

**PERCEPTIONS OF HIV AND AIDS - RELATED STIGMA AMONG EMPLOYEES IN  
THE PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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## **KEY WORDS**

1. HIV/AIDS
2. Stigma
3. Parliament
4. Anti-stigma interventions
5. Employee wellness
6. Workplace HIV policy
7. South Africa
8. HIV Disclosure
9. Employee perceptions
10. Psychological impact

## ABSTRACT

The threat that HIV/AIDS poses to most institutions, including the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, can potentially be decreased by reducing stigma and discrimination. Parliament's Policy on HIV and AIDS provides protection for people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) against stigma and discrimination. The purpose of this study was to explore employee perceptions of HIV/AIDS stigma in the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa in order to inform improved anti-stigma strategies and interventions. This exploratory qualitative cross-sectional study used individual interviews and focus group discussions among Parliamentary employees to examine perceptions of: HIV/AIDS related stigma in the workplace, the effectiveness of Parliament's HIV/AIDS response strategy, and how HIV/AIDS-related stigma might be effectively addressed. A total of 49 respondents participated in:

- a) *19 individual interviews* across five employment grades (A-Band to E-Band).
- b) *4 focus group discussions of 6- 9 people each.*

Data was analysed using thematic analysis. Five main themes were identified, as well as additional sub-themes. The main themes were: the actual acts of discrimination (enacted stigma), concerns related to disclosure, assumptions and preconceptions about causes and signs of HIV infection, concerns about psychological impact and lack of knowledge and education. Discrimination was generally described as being treated differently, as well as prejudice and negative attitude to a person with HIV/AIDS. More specifically, it was understood as labelling those who are HIV positive negatively and ostracizing them. Gossip and lack of confidentiality were the main barriers to disclosure and testing while weight loss and long term sick leave were interpreted as classic signs of a person who is HIV positive in Parliament. Fear played a major role in these respondents' accounts of HIV/AIDS related stigma, while the perceived widespread ignorance was attributed to lack of information, knowledge and education. Respondents perceived Parliament's HIV/AIDS response strategy to be ineffective. They suggested more awareness and training, establishment of support groups, involvement of PLWHA and involvement of Senior Management in addressing HIV/AIDS related stigma in Parliament.

## DECLARATION

I declare that *Perceptions of HIV and AIDS - Related Stigma Among Employees in the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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**DATE**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IPU	Inter-parliamentary union
MPs	Member(s) of parliament
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
NSP	National HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infection (STI) strategic plan (2007-2011)
	National strategic plan on HIV, STI and TB 2012-2016.
PLWHA	People living with HIV and AIDS
TB	Tuberculosis
VCT	Voluntary counseling and testing
NA	National Assembly
NCOP	National Council of Provinces
SHE	Safety, health and environment
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
SANAC	South African National Aids Council
ILO	International labour organisation
MSM	Men who have sex with men
MSW	Men who have sex with women
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
UNGASS	United Nations General Assembly Special Session

WHO	World Health Organisation
LRA	Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995
EEA	Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998
DoL	Department of Labour
SAA	South African Airways
PLWHIV	People living with HIV
CCMA	Council for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration
FGD	Focus group discussion
PMP	Parliamentary Millennium Programme
HCT	HIV counseling and testing
ICAS	Independent Counseling and Advisory Service
UWC	University of the Western Cape

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