

Article title: The implications of HIV/AIDS on employee wellness in the tourism industry.

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Abstract

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) are two of the most serious health issues that organizations confront in terms of employee wellness. Considering of the mobility of tourism workforce and the nature of the industry. HIV/AIDS are expected to have a considerable impact on tourism workplaces. As a result, providing HIV and AIDS treatment and assistance in the workplace is critical for keeping employees healthy and productive. The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of HIV/AIDS on the wellness of employees within the tourism industry. The study further aims to ascertain the importance of managing HIV/AIDS in the workplace to maintain a healthy workforce, provide a pleasant visitor experience, sustain economic growth, assist local communities, and comply with global health goals. The research study adopted a completely qualitative method, with in-depth interviews (IDIs) used to collect primary data. A total of 18 IDIs were successfully completed among tourism employees in Buffalo City and Nelson Mandela Bay in the Eastern Cape Province. The data was analyzed using NVivo version 11 software, and it was discovered that HIV/AIDS had an impact on an employee's mental and emotional wellness as well as their physical health. Many employees felt they couldn't divulge their status because of workplace stigma and discrimination. As a result, it is critical for companies to understand how to support and care for their employees' wellness. The aim of this research is to encourage the development of wellness initiatives as the best available choice for the control and prevention of non-communicable illnesses. Employers will benefit from the initiative's assistance in managing workers' wellness, especially that of those afflicted with HIV/AIDS. In order to assist businesses better manage employee wellness, which is associated with business performance, the research aimed to increase knowledge about HIV/AIDS in the tourism industry.

Key words: HIV, AIDS, wellness, employee, hospitality, South Africa

Introduction

Organizations face a monumental task of historic dimensions, say Carnevale and Hatak (2020), one that compels them to enter and actively manage new areas as they transform their workforce in technological, physical, and socio-psychological ways. One of the issues that might impact the operations and performance of the company is employee wellness in the workplace. Employee wellness is a continuous process driven by a variety of interconnected factors, such as how the company interacts with its workers and other stakeholders (Kim & Jung, 2022). Employee wellness is critical to organizational success, according to Adams (2019), who discovered that a poor sense of wellness impacts employees physically and emotionally, resulting in greater health-care costs and worse worker productivity. Employee wellness influences attitudes and actions and as a result, it is critical for employers to understand how their initiatives affect employee wellness. One of the biggest health challenges faced by employers in terms of employee wellness is the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS [UNAIDS] (2022), the HIV virus, which causes AIDS, has grown to be one of the most serious health and development issues in the globe since the first cases of the disease were noted in 1981. Global Health Policy (2022) estimates that 84 million people have contracted HIV since the pandemic's start. There are now 38 million people living with HIV, and tens of millions more people have died from AIDS-related illnesses since the AIDS pandemic began. Currently, there is no recognized therapy or preventive for HIV, and many individuals who have the illness or are at risk of getting it do not have access to care (UNAIDS, 2022). Since HIV affects people throughout their prime working years of life, it has a substantial influence on society, economies, and the tourism industry. Due to the mobility of the workforce, the existence of sex tourists, and the dangers in hotel business, the tourism industry is particularly vulnerable to the epidemic. HIV/AIDS have a significant impact on businesses and that this impact might expand quickly as the epidemic spreads (World Health Organization, 2023). Therefore, it is essential for workplaces within tourism industry to manage their employee's wellness. When employees are both physically and mentally healthy, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated and productive in their work.

The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of HIV/AIDS on the wellness of employees within the tourism industry. The two specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To determine the impact of HIV/AIDS on the well-being of workers
- To ascertain the importance of managing HIV/AIDS in the tourism industry to maintain a healthy workforce,

Literature Review

Tourism and HIV/AIDS: The Interrelationship

The tourism industry is likely to be significantly affected by HIV/AIDS owing to the mobility of the workforce, the nature of the industry, the presence of 'sex tourists' and the heavy reliance of many countries on tourism revenues. In many countries, tourism is one of the greatest and fastest-growing industry, bringing in much-needed income, tax money, and foreign currency. However, others have hypothesized that the tourism AIDS phobia may deter travellers from going to specific nations. Others have even advocated against encouraging tourism, claiming that the industry worsens the spread of HIV/AIDS. According to the South African government (2022), tourism is a significant economic sector in South Africa. The industry promotes economic growth, creates jobs, and pushes exports. The industry, which includes a variety of sectors, seeks to serve and assist domestic, foreign, business, and leisure tourists. Big and small businesses in areas ranging from lodging and transportation to food and beverage, retail and culture, and sports and recreation all try to develop products and services that bring people together, support communities, and acclaim the beauties that our planet has to offer (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2022). The industry accounted for 10.4% of worldwide GDP and 319 million jobs, or 10% of overall employment in 2018. The tourism industry further contributes 3,7% to South Africa's GDP, more than agriculture, utilities and construction (South African Government, 2022). The high degree of employment mobility found in the tourism industry makes workers more susceptible to contracting HIV/AIDS. In terms of tourism and HIV/AIDS, a vicious cycle frequently arises.

Lu, Holmes, Noone and Flaherty (2020) claim that tourism is one of the greatest and fastest growing industries in many countries generating much-needed employment, income, tax revenue, and foreign currency. Some argue that tourists' fear of AIDS may deter them from visiting specific nations. Others have even urged that tourism be avoided, noting that it contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS. According to Goliath and Vallabh (2018), people that work in the tourism industry, such as hotel staff, performers, and waiters and waitresses, frequently come into touch with both visitors and members of the local community. Thus, it is likely that the impact of HIV/AIDS on these workers and their families would be disproportionate. As they must spend a great deal of time away from home while working in the business, migrant tourist employees may particularly struggle with this (WHO, 2023).

Implications of HIV/AIDS on Employee Wellness

According to Borowiec and Drygas (2022), employee wellness includes both physical and emotional (mental) health. Employee anxiety, weariness, sadness, self-esteem, and anxiety are all examples of mental aspects. Physical symptoms include headaches, light-headedness, muscular soreness, gastrointestinal difficulties, and musculoskeletal ailments. Employee wellness is vital to organizational performance; according to studies, such as that of Adams (2019), a low feeling of wellness affects employees physically and mentally, leading to higher health-care expenses and reduced worker efficiency. Employee wellness influences attitudes and actions; as a result, it is critical for employers to understand how their initiatives affect employee wellness. One of the biggest health challenges faced by employers in terms of employee wellness is HIV/AIDS. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] (2023), HIV is a virus that affects the cells in the body that help the body fight infection, rendering the individual more vulnerable to other infections and diseases. Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) can develop if HIV is not treated. AIDS is a late stage of HIV infection that occurs when the virus severely weakens the body's immune system (WHO, 2023). According to the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research [MFMER] (2023), HIV transmission refers to the transfer of HIV from one individual to another. However, HIV is only communicated by certain bodily fluids from an infected individual. Blood, sperm, pre-seminal fluid, vaginal fluids, rectal fluids, and breast milk are examples of such bodily fluids.

Impact on Physical Health

According to the National Institute of Health (2021), many people may not notice any symptoms when they are first infected with HIV. It might take as little as a few weeks for flu-like symptoms to manifest, it could take more than 10 years, or it could take any time in between. Early HIV infection symptoms include flu-like symptoms such as headaches, muscular pains, swollen glands, a sore throat, fevers, chills, and sweating, as well as a rash or mouth ulcers. Swollen glands, a lack of energy, a loss of appetite, weight loss, chronic or recurring diarrhea, frequent yeast infections, short-term memory loss, and blotchy sores on the skin, inside the mouth, eyes, nose, or genital area are all signs of late-stage HIV or AIDS (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). According to the WHO (2023), there is currently no cure for HIV; however, it can be treated with the right medical care. Antiretroviral therapy, or ART, is a type of HIV treatment. Individuals with HIV who use ART as directed can have their viral load (the quantity of HIV in their blood) reduced to undetectable levels. If it remains undetectable, they can enjoy long, robust lives with virtually no danger of HIV transmission (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023).

Impact on Mental Health

The most enduring and common of these difficulties is mental illness. because of ill health, financial strain, and HIV-related stigma. Remien, Stirratt, Nguyen, Robbins, Pala and Mellins, (2020) claims that people living with HIV (PLWH) has greater incidence of mental health issues than the general population, particularly depression. As opposed to the general population, individuals with significant mental illness (SMI; such as psychotic disorder, bipolar disorder, recurrent major depressive disorder, comorbid mood, and drug use disorder) have an HIV prevalence rate that ranges from 2 to 6%. The prevalence of HIV among persons with SMI in Africa, where the HIV burden is considerably higher, ranging from 11 to 27% (Remien, Stirratt, Nguyen, Robbins, Pala, and Mellins, 2020). According to these figures, SMI in HIV-positive individuals is greater than it is in the general population.

Social and Economic Impact

Turan, Budhwani, Fazeli, Browning, Raper, Mugavero and Turan (2017) indicate that a large amount of data points to societal stigma as a major obstacle to work for those

with HIV/AIDS. HIV stigma and discrimination have been associated with poor mental health, lower levels of service usage, and worse antiretroviral treatment adherence. In addition, HIV-positive critical groups are more vulnerable to negative health outcomes because various types of stigma intersect. According to Remien et al. (2019), people living with HIV may frequently encounter stigma and discrimination because of their HIV status, in addition to the substantial health challenges they confront. Stigma is an attitude of disapproval and discontent held by other people or institutions against a person or group because of the existence of a trait deemed undesirable. Discrimination, which happens when unjust measures are committed against someone because they belong to a certain stigmatized group, is frequently a result of stigma. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023), more than 50% of people in 35% of the nations where data is available report having prejudices against HIV-positive people. Complex hurdles to HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and support can be created by HIV stigma and prejudice. Individuals with the virus are still stigmatized in the poor countries, which is prompting many individuals to avoid being tested for HIV. The vast majority of people who are able to be tested keep their status a secret if they are found to be carriers of the virus. Furthermore, individuals have difficulty obtaining ARV drugs or using them in public (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023).

Workplaces could reduce stigma and discrimination through the following:

- Educating the workforce about HIV/AIDS through the organization of seminars to reduce stigma and prejudice as part of the workplace policy;
- Promoting government programming against stigma and discrimination; and
- Advocating for and supporting meaningful participation of people living with HIV (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS [UNAIDS], 2020).

Tourism is often a vital economic sector for many communities. The economic impact of HIV/AIDS can extend to local economies, affecting livelihoods and economic stability. Reduced tourism revenues can lead to decreased investment in infrastructure and services. In regions, such as South Africa that is heavily affected by HIV/AIDS, the perception of health risks can deter tourists, affecting demand and revenue. Negative publicity regarding health risks can damage a destination's reputation,

leading to long-term economic consequences (Buhalis, Leung, Fan, Darcy, Chen, Xu, Wei-Han Tan, Nunkoo, & Farmaki, 2023).

The importance of managing HIV and AIDS in the tourism industry

Dwyer (2020) states that many countries rely heavily on tourism to boost national GDP, employment, and cultural exchange. However, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among workers and tourists poses unique challenges that require careful management. Effective management of HIV/AIDS within the tourism industry is crucial for several reasons, encompassing public health, economic stability, workforce well-being, and the reputation of the industry.

The management of HIV and AIDS in the tourism industry is crucial for several reasons, particularly given the industry's significant impact on both local economies and global travel patterns. Here's why it matters:

- *Economic Stability*

HIV/AIDS has a major effect on the workforce; it can cause more absenteeism, lower productivity, and higher turnover rates, all of which have an adverse effect on the efficiency and profitability of tourism-related firms. Good management can help to lessen these financial effects by providing assistance to impacted workers and preserving workforce stability (Kassegn & Endris 2021). The expenses linked to healthcare, hiring, and onboarding new staff members can be high. Effective management of HIV/AIDS can help the sector lessen these costs. Employee health and productivity are maintained when HIV/AIDS care and support are provided in the workplace (Beichler, Kutalek & Dorner, 2023). In many areas, the tourist sector is a key contributor to the local economy. Effective HIV/AIDS management contributes to the industry's continued strength and supports regional economies.

- *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*

It is the duty of businesses in tourism to advance health and wellbeing. Proactive HIV/AIDS management may improve a company's brand and shows a dedication to corporate social responsibility. Travel agencies frequently operate in regions where HIV/AIDS is widespread. Providing education, prevention, and treatment programs to local communities helps improve relationships and the general well-being of the

region. Vijedi, Maiyo, and Mutsotso (2021) claim that effectively managing HIV/AIDS in tourism-related organizations can boost employee morale. effect on the morale of employees. assisting regional businesses.

Creating a supportive and inclusive environment that addresses the needs of employees living with HIV/AIDS can lead to improved morale and contribute to a healthier, more productive workplace This can be in the form of counselling programmes to support staff who may be going through depression, anxiety and related side effects. Tourism companies and destinations that proactively manage HIV/AIDS demonstrate corporate social responsibility and commitment to the well-being of their employees and communities (Coates, Richter & Caceres, 2018). This can enhance their reputation among tourists, investors, and the general public. A positive reputation can differentiate a destination or company from competitors, attracting socially conscious travelers and business partners (Dwyer, 2020).

- *Legal and Regulatory Compliance*

Many countries have regulations related to workplace health and safety, including the management of HIV/AIDS. Compliance is essential to avoid legal repercussions and maintain operational licenses. International bodies and local governments often set guidelines for managing HIV/AIDS in the workplace, especially in high-risk areas. Aligning with these standards is important for the industry's credibility (Bunyasi & Coetzee, 2022). Managing HIV/AIDS in tourism workplace is not only a moral obligation but also makes good business sense. It helps protect employee health, fosters a supportive and inclusive work environment, ensures legal compliance, and contributes to broader societal efforts to combat HIV/AIDS (Coates, Richter & Caceres, 2018). Performance and morale can increase despite HIV/AIDS if properly managed. Employee performance can dwindle owing to the physical and emotional impact of HIV. Hence if the organisation can provide effective support to staff infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS, then it can lead to better management of their condition and, in turn, contribute to maintaining their performance (Dwyer, 2020).

- *Education and Awareness*

Sherafat-Kazemzadeh, Gaumer, Hariharan, Sombrio & Nandakumar (2021) highlight that education programs in the tourism industry can help reduce the stigma associated

with HIV/AIDS, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment. Providing information and resources to employees and tourists helps prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and empowers individuals to make informed decisions. The tourism industry involves high levels of mobility and interaction, increasing the risk of HIV transmission. Effective management can help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among employees, tourists, and local communities. Implementing comprehensive education and prevention programs within the industry can reduce risky behaviors that contribute to the transmission of HIV (Coates, Richter & Caceres, 2018).

- *Tourism Marketing and Perception*

Tourists who are concerned about health risks are more likely to choose destinations known for their effective management of public health issues. This includes travelers who are particularly cautious about HIV/AIDS, as well as those with underlying health conditions that make them more vulnerable to infections. When a destination is perceived as taking public health seriously, it builds trust with potential visitors. This trust is a key factor in the decision-making process when travelers choose where to go, especially in regions with higher perceived health risks (Quevedo-Gómez, Krumeich, Abadía-Barrero & van den Borne, 2020).

- *Global Public Health Impact*

The tourism industry connects people from all over the world, making it an ideal platform to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. Campaigns targeting both tourists and local communities can help spread vital information about prevention, treatment, and the importance of reducing stigma. The tourism industry's contribution to global health efforts in combating HIV/AIDS is multifaceted (Global Health Policy, 2022). Through awareness campaigns, support for local health programs, economic empowerment, advocacy, and by promoting safe practices, the industry plays a key role in the global fight against HIV/AIDS. These efforts not only help to mitigate the spread of the disease but also support affected communities and contribute to the overall goal of eradicating HIV/AIDS worldwide (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), 2022).

Research Methodology

Participants

The participants who engaged in the research were grouped into six sectors within the tourism industry. These sectors were:

- Transportation (e.g. car hire)
- Hospitality (e.g. hotel)
- Recreation and leisure
- Events and attractions
- Travel, Wholesalers and Retail Sector (e.g. tour operator)
- Public support sector

The sectors mentioned above were all situated within two study areas namely, Buffalo City and Nelson Mandela Bay. These two metropolitan municipalities (Buffalo City and Nelson Mandela Bay) are both located within the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Workplaces within the tourism industry that have been in operation for at least 5 years were approached to be part of the study. Owners, general managers, or any staff member with pertinent information was contacted and encouraged to take part in the study, The study focused on all positions within the organization that possessed the information that was required for the research.

These positions included:

- Owner/Partner
- Senior Manager
- Middle Manager
- Junior Manager
- Supervisor
- General Employee

A total number of 37 tourism workplaces was approached to take part in the study. However, only 19 consented to participate in the study, and only 18 interviews were completed successfully. This is understandable given the sensitivity of the research. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they are more adaptable in terms of modifying the sequence of questions and allowing for a more thorough follow-up

answer from participants. This type of interview is moderate in that it is neither too strict nor too open in that it permits additional questions to be raised throughout the interview session based on the answers provided by the participant. Purposive sampling techniques were utilized in the study to investigate the effects of HIV/AIDS on the wellness of employees in the tourism sector. This sampling strategy was used because the study would explicitly target tourism businesses who had an active workplace wellness program that explicitly addressed HIV/AIDS in the workplace.

The study further included only those participants, in this case the employees who have relevant information and knowledge to contribute to the research. This would include any employee, from top management to general staff who is directly involved in any HIV and AIDS related activities within the workplace. It refers to workers whose job roles and responsibilities include tasks or functions related to HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention, treatment, support, policy implementation, or other related activities. These employees are likely to have firsthand experience and knowledge about the challenges, strategies, and outcomes related to HIV/AIDS programs, making their input valuable to studies focusing on this area. Participants with relevant knowledge are more likely to provide informed and credible insights. This helps in building the study's credibility and in drawing valid conclusions that are reflective of the true nature of the phenomenon being studied. It also further avoids gathering irrelevant or superficial information that does not contribute to the research objectives.

The research lasted six months, from December 2022 to May 2023 and a total of 18 interviews were conducted successfully. During the data collection process, the researcher noted that saturation occurred at interview number 16, although future interview dates and times had already been confirmed. As a result, the researcher performed all 18 interviews as agreed upon by the participants.

Instrument

The study employed a strictly qualitative research technique, with a semi-structured interview schedule used to conduct in-depth interviews (IDIs) on employees in the tourism industry that are located within the previously mentioned study region. Bhat (2023) defines an in-depth interview as a qualitative research approach used to acquire extensive and comprehensive information from persons or participants on a

certain topic, issue, or experience. According to Knott, Rao, Summers, and Teeger (2022) in-depth interviews are often performed one-on-one between a researcher and a participant, allowing for a concentrated and in-depth study of the participant's perspectives, ideas, feelings, and experiences. A semi-structured interview schedule was used as the study instrument, and the researcher solo performed all the IDIs in order to complete the data collection effectively.

The survey instrument used in this study consists of three (3) sections, each containing different types of questions designed to collect data on participants' demographic characteristics, workplace information and open-ended questions about the impact of HIV/AIDS on employee wellness in the workplace. A further breakdown of the instrument is explained below:

Section 1: This section of the interview schedule comprised of five (5) closed ended questions related to participants' age, gender, education, and years of experience. These questions are essential to control for demographic variables in the analysis.

Section 2: The second section of the schedule included four (4) close ended questions related to the respondent's employment. These questions covered the respondent's position in the organization, type of employment

Section 3: This section of the interview schedule included 10 (ten) open-ended questions about the impact of HIV/AIDS on employee wellness in the workplace. These 10 questions for this study were developed based on an extensive review of the existing literature on HIV/AIDS, employee wellness, and the tourism industry (as noted in literature by Allinder & Fleischman, 2019; Turan, Budhwani, Fazeli, Browning, Raper, Mugavero & Turan, 2017; Adey, Hannam, Sheller & Tyfield. 2021; Odugbesan, J.A. & Rjoub, 2019; Bunyasi & Coetzee, 2021; Sikkema, Dennis, Watt, Choi, Yemeke & Joska, 2022; Vearey, 2023). This section of the interview schedule raised questions about the relevance of managing HIV/AIDS in the workplace and how it affects the success of any tourism business. The study's objectives also provided guidance for the creation of questions that helped the researcher get the pertinent data needed.

Data analysis

NVivo version 11 software was used to conduct, record, and process IDIs satisfactorily. NVivo 11 Windows is a desktop application, according to NVivo (2023), that enables users to organize, study, and display content, including Word and PDF documents as well as videos, podcasts, images, and database tables. In order to provide a clear image of the respondents' opinions, this led to the creation of an analytical report that comprised nodes, word clouds, cluster analyses, tree maps, and word trees. The results were then impartially assessed and evaluated by the researcher.

Results and discussion

The following section will provide the results, including the demographical profile of the respondents and the business in which they are employed. The section will further provide a discussion of the results.

The first section of the interview schedule included a brief portion on the demographic profile of the respondents and the organization. The findings indicated that there were more females (10) than males (8) respondents, and most respondents (15) were above the age of 35. The majority (15) of responders were of African descent. All the respondents were South African nationals, with the majority (13) speaking Xhosa at home, followed by 5 participants who speak English. The results further indicated that respondent were highly educated and above the majority of responders (11) held senior-level positions, which indicates experience, expertise, and insight. Everyone who responded said they were full-time employees. All respondents added that their companies had been operating for more than five years, proving that they were established. The table below shows the sectors of the tourism industry as well as the percentage of each that participated in the study.

TABLE 1: Sector in the tourism industry	Number of participants
Transportation	3
Recreation and leisure	2
Accommodation and catering	6
Events and attractions	2

Travel wholesalers and retail	2
Public support	3
Total number of participants	18

The second section of the interview schedule contained a list of open-ended questions pertaining to the two objectives of the study, 1. To determine the impact of HIV/AIDS on the well-being of workers and 2. To ascertain the importance of managing HIV/AIDS in the tourism industry to maintain a healthy workforce, provide a pleasant visitor experience, sustain economic growth, assist local communities, and comply with global health goals.

All verbatim quotes were extracted directly from the interview transcripts. The findings of the study were also divided into unique theme, these themes were derived directly from the data collected during the study. A methodical approach was taken to identify the themes from the findings, which started with the researcher getting to know the material via extensive reading and evaluation. Initial codes were created throughout this phase by marking significant data segments that are associated with particular subjects or concepts. As trends and connections were found, these codes were subsequently categorized into more general topics. In order to make sure the themes appropriately depict the facts, they were further developed by going over and confirming their uniqueness and relevancy. Ultimately, by giving these themes names, definitions, and connections to the research questions, these themes contributed to the study's insightful analysis and resolution of important issues.

The study further identified three (3) major themes from relevant literature that involved a careful review and synthesis of existing studies, theories, and concepts. related to the research topic. The following themes and literature were identified for the study:

- **Theme 1:** The impacts of HIV/AIDS in the workplace (Fauk, Hawke, Mwanri, Ward, 2021; Setswe, 2019; Bunyasi & Coetzee, 2021; Muslimin, Baso, Hidayanty, Syarif, Aminuddin & Bahar, 2022; Turan, Budhwani, Fazeli, Browning, Raper, Mugavero & Turan, 2017).

- **Theme 2:** The importance of managing HIV/AIDS within the workplace (Ottemöller & Daniel, 2020; Remien, Stirratt, Nguyen, Robbin, Pala & Mellins, 2019; Sikkema, Dennis, Watt, Choi, Yemeke & Joska, 2019; Vearey, 2023).
- **Theme 3:** Ways to manage HIV/AIDS in the workplace (Collins, Jones, de Jong, Lambotte, Lamplough, Ndung'u, Sugarman, Tiemessen, Vandekerckhove & Lewin, 2021; Costa, Viscardi, Feijo & Fontanari, 2022; Coates, Richter & Caceres, 2018).

These themes are all discussed next based on the interview responses (direct quotes) from the participants and literature.

Theme 1: The impacts of HIV/AIDS in the workplace

The theme indicated above was taken from literature by the following authors: Muslimin, Baso, Hidayanty, Syarif, Aminuddin & Bahar, 2022; Turan, Budhwani, Fazeli, Browning, Raper, Mugavero & Turan, 2017; Setswe, 2019; Bunyasi & Coetzee, 2021. The subsequent sub-themes that are covered below were derived from this main subject.

Emotional impact of HIV/AIDS

The emotional impact of HIV/AIDS was the highest ranked on the wellness of staff. The major emotional impact on employees in the workplace was identified as stigma and discrimination. Historically, HIV/AIDS has always been associated with stigma and discrimination. Employees are reluctant to be open about their status or sexual orientation because of the stigma that they may be faced with.

“If you were to look at people because you know as I said people stigmatize you and you know what were you doing you were irresponsible and and and unfortunately the staff know how how how they talk or they gossip about each other you're already pre-empting your brain with those thoughts on how they're going to be discussing you.”

“you know with the stigma attached to that as well just socially amongst colleagues as well that that that could be a a a challenge that that also needs to be managed.”

Depression, stress and anxiety was also mentioned by respondents as a consequence of HIV/AIDS on an employee's physical and mental wellness. The employees whose mental condition becomes weak and unsteady, which implies they may lose their rationality at work. Given interpersonal risks associated with HIV disclosure, however, stress and anxiety about sharing one's status is common. The fear of negative consequences, such as discrimination or gossip, can contribute to heightened anxiety and depression.

“such as depression, your anxiety, unable to come to work, yes I think that is all.”

“I think just from the physical health perspective, that could cause a lot of strain and stress for the employee, um but also it could affect how you think others think about you. You know, if you, now you've decided to not tell people, but it might be a burden on you because some people know and others don't know. So just very stressful how people react when they do find out about my status. Um, and I think even something as family acceptance could also play a role in how it affects employee wellness.”

Physical impact of HIV/AIDS

Employees' emotional and physical reactions to HIV/AIDS can have a domino effect on both individual wellness and organizational performance. Respondents mentioned the fact that employees who are HIV positive can become physically sick and hospitalised and therefore unable to attend to work. This has been confirmed by Muslimin, Baso, Hidayanty, Syarif, Aminuddin and Bahar (2022) that the physical challenges and potential side effects of HIV/AIDS medication can lead to fatigue, illness, and reduced physical capacity within the workplace.

“Sometimes you would find that people are hospitalized because they have other accompanying ailments together with it and I think your organization plays also a vital role with regards to support in terms of leave, for example, sick leave things like provision of medical aid, stuff like that.”

Fear of dissemination and exposure to HIV/AIDS in the workplace

There is always a danger of dissemination and exposure based on the sort of place, such as hotels, particularly in scenarios involving body fluids or potentially harmful

actions. Many respondents made mention on their concerns of the spread and exposure of HIV/AIDS within the workplace. While HIV is not communicable by regular coughing and sneezing, it can be communicated through blood. As a result, cuts and wounds can lead to viral exposure, particularly in settings where sharp items are used, such as kitchens in hotels or restaurants. This was highlighted as a major concern for majority of respondents. This affecting the wellness of other staff members, both emotional and physical.

“we're not walking around with gloves. People get cuts that the kitchen, the, the, the, you know, there's a lot happens. A lot happens, we're exposed to a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot I guests in the rooms, um, perhaps get sick and you are exposed to that environment. Um, housekeeping is exposed to that environment cause they see a lot in the rooms.”

“And the way in which a staff member responds to occupational exposures, so for example, let's say a visitor cuts their finger and it's bleeding, how are they approached, how are they dealt with?”

Theme 2: The importance of managing HIV/AIDS within the workplace.

The second theme, which is mentioned above, was taken from literature by authors Ottemöller & Daniel, 2020; Remien, Stirratt, Nguyen, Robbin, Pala & Mellins, 2019; Sikkema, Dennis, Watt, Choi, Yemeke & Joska, 2019; and Vearey, 2023.

Many respondents understood the importance of managing HIV/AIDS in the workplace and how it will influence the success of the business as per the responses received from theme 1 discussed previously. This indicates that if the organization's production suffers, its profitability will ostensibly suffer as well, the impacts vary depending on the exact circumstances, industry, and how the business handles the situation.

“Taking care of the HIV/AIDS in the right place, the employees will become an absent in the work and then that will tend to reduce their productivity in the workplace and that is the loss of the company.”

“it's important because, you know, once the employees get sick again. It also will be affecting the activity because now they'll be spending more days away from work, and that simply means that now the employer will have to put in more money to bring in part timers, um also I mean it it's also going to impact.”

Lack of productivity

Productivity was the highest ranked factor mentioned by respondents when addressing the effects of HIV in the workplace. According to Verbooy, Wagener, Kaddouri, Roelofs, Miedema, van Gorp, Brouwer and van Exel (2019) Employees who may be infected may dwindle in productivity due to emotional and physical impact of HIV. Employees can become emotionally and physically sick and not be able to perform. In addition, they may be on extended periods of sick leave. Lastly, they may also pass on. All of these imply that key skills can be lost which affects the productivity of the entire organisation.

“unfortunately, circumstances losing those employees, there would be decrease in productivity and also and that would also lead to you know changes in labour force, you know you have employees that well I have employees coming in, training new employees, losing your skilled employees in the process. So there are a lot benefits that organisations can derive from institutionalising kinds of programs and meeting this kind of programs of the initiatives um um an organisation does for people living with HIV/AIDS notwithstanding I mean not not over emphasising that if these issues are you know left unattended you know it can leave a conversation in a dire state of lack of productivity uh escalating labour costs and general risks to the the their livelihood. (Respondent 2)

Lack of profitability and loss of skilled workers

Respondents emphasised the fact that profitability is affected by HIV/AIDS in the workplace. Profitability is tied to productivity. This indicates that if the organization's production suffers, its profitability will ostensibly suffer as well, the impacts vary depending on the exact circumstances. However, the organization will have to spend more to acquire new workers, and service delivery may be affected as a result of staff turnover, leading to a decline in customers (American Psychological Association, 2023). Respondents had indicated that HIV/AIDS not managed in the workplace can lead to increased sick leave and absenteeism among the employees and it will translate to added expenses due to operational restriction and downtime. This will also affect the productivity and profitability of the business as previously mentioned. Increased turnover will mean that the organisation will lose skilled workers. It can cost

time and money to recruit skilled workers and/or train new workers. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2023) Increased workforce turnover and the loss of skilled personnel raises the cost of recruiting and training. HIV/AIDS cause higher worker turnover, a loss of trained labor, and a greater demand for training.

“employees, you know, dying, taking time off work, you know, taking you know unending leave days just to get off work because they are sick, there's no doubt that would lead to also, you know, decrease in profits. You know, any organization, whether you are a profit organization or a non-profit making organization, but there's a deliverable that you're working towards.”
(Respondent 5)

“and engaging in whatever projects they do within the company. Because if you don't take care of them, it means that there's going to be high turnover of them living the institution getting sick and some of them obviously no leaving the institution through death and all what not. So it's very important for us to take care of those.” (Respondent 3)

Theme 3: Ways to manage HIV/AIDS in the workplace.

The last and third theme came from the writings of Coates, Richter & Caceres, 2018; Costa, Viscardi, Feijo & Fontanari, 2022; Collins, Jones, de Jong, Lambotte, Lamplough, Ndung'u, Sugarman, Tiemessen, Vandekerckhove & Lewin, 2021. Sub-themes were generated from this theme; these are covered in the next section.

Creating a conducive work environment

Creating a workplace that values inclusivity, offers resources and accommodations, and fosters open communication can help mitigate negative impacts and promote a positive, productive, and thriving work environment. Providing HIV/AIDS care and assistance in the workplace helps to keep employees healthy and productive (Beichler, Kutalek & Dorner, 2023). Hence if the organisation can provide effective support to staff infected and affected with HIV/AIDS, then it can lead to better management of their condition and in turn contribute to maintaining their performance. According to Vijedi, Maiyo and Mutsotso (2021) properly managing HIV and AIDS within the workplace can have a positive impact on staff morale. Creating a supportive and

inclusive environment that addresses the needs of employees living with HIV/AIDS can lead to improved morale and contribute to a healthier, more productive workplace. This can be in the form of counselling programmes to support staff who may be going through depression, anxiety and related.

“you know um you know, a case where maybe a staff member regularly takes some time off work or sometimes if they are not properly counselled, if there are no counselling programs to support them, you know, we need not to be looking at HIV/AIDS as an isolated issue from issues of your depressions and you know mental health issues. There’s a lot of those issues that we need to be taken care of and we’re all doing that to also boost their morale, the staff members. So it’s very important for organizations to have these kinds of programs for that particular function as well or purpose of boosting the staff morale.” (Respondent 5)

Creating awareness and ongoing education of HIV/AIDS in the workplace

According to UNAIDS (2022) Creating awareness and empowerment, organizations can reduce stigma, promote understanding, and create an environment where employees living with HIV/AIDS feel valued, supported, and able to thrive. This approach contributes not only to the wellness of individuals but also to the overall health and productivity of the organization. Respondents felt that programmes should be created to declassify myths and de-stigmatise HIV. This will mitigate discrimination and allow for those living with HIV to have a sense of belonging. Ongoing education about HIV/AIDS will create the necessary awareness. Raising HIV/AIDS awareness in the workplace is not just a social responsibility but also a strategic decision that benefits employee wellness, corporate culture, and overall performance (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health, 2023). It promotes an atmosphere of understanding, compassion, and proactive health management, which benefits both people and the company as a whole.

“education awareness and I mean if you have a client who actually who have HIV/AIDS and then they see that to them I mean immediately it sort of you know it changes their mood I mean yeah it changes your mood so I think we are in business of actually trying to make sure that if I give you the best service service ever you are actually going to spread the word that you know I visited this this

place you are now actually uplifting me as a company you know indirectly because I mean you saw that simple poster it could be the website I mean that is picking.”(Respondent 15).

Conclusion

This study focuses on an issue that is undeniably important for the success of the tourism industry. In relation to the study’s research objectives, the following conclusions are drawn:

- Firstly, to determine the impact of HIV/AIDS on the well-being of workers, a holistic approach that considers both physical and emotional wellness is essential. Emotional wellness, in particular, plays a critical role in the overall health of employees affected by HIV/AIDS. Many respondents in studies and interviews have highlighted that the emotional impact of HIV/AIDS can be even more profound than the physical symptoms. This emotional burden stems from stigma, discrimination, stress, anxiety, and depression, all of which can exacerbate the physical effects of the disease.
- Secondly, to ascertain the importance of managing HIV/AIDS in the tourism industry to maintain a healthy workforce, The management of HIV/AIDS within the tourism industry is a critical health-related issue that has significant implications for employee well-being, workplace productivity, and overall industry sustainability. Ensuring that the workforce is healthy helps prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS to guests and contributes to a safer environment. Respondents have consistently highlighted the importance of effectively managing HIV/AIDS in the workplace, recognizing the severe repercussions of neglecting this issue.

Implications and recommendations

The purpose of this research was to ascertain how HIV/AIDS affected the wellness of workers in the tourism industry. It was stated that HIV/AIDS affect an employee's mental and emotional wellness in addition to their physical health. Due to stigma and discrimination at work, many employees felt they could not reveal their status. Thus, it

is crucial for employers to understand how to assist and care for the wellness of their employees. Employers must take responsibility for the wellbeing of their workforce by creating an active workplace wellness program. A workplace wellness program needs to comprise an extensive array of activities intended to advance the health and wellness of staff members. One of these activities can be hosting information seminars to teach people about different facets of wellness and health, specifically on HIV/AIDS.

Workers in the tourism industry, especially those in low-income regions, may have limited access to healthcare services. By promoting access to HIV testing, treatment, and support services, the industry can help improve the health outcomes of its workforce. Additionally, it is advised that tourism workplaces provide wellness days when workers may get wellness checks, health risk assessments, and preventative screenings to assist them recognize and manage health issues before they get worse. To assist management with wellness days, tourism workplaces can also reach out to external health stakeholders (such as clinics, pharmacies, and medical assistance providers). It is imperative that management maintains ongoing oversight of the wellness program's efficacy by analysing employee input, participation rates, and health results. Make any necessary adjustments and modifications using this information.

To promote employees emotional wellbeing and address mental health concerns, particularly for those employees who are infected and afflicted by HIV/AIDS, it is also advocated that companies grant access to mental health resources, counseling services, and employee assistance programs (EAPs). Employers might carry out further evaluations to gain insight into the unique wellness requirements and preferences of their workforce. It is imperative that tourism workplaces cultivate a climate of open communication and support and encourage staff members to voice their demands and concerns without worrying about the consequences.

Additionally, it is advised that employers are recommended to give staff members specific training on recognising and managing HIV-related workplace consequences. Workshops, seminars, or online platforms (such Teams, Zoom, etc.) can be used for the training. Training could involve disseminating information about HIV/AIDS by increasing knowledge of risk reduction techniques, preventative techniques, and HIV transmission. Staff education about HIV transmission prevention in the workplace can

help lower the infection risk. Giving this kind of training would promote empathy, understanding, and the respectful treatment of people living with HIV, which will help fight stigma and discrimination. Clear anti-discrimination rules that forbid discrimination based on race, gender, age, handicap, sexual orientation, religion, or other protected characteristics should be established and enforced in the workplace. In this way, persons who are HIV positive will be safeguarded at work, and it will also be made sure that staff members are aware of how to report harassment and discrimination and that there is a secure and private reporting mechanism in place.

Limitations and future research

The research did not require any information of the participant's HIV status because it is deemed highly confidential. However, individuals shared their perspectives on HIV and AIDS in the workplace. Others went on to relate their interactions with co-workers who are HIV-positive. Managers further elaborated on the effects of HIV/AIDS within the workplace as some employees had disclosed their HIV status with their employer (management). This study has limitations in that the findings were based mostly on the perspectives of employees in managerial positions rather than the general staff members. The study did not target managers, but rather employees who possessed important information for the study. It just so happened that those employees had management positions.

Since many of the general employees refused to participate. Future studies could look at the percentage of general employees on HIV/AIDS and how it affects their wellness. The study only used qualitative data collecting techniques. Due to the lack of time allotted for in-depth interviews and the employees' hectic schedules, it is possible that this technique did not accurately reflect all the opinions of the employees. Quantitative techniques should be used in future studies to close this gap and increase participant involvement. This research gives insight into the tourism industry in only two municipalities in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. To compare results, similar research might be conducted that will include other Eastern Cape municipalities.

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