

## **Title: Determining Factors of HIV/AIDS related Stigma Among Young Adults in Cape Town**

Author: Stefan Buchholz, PhD Candidate, Ruhr University Bochum, Germany.

More than thirty years after the discovery of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), HIV related diseases still have a devastating impact on many people in South Africa. In 2011, the country faced one of the largest and most destructive epidemics worldwide, with more than 5.6 million people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), more than 380.000 citizens newly infected with HIV and more than 270.000 citizens who died of AIDS-related diseases<sup>1</sup>. The national pandemic is causing destabilizing effects for all important sectors of South African society<sup>2</sup>. In addition to medical and emotional distress, people with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) have to face negative social responses including gossip, discrimination in daily life, and violence. These reactions are summarized under the term "HIV/AIDS related Stigma"- and turned out to be a major barrier to effective responses to the epidemic<sup>3</sup>. Little research has been done to quantify the extent of stigma in the South African society so far- and little is known about driving factors that lead people to stigmatize against PLWHA<sup>4</sup>. Only if more scientific knowledge can be gathered around these determining factors of HIV/AIDS related stigma, measures of intervention can be developed, established and evaluated-, so that existent stigmatizing tendencies can be diminished.

My research project therefore is designed as a comprehensive statistical analysis with the main focus on the development of standardized indicators that allow a valid and reliable measurement of stigmatizing attitudes- as well as the measurement and validation of possible determining factors of the phenomenon. The main objective of my field research period in South Africa was the collection of quantitative data to serve as empirical fundament of my PhD-thesis, which is mainly considered with the research question: "*What factors lead people to stigmatize against*

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<sup>1</sup> For further information visit the UNAIDS Country website for South Africa: <http://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/southafrica>

<sup>2</sup> For further information visit the Avert HIV and AIDS country website for South Africa: <http://www.avert.org/aidssouthafrica.htm#contentTable0>

On the impact of HIV/AIDS on South African society, see also: Dorrington, Rob / Bradshaw, Debbie / Johnson, Leigh / Butlender, Debbie: The Demographic Impact of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. National Indicators. Cape Town, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> For further information visit the UNAIDS Website on HIV/AIDS related Stigma and Discrimination: <http://www.unaids.org/en/targetsandcommitments/eliminatingstigmaanddiscrimination>

<sup>4</sup> First quantitative studies on HIV/AIDS related Stigma in South Africa have been published from 2002.

See: Parker, R. Oyosi, W. Kelly, K. & Fox, S. (2002). *On the move: The response of public transport commuters to HIV/AIDS in South Africa*.

Comprehensive multivariate analyses were mainly published by Maughan-Brown between 2004 and 2008.

See: Maughan-Brown, B. (2004). Measuring HIV/AIDS Stigma. University of Cape Town (UCT) : Centre for Social Sciences Research (CSSR). Working Paper No 74. Cape Town: CSSR.

See: Maughan Brown, B. (2006). Quantifying Stigma in the Adult Population of Cape Town. UCT. CSSR Working Paper No.165. Cape Town: CSSR.

See: Maughan-Brown, B. (2008). A Multidimensional Quantitative Evaluation of HIV/AIDS-related Stigma in Cape Town, South Africa. Dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Economics, UCT. Cape Town.

*people with HIV/AIDS?"* As research locations, national colleges and universities in Cape Town were selected. The Quantification of HIV/AIDS related stigma and possible determining factors within Institutions of the education system is regarded as particularly relevant: Both, today's university students and today's college students will hold key positions in future South Africa. Therefore their present negative attitudes among these young adults can forge future stigmatization. If recognized early enough in the environment of these institutions, colleges and universities provide excellent opportunities to intervene against stigma, before attitudes have strengthened and students have taken their position in society.

My data collection period took place between November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012 and April 26<sup>th</sup> 2013 in Cape Town, South Africa. The University of the Western Cape as my SYLFF host institution-, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology- and the three public FET Colleges that are situated in the Cape Town Municipal Area were selected as research locations<sup>5</sup>. In preparation for the data collection, research permissions had to be requested from all institutions involved in the project. In the scope of the research applications, I had to prove, that my project would be conducted in accordance with the common South African and international standards of research ethics<sup>6</sup>. In order to let universities and colleges benefit from the project, data sharing agreements were made with the Department of Higher Education of the Western Cape Province, the university administrations and the managers and student support staff members of five FET College Campuses. All institutions mentioned will receive the aggregated results of my survey in order to review their individual HIV/AIDS related strategies and policies. All research applications were handed in by mid- December 2012 and positively answered between January and April 2013. Since it took relatively long to get permission from some partner institutions-

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<sup>5</sup> FET Colleges South Africa is a nationwide association of colleges for vocational and educational training. The three selected FET Colleges in the Cape Town area were: False Bay College, College of Cape Town and Northlink College. Among these three colleges, five campuses were selected. Two False Bay Campuses and Two Northlink Campuses were included. Since Colleges of Cape Town gave the permission for field research in April, only one campus could be included. For further information on FET Colleges visit the website of FET Colleges South Africa:

[http://www.fetcolleges.co.za/Site\\_FET\\_Overview.aspx](http://www.fetcolleges.co.za/Site_FET_Overview.aspx)

<sup>6</sup> The researcher agreed to conduct the project in full acceptance of all relevant international guidelines of research ethics. In particular, the following guidelines for socio-scientific and statistical research projects have been reviewed:

- National Advisory Board on Research Ethics. (2009). Ethical principles of research in the humanities and social and behavioral sciences and proposals for ethical review. Helsinki.
- Southern African Association for Institutional Research (SAAIR) Code of Ethics.(2005).
- International Statistical Institute. (2010). DECLARATION ON PROFESSIONAL ETHICS. Reykjavík.

For further information on the requirements of ethical research at South African Universities, visit the website of UWC Research Committee:

[http://196.21.45.52/index.php?module=cms&action=showfulltext&id=gen20Srv23Nme0\\_7662\\_1258634842&parent=gen11Srv7Nme54\\_6363\\_1239265491&menustate=research](http://196.21.45.52/index.php?module=cms&action=showfulltext&id=gen20Srv23Nme0_7662_1258634842&parent=gen11Srv7Nme54_6363_1239265491&menustate=research)

and the website of CPUT Board of Research Ethics: <http://www.cput.ac.za/research-committees>

and since details of field research had to be negotiated with officials from five FET College Campuses, I had to extend my field research period by six weeks<sup>7</sup>.

A pilot study was conducted among students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in January 2013. After final adjustments of the questionnaire, data collection at UWC began in February- and was finished on April 24<sup>th</sup>. Until then, the survey instrument was administered among more than 1.300 University students and among more than 600 college students. For the data collection on the university campuses, a random route method was applied, while college students were included with the method of stepwise sampling: First, different campuses of the three FEC Colleges were selected. In a second step, classes on each campus were selected in cooperation with administrative staff and student support staff at the campuses. In both cases, students filled out the questionnaires themselves. The average time for a questionnaire was between 15 and 20 minutes.

First insights show relatively low levels of HIV/AIDS related stigma among students from all institutions that were included in the survey: Less than ten percent of UWC students and FET College students for instance agree that *“People with HIV/AIDS should feel ashamed”* and less than five percent of survey participants would *“cancel a meeting if somebody would bring a person with HIV/AIDS”*.

Altogether, my field research project in Cape Town was completed successfully. The data will provide a strong empirical fundament for my PhD thesis and for further academic work. Insights can be used by my partner institutions to implement new- or to review existing programs that address HIV related stigma and related topics. Besides the data collection, I learnt a lot about the most important requirements of ethical research on a sensitive topic like HIV/AIDS related stigma in the environment of institutions of the South African Education System. In many discussions that I had with students, administrative staff and student support staff of my partner institutions, I could gain valuable insights on common opinions and frequent misapprehensions of young adults regarding attitudes towards PLWHA-, HIV/AIDS related Knowledge and further important HIV/AIDS related topics.

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<sup>7</sup> Initially it was planned to end the field research period on March 12th 2013. The final return date was shifted to April 26th 2013, since research permissions from and field research agreements with some partner- institutions were granted in early April only.