



MANAGEMENT OF HIV AND TB IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

The informal economy accounts for 16% of the working population in South Africa. Informal economy workers are extremely vulnerable to HIV and TB because of poor access to health care and social protection. Day-to-day survival of workers, including having food on the table and providing basic needs for their families, takes precedence over important health matters such as HIV and TB, hence workers are likely to seek healthcare when already ill. Women in the informal economy are the most vulnerable to HIV due to gender inequalities that influence socio-economic vulnerability, leading to exposure to sexually risky behaviours as means to increase income.^{i,ii}

Barriers to healthcare

Informal workers face the following barriers to HIV and TB health services, according to five dimensions of accessibility, which are 1) Approachability, 2) Acceptability, 3) Availability and accommodation, 4) Affordability, and 5) Appropriateness

- Long-distance between the working station and health facilities
- Inability to use health facility nearest to their workplace as their residential address is from a different area
- Long waiting times in health facilities, which equals to loss of income
- Health facility operational hours do not accommodate the informal workers
- Poor HIV and TB knowledge
- Low perception of HIV and TB risk
- Lack of workplace HIV and TB health services
- HIV and TB stigma and discrimination



Basic facts:

- TB is preventable and curable
- HIV is preventable and treatable
- People living with HIV have a greater risk of developing TB
- The workplace has a role to play in the prevention and management of HIV and TB.

Categories of Informal Economy

- ❖ Street Hawkers
- ❖ Tuckshops
- ❖ Hairdressing
- ❖ Informal engineering production
- ❖ Domestic work
- ❖ Waste pickers
- ❖ Taxi industry
- ❖ Commercial sex workers
- ❖ SMME (e.g. construction, retail, soft good production)

For more information:

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What can the health system do?

The constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 and the National Health Act 61 of 2003 section 25(2) call for the right to access health care services and provision of occupational health services by employers. Further provisions of occupational health services for the informal economy are placed in the Provincial Health Departments which can be achieved through the district health system (Notice 667 of 1997).ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore, the district health municipalities have a responsibility in improving access to HIV services for the informal economy. To meet the OHS needs for the informal economy all levels of prevention (primary, secondary, tertiary) should be incorporated, including:

Prevent diseases and injuries before they occur

- Provide HIV/TB awareness programs and integrate awareness messages into all aspects of informal economy interventions and programs, with emphasis on key facts on HIV and TB transmission
- Provide ongoing HIV and TB prevention education, tailored to suit informal workers working conditions, and associated risk factors.
- Provide an ongoing supply of condoms to market areas where street vendors operate.
- Promote the establishment of peer educators in informal workplaces
- Conduct regular HIV TB risk assessment of informal workplaces to inform appropriate targeted HIV/TB programs for the informal workers,

Detect diseases and injuries early

- Strategic provision of HIV/TB services and other health services closer to where informal workers operate, i.e. Workers to access health services such as TB screening, HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT), and treatment and care to health facilities closest to the trading areas; with fast queue services for street vendors.
- Consider community health worker's role in the provision of directly observed therapy (DOT) within the working spaces for workers who are TB infected; as well as for follow-up on defaulting workers who are on ART or TB medication

Prevent complications of diseases and injuries

- Access to ongoing psychosocial counselling and support on workers who are on life-long ART.

What can workers do?

Informal economy workers should be aware that even though HIV and TB may not be occupational diseases for them, they are workplace issues with a significant economic impact on informal economy workers and their families. Therefore, informal economy workers should strive to:

- Mobilize and organize formally so as to have workers' unions and workplace representatives who can lead negotiations for improvement in overall working conditions.
- Each workplace should have a campus-wide HIV and TB policy statement, through the leadership of worker's unions or representatives.
- Practice safe sex.
- Screen for HIV on regular basis; and recognize TB signs and symptoms and screen promptly to avoid advanced TB and spread of TB infection to other workers.
- set up a workplace health and safety committee covering HIV & TB.
- Start Antiretroviral therapy (ART) if HIV infected as soon as they are diagnosed and maintain 100% adherence to ART.
- Advocate for DOTs within their workplaces.
- Avoid discriminating against those who are living with HIV and/or TB.

Promoting Healthy, Safe, Happy & Sustainable Workplaces

ⁱ Quédrago et al. BMC International Health and Human Rights (2017) 17:1 DOI 10.1186/s12914-016-0109-8

ⁱⁱ Lee S. HIV/AIDS in the informal economy: an analysis of local government's role in addressing the vulnerability of women street traders in Durban. University of KwaZulu-Natal. 2004.

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of employment and Labour. The profile of Occupational Health and Safety in South Africa. Pretoria. 2020.