



EFFECTS OF HIV/AIDS IN A BUSINESS ORGANIZATION: THE CASE OF SELECTED RETAIL BUSINESSES IN BOTSWANA

Phodiso Kgalaeng¹,

Koketso Jeremiah²ⁱ

¹B.Ed (Final Year Business Education Student),
University of Botswana, Botswana

²Lecturer, Department of Languages and Social Sciences Education,
University of Botswana, Botswana

Abstract:

Businesses are important to the society that they serve. They provide goods and services to society as well as create employment. AS businesses provide these services to society they are in turn affected adversely by diseases through infection of employees. This study was carried out to find out the effects of HIV/AIDS on retail businesses in Botswana. A sample of nineteen (19) respondents was drawn from retail stores owned by Spar Botswana. The key research questions were: 1. How does HIV/AIDS affect the running of a business? 2. How do business firms deal with the effects of HIV/AIDS? 3. Do business organizations have workplace policies on HIV/AIDS that seek to minimize its effects? The key objectives were: 1. How the running of a business is affected by HIV/AIDS. 2. How business firms deal with the effects of HIV/AIDS. 3. If business organizations have workplace policies on HIV/AIDS that seek to minimize its effects. The study used the qualitative research method. The data collection techniques or tools used were the questionnaire and structured interviews. One of the key findings was that HIV/AIDS affects worker productivity in many ways, the key ones being that it lowers productivity and hence profitability. Another important finding was that some business organizations have policies that guide or govern workers to cope with the HIV/AIDS epidemic at the workplaces. Spar Botswana retail businesses have such policies for the benefit of both the workers and the employees. The study came up with several; recommendations to make businesses to cope with the HIV/AIDS situation at the workplaces. Two of these recommendations

ⁱ Correspondence: email jeremiahk@mopipi.ub.bw

are 1. Businesses formulate and implement policies that encourage workers to test for HIV/AIDS on regular basis. 2. Businesses should host testing days where workers get immediate consultation when they find out if they are infected.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS, business organization, Botswana

1. Introduction

HIV/AIDS generally has an effect on the markets and consumer behaviour of people. A healthier labour force generally has more spending power and generates a more vibrant economy. The International Labour Organization estimates that there are 39 million people living with HIV in the world and that 36 million out of these are engaged in activities that are productive and hence contribute to the world economy (UNAIDS, 2014). HIV/AIDS affects businesses resulting in escalation of costs and contraction of markets.

If the prevalence of HIV/AIDS reaches a high level in a country or within a firm, the impact of the disease may be dramatic for the business involved. Deaths from AIDS may lead directly to a reduction in the number of available workers. In the event that skilled workers who occupy important positions in the firm become sick or die from AIDS, the company may lose its institutional memory – know-how (that is, knowledge, skills and technology) accumulated through many years of experience. This occurs predominantly among workers in their most productive years, as younger, less experienced workers replace experienced workers and worker productivity may be reduced (Bollinger & Stover, 1999).

Direct costs may include impact on insurance, retirement funds, health and safety, medical insurance, recruitment costs for new staff – advertising and training, for instance, and HIV testing for new and existing staff and funeral costs (Bollinger & Stover, 1999).

Indirect costs include absenteeism, loss of skills, loss of tacit knowledge, in a decline in the morale of workers. When added up these costs extremely escalate resulting in decline in productivity. The HIV epidemic poses acute challenges to businesses, more especially in countries where the HIV prevalence is high, in those countries whose governments have limited capability to provide the needed health care, and most acutely, in countries facing both challenges. Most companies are concerned about three types of business risks associated with the spread of HIV/AIDS: financial, reputational and, with respect to small and medium-size businesses, the viability of the company (Bollinger & Stover 1999).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Business organizations are important in the society as they create employment, provide services and sell goods to the society or communities. Business organizations also give back to the society or community through charity work and other services that benefit the community. As businesses carry out their work (providing goods and services) their employees are affected by the spread of HIV/AIDS which in turn adversely affects their productivity. Once their employees contract HIV/AIDS, business productivity falls, resulting in profit loss, and in some cases, causing business closure. This study sought to find out the effects of HIV/AIDS in a business organization. In essence, the study sought to find out how employees of business organizations who have contracted HIV/AIDS impact on business productivity.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions are such that if they are answered, address the problem statement:

1. How does HIV/AIDS affect the running of a business?
2. How do business firms deal with the effects of HIV/AIDS?
3. Do business organizations have workplace policies on HIV/AIDS that seek to minimize its effects?

1.3 Research Objectives

This research sought to find out:

1. How the running of a business is affected by HIV/AIDS.
2. How business firms deal with the effects of HIV/AIDS.
3. If business organizations have workplace policies on HIV/AIDS that seek to minimize its effects.

2. Literature Review

The literature review covers various aspects of HIV/AIDS including impact on employees and policy issues.

A study carried out in Botswana found that the impact of HIV/AIDS was dependent on the type of business involved, the level of skills of employees, the types of benefits the company provided, and the amount of savings (or wealth) held by the company or firm. This study was based on a sample of five selected firms ((Bollinger & Stover, 1999).

Rosen (2003) conducted a study to find out the cost-benefit of the impact of HIV/AIDS on a firm. The findings indicated that if a company invested on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, it will net gain from its investment.

Running a business is becoming costly because of the AIDS epidemic. This is because companies directly pay for several things with regard to the welfare of their employees. For example, they pay for the treatment of their sick employees, they pay for medical aid schemes for which their employees are members, they pay by loss of productivity when an employee becomes sick and absenteeism of due to the disease, as well as the increasing costs of recruiting and training new staff to replace those dying or leaving work due to illness (Barks-Ruggles, et al.: 2001).

Several countries in Africa have policies on HIV/AIDS, for example, Zambia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Botswana is working towards having an HIV/AIDS policy too; at the moment the Botswana HIV/AIDS policy is still in draft form. It is hoped that it will be finalized soon.

HIV/AIDS policies in Africa share some common characteristics, for example, they all have key principles, overall purposes, scope, and objectives, inter alia. What follows are the HIV/AIDS policy objectives for selected countries in Southern and East Africa. The objectives of the HIV/AIDS policy (in draft form) for Botswana are (Botswana National Policy on HIV/AIDS and Employment – Final Draft, p9):

1. To create and sustain a safe, healthy, healthy, fair, equitable and non-discriminatory work environment.
2. To create a climate for collaboration in dealing with HIV/AIDS for the mutual benefit of all.

The objectives for the HIV/AIDS policy for the Republic of Zambia are, to:

- a) Provide legal framework for the establishment of a multisectoral autonomous institution for technical guidance to implementing agencies and monitor and evaluate the national response to HIV/AIDS/STI/TB;
- b) Provide a framework and facilitate advocacy and social mobilization in order to promote partnership in the fight HIV/AIDS/STI/TB;
- c) Intensify and strengthen preventive intervention programmes by various stakeholders in order to reduce the spread and impact of HIV/STI/TB;
- d) Reduce morbidity and mortality related to HIV/AIDS/STI/TB;
- e) Eliminate the socio-economic impact of HIV/AIDS;
- f) Upheld and protect the human rights and dignity and of all people with HIV/AIDS/STI/TB;
- g) Ensure Gender Mainstreaming in all HIV/AIDS/STI/TB interventions;
- h) Encourage and support research in HIV/AIDS prevention and management;

- i) Ensure mobilization of resources by government by government for the implementation of HIV/AIDS/STI/TB interventions ; and
- j) Monitor and evaluate interventions of the National HIV/AIDS /STI/TB policy.

3. Methodology

The research method used in this study was qualitative. The data collection methods used was the questionnaire and structured interview. These data collection methods were test for validity and reliability before being used to collect data. This was done through pilot testing. Validity is the degree to which an instrument measures what it is meant to measure successfully while reliability means the degree to which an instrument repeatedly measures what it is meant to measure and nothing else.

The purposive sampling technique was used to draw a sample for the study. Purposive sampling was preferred because it has the potential to provide information that is both insightful and rich (Patton, 2002). A total of ten (10) questionnaires were administered to cashiers, two (2) to cleaners, and five (5) to shop assistants at a Spar Botswana supermarket/retail store in Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana. An oral interview was administered to the manager. One (1) employee participated in the interview. The sample size for the study was therefore, nineteen (19).

3.1 Data analysis/Presentation and discussion of findings

The data presented below are the responses that were acquired through the use of the questionnaire. The responses are analyzed under an appropriate theme.

3.2 HIV/AIDS: A concern at the workplace

Respondents were asked if HIV/AIDS was an issue of concern at their workplace. The question was open-ended with a Yes or No response. Figure 1 shows the findings of the responses from the respondents.

Figure 1: HIV/AIDS; A concern at the workplace

Yes (%)	No (%)
84	16

The majority of the respondents (84%) thought that HIV/AIDS was an issue of concern at their workplace. The remaining 16 % of the respondents thought that HIV/AIDS was not an issue of concern at their workplace.

3.3 Effect of HIV/AIDS on labour force

Figure 2 below shows the results of the respondents when asked if HIV/AIDS affected labour (or employees) at their workplace. The possible responses were Yes or No accompanied with reasons for those who responded in the affirmative (Yes). Figure 2 shows the responses of those who responded to the questionnaire.

Figure 2: Effect of HIV/AIDS on labour force

Yes (%)	No (%)
89	11

Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the respondents agree that HIV/AIDS affected labour force while the remaining 11% disagreed. Those who agreed that HIV/AIDS affected labour force gave various reasons and this included the fact that when an employee was sick or had a sick relative the employee's productivity fell meaning that he/she would become less effective at work. The decline in productivity would obviously result in decrease in profitability. Additionally, the amount of stress would increase for managers and employees, healthy employees would have to stretch themselves to cover areas of work suffering from absenteeism of workmates due to illness, and an increase in medical aid costs for staff as they increasingly seek medical attention.

3.4 HIV/AIDS workshop attendance

Figure 3 below shows responses to HIV/AIDS awareness workshops. Respondents were asked to answer in the affirmative (Yes) for attending or in the negative (No) for not attending.

Figure 3: HIV/AIDS awareness workshop attendance

Yes (%)	No (%)
68	32

Figure 3 shows that 68% of the respondents have attended workshops while 32 % of them have not. Spar Botswana provides workshops and training sessions to help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS amongst its employees.

3.5 HIV/AIDS training session's attendance

Figure 4 shows the responses of participants to a question that required them to say they attended training sessions on HIV/AIDS.

Figure 4: Training session's attendance

Yes (%)	No (%)
68	32

The majority of the respondents (68%) have attended HIV/AIDS training sessions while 32% of the employees have not attended training sessions.

Participants who responded to question 4 were also asked to state the sponsor(s) of the HIV/AIDS training sessions that they attended. The responses are shown on Figure 5.

Figure 5: Sponsors of HIV/AIDS training sessions

Spar Botswana	68%
Others	32%

Figure 5 shows that 68 of the respondents attended training sessions on HIV/AIDS at Spar while 32% said they attended training sessions organized by other organizations.

3.6 HIV Status disclosure

Respondents were asked if they were asked to disclose their HIV status at their workplace. All respondents (19 or 100%) said they were not required to disclose their HIV status at their workplace.

3.7 Employees' preparedness to interact with HIV/AIDS infected people at their workplace

Respondents were asked if they were prepared to interact with HIV/AIDS infected people at their workplace. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the respondents said they were prepared to interact with HIV/AIDS infected people at their workplace while thirty-two (32%) said they were not prepared to do so.

3.8 Employees' knowledge of a policy on HIV/AIDS at their workplace

Employees were asked if they knew of any HIV/AIDS policy at their workplace. All employees (100%) in the sample said they knew of an HIV/AIDS policy at their workplace. This means that Spar Botswana has an HIV/AIDS policy and it is implanting it in the workplace.

3.9 Opinions of respondents on how businesses should deal with the issue of HIV/AIDS for the benefit of both employees and businesses

Employees were asked to give their opinions on how they felt businesses should deal with the issue of HIV/AIDS for the benefit of both employees and businesses. The respondents gave various responses. However, the majority of the respondents emphasized the need for the employer to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS issues to employees and to increase time for workshops and training and urge employees to participate in HIV/AIDS activities for their benefit and the benefit of the organization in terms of increasing productivity and maximizing profitability. One respondent emphasized the need for Spar Botswana to improve on its policies on dealing with HIV/AIDS issues as these policies appear to be less effective which means that employees are not getting maximum benefits from them and the harsh effects of HIV/AIDS are not being reduced.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings indicate that HIV/AIDS affects business organizations. The impact of HIV/AIDS on businesses include: reduction of productivity and profitability. This puts more strain on the economy of the country in the sense that developments are slowed down by employees' absence from work on a large scale. Spar Botswana has implemented policies on HIV/AIDS so as to stabilize the spread of the disease among workers in order to maximize production and to accelerate business growth.

On the basis of the findings, the study recommends that:

1. Businesses formulate and implement policies that encourage workers to test for HIV/AIDS on regular basis.
2. Businesses should host testing days where workers get immediate consultation when they find out if they are infected.
3. Businesses should also provide free counseling to their workers who are infected with HIV/AIDS to promote work ethics and labour efficiency.

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