. *New insights into the SA epidemic provided by SAHA researchers. Source Rehle et al, SAMJ, 2007*

Ongoing projects and future developments Enhancing the monitoring and evaluation of HIV/AIDS

SAHA has a multitude of ongoing projects. A new five-year multi-million project, entitled Programme to improve the capacity of an indigenous statutory institution to enhance monitoring and evaluation of HIV/AIDS in the Republic of South Africa, covers strategic information, PMTCT, medical transmission and positive prevention. The overall goal of the project is to develop capacity to generate objective, verifiable and replicable HIV and AIDS-related data to support South Africa's efforts in the prevention, treatment and care of the epidemic.

Assessment of the impact of prevention and care programmes

SAHA is participating in a project that assesses the impact of HIV/AIDS prevention and care programmes funded by the Department of Science and Technology. This project is part of the overall impact assessment programme of the HSRC to measure SA's progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

Global ageing and adult health study

A large longitudinal study on global ageing and adult health (SAGE) in South Africa forms part of a WHO multi-country survey study programme. The goals of SAGE are to promote a better understanding of the effects of ageing on wellbeing, to examine the health status of individuals 50 years and older and the changes, trends and patterns that occur over time. It

also aims to improve the capacity of researchers to analyse the effects of social, economic, healthcare and policy changes on current and future health. The pilot project, which forms the basis of the main study, has been completed and fieldwork for the main study has commenced.

Social exclusion

A project on social exclusion, conducted under the auspices of the Social-Exclusion Knowledge Network (SEKN), forms part of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health of the WHO. The coordinating hub is at Lancaster University, with sub-regional hubs in Europe, South America, South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). SEKN focuses on the relational processes that contribute to exclude particular groups of people in different contexts from engaging fully in community/social life and the impact of these processes on health inequalities. SAHA is coordinating the sub-Saharan African hub. The project consists of a South African case study and an appraisal of selected social inclusion policies in sub-Saharan Africa. The project is nearing completion, and SAHA will host the final meeting of the SEKN in June 2007.

The impact of disability grants

Fieldwork for a study which aims to measure the impact of disability grants on people living with HIV/AIDS in the Eastern Cape has commenced.

Soul City/De Beers community HIV/AIDS training partnership

The main purpose of the evaluation is to conduct a qualitative assessment of the process and impact of the training programme in the five mining areas of Finch and Namaqualand in the Northern Cape, Venetia and The Oaks in Limpopo, and Cullinan in Gauteng. The evaluation is intended to inform future programmes and/or activities. Fieldwork for the evaluation commenced in Cullinan, Gauteng.

Multi-million rand project to improve capacity for monitoring and evaluation in the RSA

Name	Where?	What?
Positive prevention	Mthatha area of the Eastern Cape	A support-group-based intervention designed to reduce HIV transmission risks for PLWHA and their partners
Medical transmission	Western Cape and parts of Northern Cape	Assess potential for nosocomial transmission of HIV among patients and staff in public health sector facilities; conduct training of healthcare workers in infection control and assess the impact of training
Prevention of mother to child transmission programme	Kouga area of the Eastern Cape	Programme strengthening, including technical and monitoring and evaluation support
Strategic information	National focus	HIV testing among children study in Gauteng and the Western Cape Developing a master sample Third national HIV household survey

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Alcohol use and HIV risk reduction

The purpose of a project on alcohol use and HIV risk reduction is to design and field-test a theory-based, risk-reduction intervention for men and women who use alcohol and are at risk for HIV infection in Cape Town, South Africa. Depending on the outcome, it is envisaged that the project will be rolled out to other provinces. It involves developing and piloting a 60-minute theory-based risk-reduction intervention for individuals – first introduced at the Spencer Road STI Clinic in Cape Town during 2006 – and then at a single, three-hour, group-based intervention in Delft township, also in Cape Town.

Assessment of HIV/AIDS in the private security and legal services

A project of the Safety and Security Sector Education and Training Authority (SASSETA), it aims to conduct a critical assessment of HIV/AIDS in the private security and legal services industries. This includes measuring the HIV prevalence rate, the impact of the epidemic on businesses and business response. The project was launched successfully in five provinces and fieldwork has been completed. Results will be available in the next financial year.

Phaphama 2

This five-year project is a follow-up study to Phaphama 1, and is funded by the USA's National Institute of Mental Health through the University of Connecticut. It is a theory-based HIV risk-reduction intervention, implemented with STI service users in three primary healthcare clinics, in Cape Town, Ekurhuleni, and Queenstown.

Building of research capacity on stigma

A five-year project on capacity building for research on HIV stigma, funded by the USA's National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) through Penn State University, aims to strengthen infrastructure and capacity building at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the University of Limpopo. The purpose is to develop and sustain cultural and gender-based interventions for the elimination of stigma associated with HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support.

Gender-based violence and HIV in men

This four-year project on gender violence and HIV risk reduction targeting South African men, funded by NIMH through the University of Connecticut, aims to design and field test a gender- and theory-based risk reduction intervention for the prevention of HIV transmission and sexual violence against women in Cape Town, South Africa. The study will yield important new information on intervention models for reducing HIV risks in South Africa, particularly among men, who are a difficult group to reach.



Specialist researchers 2006/07

Dr Gail Andrews

PhD, University of the Western Cape
HIV/AIDS related research



Dr Victoria Pillay

PhD, University of Cape Town
Sodium and potassium disturbances in
childhood diarrhoea



Dr Pelisa Dana

PhD, University of KwaZulu-Natal
HIV/AIDS intervention research



Professor Thomas Rehle

MD, University of Munich
PhD, University of Antwerp
Infectious disease epidemiology, tropical
medicine, HIV/AIDS intervention research,
survey design and analysis, programme evaluation and
impact assessment (including modelling)



Mr Sean Jooste

MA, University of the Western Cape
Research design and methodology, design
of research instruments



Professor Geoffrey Setswe

DrPH, University of Limpopo
Systematic reviews, behavioural
interventions for reducing HIV risk,
monitoring and evaluation of HIV/AIDS and
public health interventions



Ms Ntombizodwa Mbelle

MA ELT, Thames Valley University,
MPH, Medical University of South Africa
Project & finance management, project
planning, tracking and reporting, evaluations



Professor Leickness Simbayi

DPhil, University of Sussex
Biological aspects of psychology, applied
health psychology, HIV/AIDS and traditional
healing



Dr Carol Metcalf

MBChB, University of Cape Town
MPH, University of Washington, Seattle,
USA



Dr Donald Skinner

DPhil, University of Cape Town
Social aspects of HIV/AIDS, social and
clinical psychology, qualitative research,
intervention research



Professor Karl Peltzer

PhD, University of Hannover
Dr Habil, University of Klagenfurt
Social aspects of public health, health
behaviour, behavioural health, psychology
applied to health, culture and health



Dr Cily Tabane

PhD, University of Pretoria
HIV and AIDS and cultural practices,
clinical social work applied to health, HIV
voluntary counselling and testing



Professor Nancy Phaswana-Mafuya

PhD, University of the North
Social aspects of public health, HIV/AIDS,
injury prevention, substance use and misuse,
social work applied to health



Dr Khangelani Zuma

PhD (Statistics), University of Waikato, NZ
Statistics, survival analysis, Bayesian
simulation methods and modelling
infectious diseases, HIV/AIDS

