

# THE IMPACT OF HIV AND AIDS ON EDUCATION AS PERCEIVED BY SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS IN MASILONYANA IN THE FREE STATE PROVINCE

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reports on secondary school learners' perceptions of the impact of human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV and AIDS) on education. A questionnaire on the impact of HIV and AIDS on education was constructed and it was content validated against the theoretical assumptions supported by the literature on HIV and AIDS. Empirical investigation and findings reveal that learners perceive that HIV and AIDS have impact on educators, on learners themselves, on school environment, and on school enrolments and performance.

**Keywords:** HIV and AIDS, Impact of HIV and AIDS, learner perceptions, HIV and AIDS on education.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The threat posed by the rampant spread of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in sub-Saharan Africa in general and South Africa in particular, presents unprecedented challenges to the South African intellectual community, educators and learners. South Africa is no exception with regard to the escalating number of deaths caused by the epidemic. It is claimed that 29, 4 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa where the virus has claimed the lives of 2, 4 million since 2002 (Wadula, 2003:12).

HIV and AIDS are likely to devastate the education sector in South Africa. Studies show that since 2000, the proportion of potential parents (20 – 40 years) is decreasing; the number of orphans is increasing while poverty levels and drop-out rates at schools are also increasing owing to HIV and AIDS (Coombe, 2000: 14).

### 1. THE IMPACT OF HIV AND AIDS ON EDUCATION: AN ORIENTATION

Coombe (2000: 10 -17) establishes that HIV and AIDS have impact on educators, learners, school enrolments, drop-out rates, absenteeism rates, rates of poverty and orphanage, and the overall quality of education. The following table provides data on the consequences of the pandemic on South African workforce, number of new cases per year, number of orphans, and life expectancy.

Table 1: The consequences of HIV and AIDS: Projections to 2010

	1999	2005	2010
Percentage of SA workforce HIV+	11,5%	20%	22,5%
Percentage of SA workforce AIDS sick	0,4%	1,65%	2,7%
New AIDS cases per annum	145,256	466,365	625,180
<b>Number of AIDS orphans</b>	<b>153,000</b>	<b>1 000,000</b>	<b>2 000,000</b>
Life expectancy of SA females (years)	54	43	37
Life expectancy of SA males (years)	50	43	38

(Swainson, 2002:11)

Analysis of Table 1 reveals that the percentage of South African workforce HIV+ increased by 8, 5% between 1999 and 2005. The percentage of HIV+ workforce will increase by 2, 5% between 2005 and 2010 (a projected decline of 6%). The percentage of SA workforce AIDS sick increased by 1, 25% between 1999 and 2005, and will also increase by 1, 05% between 2005 and 2010. New AIDS cases increased by 321,109 per year between 1999 and 2005 and will increase by 158,815 by 2010. This will mark a decline of 162,294 cases between 1999 and 2010. The number of AIDS orphans increased by 847,000 to 1 000 000 between 1999 and 2005 and will double to 2 000 000 by 2010. Life expectancy of males (years) declined by 11 years from 54 years in 1999 to 43 in 2005 and will decline by a further 6 years between 2005 and 2010 (38 years). Data in this table imply that there could be a huge impact of HIV and AIDS on the education system in South Africa.

## 2.1 Impact on absenteeism rates

Coombe (2005: 15) maintains that South Africa's education workforce comprises 443,000 educators with approximately 12% infection. Furthermore, infection rates as high as 40% have been reported from parts of Malawi and Uganda. Approximately 53 160 educators in South Africa are likely to die of AIDS by year 2010. This can be realised by using this simple calculation:

Education workforce:	443 000		
Total infected HIV+:	12%		
Ten year period:	2010-2000	=	10 years
Therefore:	$443\ 000 \times 12/100$	=	53 160

There could be many more that are ill, absent and dying, or pre-occupied with family crisis caused by HIV and AIDS (Coombe, 2000:15). This implies that 53 160 new educators need to be trained to replace the 53 160 who could be lost to HIV and AIDS. The replacement of these educators is likely to bear high costs to the Department of Education and by implication to the taxpayer.

## 2.2 Impact on quality education

Coombe (2004:207) provides the following impact of HIV and AIDS on quality of education:

- the decreasing supply of trained educators;
- the loss of educator productivity when they become ill; as a result,
- parents and care-givers choose not to educate the children because educational materials are not readily available;
- the learning environment is disorganised;
- when educators become ill, their teaching capacity decreases, further limiting the quality of instruction; and
- educators are forced to take long sick leaves to recover from illnesses as HIV progresses into full-blown AIDS.

## 2.3 Impact on rates of poverty and orphanage

Poverty is the main constraint to support orphans. Without proper use of resources, to feed, clothe and counsel learners, the basic need for education cannot be realised (Coombe, 2004:202). Table 2 below illustrates the impact of HIV and AIDS on orphanage.

Table 2: Impact of HIV and AIDS on orphanage.

Year	Children under age 15 (millions)	Maternal/double orphans from all causes (millions)	Maternal/double orphans as % of children under 15	% of maternal/double orphans caused by AIDS	Number of children orphaned by AIDS (millions)	% of children under age 15 orphaned by AIDS
1990	9.53	4.2	4.5	23.3	1.1	1.2
2000	115.6	8.2	7.8	60.1	4.6	4.6
2010	85.3	9.0	11.6	71.5	7.3	9.8

(Coombe, 2004:202).

Table 2 reveals that the number of children (in millions) orphaned by AIDS in Africa was 1,1 million in 1990 and it will increase to 7,3 million by 2010, which represents 9,8% increase.

## 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this study a quantitative approach was deemed most appropriate as it provided secondary school learners with an opportunity to rate the impact of HIV and AIDS on their schools. The primary aim of the research was to investigate the impact of HIV and AIDS on education. The specific research objectives were to establish learners' perceptions of the impact of HIV and AIDS on education.

### **3.1 Research objectives**

The objectives of this study were to:

- determine the impact of HIV and AIDS on education;
- establish the impact of HIV and AIDS on education as perceived by secondary school learners in Masilonyana district; and
- investigate how the impact of HIV and AIDS on education can be alleviated.

### **3.2 Data collection**

The literature review consisted of the review of literature relevant to the topic in order to gather as much background to the problem as possible. Such data was analysed and synthesized in order to arrive at some definite conclusions. Both questionnaire and interview were used to gather data. The reason for using both instruments was the size of the sample which consisted of a large number of subjects, questionnaires alone may not elicit as high a completion rate as expected whereas with interviews, a pure information transfer – a transaction and a face to face encounter with respondents was possible.

### **3.3 Research sample**

Questionnaires were sent to five schools after a simple random sampling was applied to select the target population. In a random sample all learners have equal chances of being included (Welman and Kruger, 2001:53). Furthermore, characteristics of each learner in the sample reflected the characteristics of the total population. This process ensured that all secondary learners in Masilonyana district had an equal and independent chance of being selected. This was done by writing the names of schools on pieces of paper and putting the papers in a bowl. The first five pieces of paper to be drawn out of the bowl became part of the sample. Of the 750 questionnaires delivered to the schools, 632 were returned which represented a return of 84 percent.

### **3.4 Data collection strategy**

A statistician from the Institutional Research Institute at Central University of Technology, Free State assisted in the construction of the questionnaire. In order to design questionnaire items with a high reliability, content validity and construct validity, a literature survey was conducted and statements were formulated in terms of the assumptions underpinning learners' understanding of the impact of HIV and AIDS on education. The constructed questionnaire was delivered to the sampled schools and collected approximately a week after delivery.

## 4 ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES OF LEARNERS

This section focuses on empirical responses of learners who participated in the study. Tables 3 to 11 show the impact of HIV and AIDS on education according to learners' perceptions.

### 4.1 Impact on parents

Learners were asked if some learners may have lost parents because of HIV and AIDS.

Table 3: Learners who lost parents because of HIV and AIDS (Gender) N = 632

			Q19 In my school some learners lost parents because of HIV/AIDS.		Total
			True	False	
Q4 Gender	Male	Count	176	96	272
		% Q4 Gender	64.7%	35.3%	100.0%
	Female	Count	292	68	360
		% Q4 Gender	81.1%	18.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	468	164	632
		% Gender	74.1%	25.9%	100.0%

Table 3 demonstrates that 468 (74, 1%) learners have the perception that some learners could have lost parents because of HIV and AIDS. This could mean that HIV and AIDS might impact negatively on the minds of learners, which is a psycho-social impact that is associated with trauma.

## 4.2 Impact on rates of poverty and orphanage

Learners were asked if some learners were unable to pay school fees because their parents died of HIV and AIDS

Table 4: Some learners are unable to pay school fees because their parents died of HIV and AIDS (Gender) N = 630

			Q20 In my school some learners are unable to pay fees because their parents died of HIV/AIDS.		Total
			True	False	
Q4 Gender	Male	Count	172	99	271
		% within Q4 Gender	63.5%	36.5%	100.0%
	Female	Count	242	117	359
		% within Q4 Gender	67.4%	32.6%	100.0%
Total		Count	414	216	630
		% within Q4 Gender	65.7%	34.3%	100.0%

Table 4 shows that 65,7% of learners had a perception that some learners were unable to pay school fees because their parents died of the pandemic. The implication is that some learners might have lost parents because of HIV and AIDS, a situation which could have led to an increase in the rates of poverty.

Learners were also asked if the number of orphans in their towns is increasing because of HIV and AIDS.

Table 5: The number of orphans is increasing because of HIV and AIDS (Gender) N = 632

			Q32 In my town, the number of orphans is increasing because of HIV/AIDS.		Total
			True	False	
Q4 Gender	Male	Count	177	95	272
		% within Q4 Gender	65.1%	34.9%	100.0%
	Female	Count	277	83	360
		% within Q4 Gender	76.9%	23.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	454	178	632
		% within Q4 Gender	71.8%	28.2%	100.0%

Table 5 shows that 71,8% of learners perceived that the number of orphans in their town was increasing because of HIV and AIDS. This also shows that the number of orphans could, by implication, be increasing even at secondary schools.

### 4.3 Impact on drop-out rates and school enrolments

Learners were asked to rate if some learners got sick of HIV/AIDS and never returned to school.

Table 6: Drop out as result HIV and AIDS illness (Gender) N = 632

			Q25 In my school, some learners get sick of HIV/AIDS and never return to school.		Total
			True	False	
Q4 Gender	Male	Count	144	128	272
		% within Q4 Gender	52.9%	47.1%	100.0%
	Female	Count	159	201	360
		% within Q4 Gender	44.2%	55.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	303	329	632
		% within Q4 Gender	47.9%	52.1%	100.0%

Table 6 illustrates that 47,9% of learners perceive that some learners get sick of HIV and AIDS and never return to school. This implies that the majority of the learners do not perceive HIV and AIDS as a threat to them. Hence they are of the opinion that learners do not drop out of school. This could mean that according to learners' perceptions school enrolments are not decreasing as a result of learners' infection with the pandemic.

However, the following table shows that school enrolments could be affected by learners who leave school to take care of sick relatives. Learners were asked to rate if some learners left school to take care of sick relatives infected of HIV and AIDS.



Table 7: Some learners left school to take care of sick relatives who were infected of HIV and AIDS (Gender) N = 631

			Q21 In my school, some learners left school to take care of sick relatives who are infected of HIV/AIDS		Total
			True	False	
Q4 Gender	Male	Count	150	122	272
		% within Q4 Gender	55.1%	44.9%	100.0%
	Female	Count	208	151	359
		% within Q4 Gender	57.9%	42.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	358	273	631
		% within Q4 Gender	56.7%	43.3%	100.0%

Table 7 indicates that 56, 7% of learners had the perception that some learners left school to take care of sick relatives infected of HIV and AIDS. This implies that learners believe that learners who leave school, do so not because they are infected themselves but to take care of their sick relatives.

#### 4.4 Impact on educators

Learners were asked to rate if educators were worried when learners became ill of HIV and AIDS.

Table 8: Educators get worried when learners get ill of HIV and AIDS (gender) N = 631

			Q22 In my school, educators get worried when learners get ill of HIV/Aids.		Total
			True	False	
Q4 Gender	Male	Count	227	44	271
		% within Q4 Gender	83.8%	16.2%	100.0%
	Female	Count	297	63	360
		% within Q4 Gender	82.5%	17.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	524	107	631
		% within Q4 Gender	83.0%	17.0%	100.0%

Table 8 demonstrates that 83, 0% of learners perceive that educators are worried when learners get ill of HIV and AIDS. This could imply that educators are stressed and worried when their learners are ill of the pandemic which could be interpreted as a psycho-social impact.

Learners were asked to rate if educators could not do a good job because educators were sick of HIV and AIDS.

Table 9: Educators cannot do a good job because they are sick of HIV and AIDS (Gender) N = 632

			Q28 In my school, educators cannot do a good job because they are sick of HIV/AIDS.		Total
			True	False	
Q4 Gender	Male	Count	60	212	272
		% within Q4 Gender	22.1%	77.9%	100.0%
	Female	Count	60	300	360
		% within Q4 Gender	16.7%	83.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	120	512	632
		% within Q4 Gender	19.0%	81.0%	100.0%

Table 9 shows that the majority of learners (81,0%) did not have the perception that educators could not do a good job because they were sick of HIV and AIDS. This implies that according to learners' perceptions, teachers who could be infected by the pandemic were not negatively affected by it. Learners believed the infected teachers remain effective in the classroom regardless of their HIV and AIDS status.

#### 4.5 Impact on school performance

Learners were asked to rate if there was a decline in school performance because of HIV and AIDS.

Table 10: A decline in performance because of HIV and AIDS (gender) N = 628

			Q30 In my school, there is a decline in performance because of HIV/AIDS.		Total
			True	False	
Q4 Gender	Male	Count	79	191	270
		% within Q4 Gender	29.3%	70.7%	100.0%
	Female	Count	119	239	358
		% within Q4 Gender	33.2%	66.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	198	430	628
		% within Q4 Gender	31.5%	68.5%	100.0%

Table 10 illustrates that 68, 5% of learners did not agree that there was a decline in school performance because of HIV and AIDS. This implies that learners perceive that the overall effectiveness of the school performance is not negatively affected by the pandemic. However, a sizable number comprising 31, 5% of respondents agree that in their schools there is a decline in school performance because of the pandemic.

#### 4.6 Impact on the quality of education

Learners were also asked to rate if, when educators become ill, their absence affects the quality of learning.

Table 11: when educators become ill, their absence affects the quality of learning (Gender)

N = 632

			Q29 When educators become ill, their absence affects the quality of learning.		Total
			True	False	
Q4 Gender	Male	Count	214	58	272
		% within Q4 Gender	78.7%	21.3%	100.0%
	Female	Count	277	83	360
		% within Q4 Gender	76.9%	23.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	491	141	632
		% within Q4 Gender	77.7%	22.3%	100.0%

The analysis of Table 11 shows that 77,7% of respondents perceive that when educators become ill, their absence affects the quality of learning. This could imply that educators' absence from school negatively affects the quality of the learning experiences provided to learners. Quality education should first meet the needs of the learner. Educators who are always absent from school fail to provide quality learning to their learners.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The literature review has shown that HIV and AIDS have negative impact on various aspects of education. The empirical study has also confirmed that the pandemic affects education throughout the education system including educators, learners themselves and the environment under which teaching and learning take place. The impact can be identified by educator absenteeism, illnesses, and deaths, declining performance, stress and so forth. On the learners' side, the impact can be explained in terms of increasing dropout rates, and poor quality of learning. The study revealed that previous

researchers observed that the spread of HIV and AIDS in secondary schools is a world wide problem that needs to be continuously researched.

The majority of learners did not agree that there was a decline in school performance because of HIV and AIDS. The implication is that learners perceive that the overall effectiveness of the school is not negatively affected by the pandemic. However, the majority of learners perceive that when educators become ill, their absence affects the quality of learning. Quality education should first meet the needs of the learner. Educators who are always absent from school fail to provide quality learning to their learners. When learners and educators experience hardships, they find it difficult to concentrate and do well at school. This could mean that the education performance of learners from disrupted families and especially child-headed households suffer.

## 6. REFERENCES

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