

SURVEY GIVES HARD FACTS ABOUT THE LIVES OF EDUCATORS

The first seven reports resulting from a comprehensive study of factors determining educator supply and demand in South African public schools were released at a media conference on 31 March in Cape Town. The principal investigators, OLIVE SHISANA and PETER BADCOCK WALTERS, presented the main findings.

Following worrying anecdotal reports that educators seem to be leaving the education profession in large numbers, the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) commissioned a consortium to investigate the validity of this statement. Some of the reasons that were suspected for this included low morale, job dissatisfaction, AIDS and premature mortality.

The consortium consisted of the HSRC and the Medical Research Council (MRC), which produced six of the reports, and the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Mobile Task Team on the Impact of HIV/AIDS on Education (MTT), which produced the seventh report. The following findings warrant highlighting.

EDUCATORS CONSIDERING LEAVING

The HSRC conducted a national survey of 21 358 educators in more than 1 714 randomly selected schools; 97% agreed to participate. This survey revealed that 55% have considered leaving the profession due to inadequate remuneration, increased workload, lack of

career development or professional recognition, dissatisfaction with work policies, job insecurity and lack of choice of where to work.

The factors that prevented educators from leaving were mainly the lack of alternative job opportunities available to them, the opportunities that the occupation allows for the development and empowerment of young people, their participation in decision-making on school policies and the sense of autonomy they experienced because of this, and the friendship and support that they receive from colleagues.

ATTRITION

Intention to leave is not synonymous with leaving. A parallel report, *Educator Attrition & Mortality in South Africa 1997/8-2003/04*, by the MTT, provides the first overview of estimated gross educator attrition (number leaving the education system for whatever reason) rates and trends, by cause, age and gender, in South African public schools.

The average number of educators in the

system has declined over the last seven years, from 386 735 to 368 548 in 2003/04, largely due to a reduction in the number of temporary educators. Attrition (total loss) in the educator workforce fluctuated over this period: the national rate was 9.3% in 1997/98 as a result of the post-apartheid rationalisation process, reducing to 5.5% in 2000/01, before climbing again to 5.9% by 2002/03. By 2002/03, over 21 000 educators were leaving the system annually, although up to a third of these may re-enter the system at some future point.

While the largest cause of attrition between 1997/98 and 2003/04 was contract expiry (81%), these terminations were almost immediately followed by contract reinstatement and do not constitute attrition in the conventional sense. The next highest cause was resignation (9%), followed by death (3%) and retirement (3%). However, excluding contract expiry and reinstatement, the breakdown of attrition by cause over the same period is as follows: 53.1% due to resignation, 17.7% deceased, 17.7% retirement, and 8.7% medical reasons.

The proportion of attrition due to mortality (all causes) increased from 7.0% in 1997/98 to 17.7% in 2003/04. The proportion of attrition due to medical reasons grew from 4.6% to 8.7% over the same period.

TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Factors affecting teaching and learning reveal significant disparities in conditions, both within and between provinces. Large class sizes of 46 or more are reported in Limpopo (64%), Mpumalanga (60%) and Eastern Cape (59%), in contrast to Northern Cape (22%) and Western Cape (22%). Urban/rural disparities in class size were also observed, 60% of rural educators, compared with 24% of urban educators, reported teaching classes of 46 or more learners.

School fees also affect the teaching and learning environment. Western Cape, Gauteng and Northern Cape have annual school fees averaging approximately R800, while Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga averaged R150.

An analysis of matric results over a three-year period indicates that the wealthier provinces, Western Cape and Northern Cape, obtained high percentages (above 86%) while the poorer provinces, Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape, achieved less than a 60% matric pass rate.

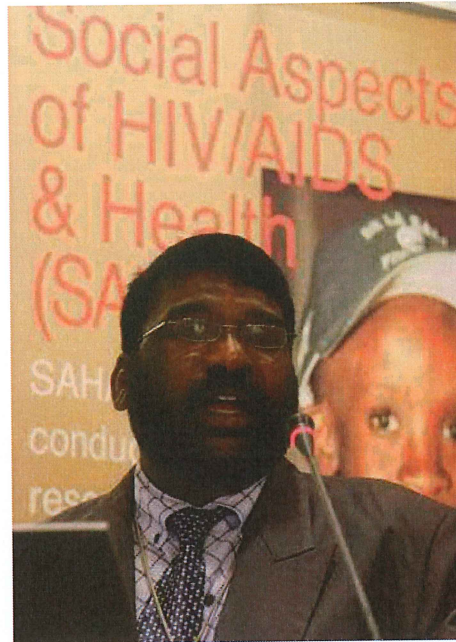
HIV/AIDS AMONG EDUCATORS

Based on a nationally representative sample of 17 088 educators who gave an oral fluid or blood specimen for HIV testing (response rate: 83%) 12.7% are HIV positive; if sex and age are taken into account, the figure is not significantly different from that of the general population.

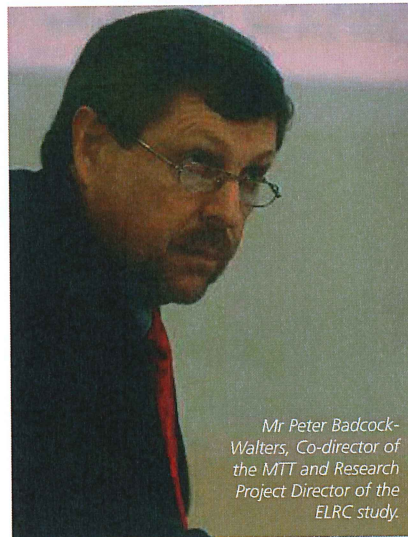
African educators were most likely to be HIV positive compared with the other groups; they were also most likely to be part of low economic status and more likely to be placed in rural areas without their families.

THE KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY ARE:

- ▶ HIV prevalence is the highest in the 25–34 age group (21.4%).
- ▶ More than a fifth (22%) of HIV-positive educators would need immediate antiretroviral therapy.
- ▶ The overwhelming majority of educators (75%) did not drink alcohol in the past 12 months; 20% are classified as low-risk drinkers and 5.3% as high-risk drinkers.



Mr Peter Badcock-Walters, Co-director of the MTT and Research Project Director of the ELRC study.



- ▶ Two-thirds of educators who were considering leaving the profession were in the scarce fields such as technology, natural sciences, economics and management.

DETERMINANTS OF HIV INFECTION

The HIV epidemic seems to be driven by multiple sexual partnerships, low and inconsistent condom use, having significantly younger sexual partners, spending nights away from home, and gaps in the knowledge of HIV transmission.

WORKPLACE POLICIES

After reviewing all key Department of Education (DoE) workplace policies as well



1 Mr Dhaya Govender, General Secretary of the Education Labour Relations Council at the media conference.
2 Dr Olive Shisana, Principal Investigator of the ELRC study and Executive Director of the HSRC's Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS and Health Research Programme.

- ▶ The proportion of educators absent from work for longer than 10 days was highest among those diagnosed with TB in the last five years, high-risk drinkers, and those with lung or breathing problems, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or anaemia. The main reason for absenteeism was high blood pressure, followed by smoking, HIV positive status, stomach ulcers, arthritis or rheumatism, and high-risk drinking. Low morale, intention to quit teaching, low job satisfaction and high job stress are strongly associated with a higher number of days absent from work and days feeling unwell at work.
- ▶ The health of educators is apparently poorer than that of the general population, considering that 10.6% had been hospitalised in the previous 12 months. This is higher than the 7% observed in the general population in the 2002 Nelson Mandela/HSRC study of HIV/AIDS.

as those of two unions, the HSRC report concludes that the transformation of the education sector has been largely successful, especially in the policy-making arena.

The major criticism centred on the difficulty in implementing the new policies. Some concerns were expressed about some important HIV/AIDS issues that are not covered in the policies.

From the interview-based survey of educators it was found that the majority was aware of some DoE workplace policies or directives, such as giving sick leave to educators (87%) and prohibition of sexual relationships between educators and learners (64%) as well as the DoE's HIV/AIDS policy (65%). However, educators were not aware of their unions' policies (46%).

A slight majority of the educators (52%) had attended HIV/AIDS training and workshops and 48% had taught a class on HIV/AIDS.

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HSRC review

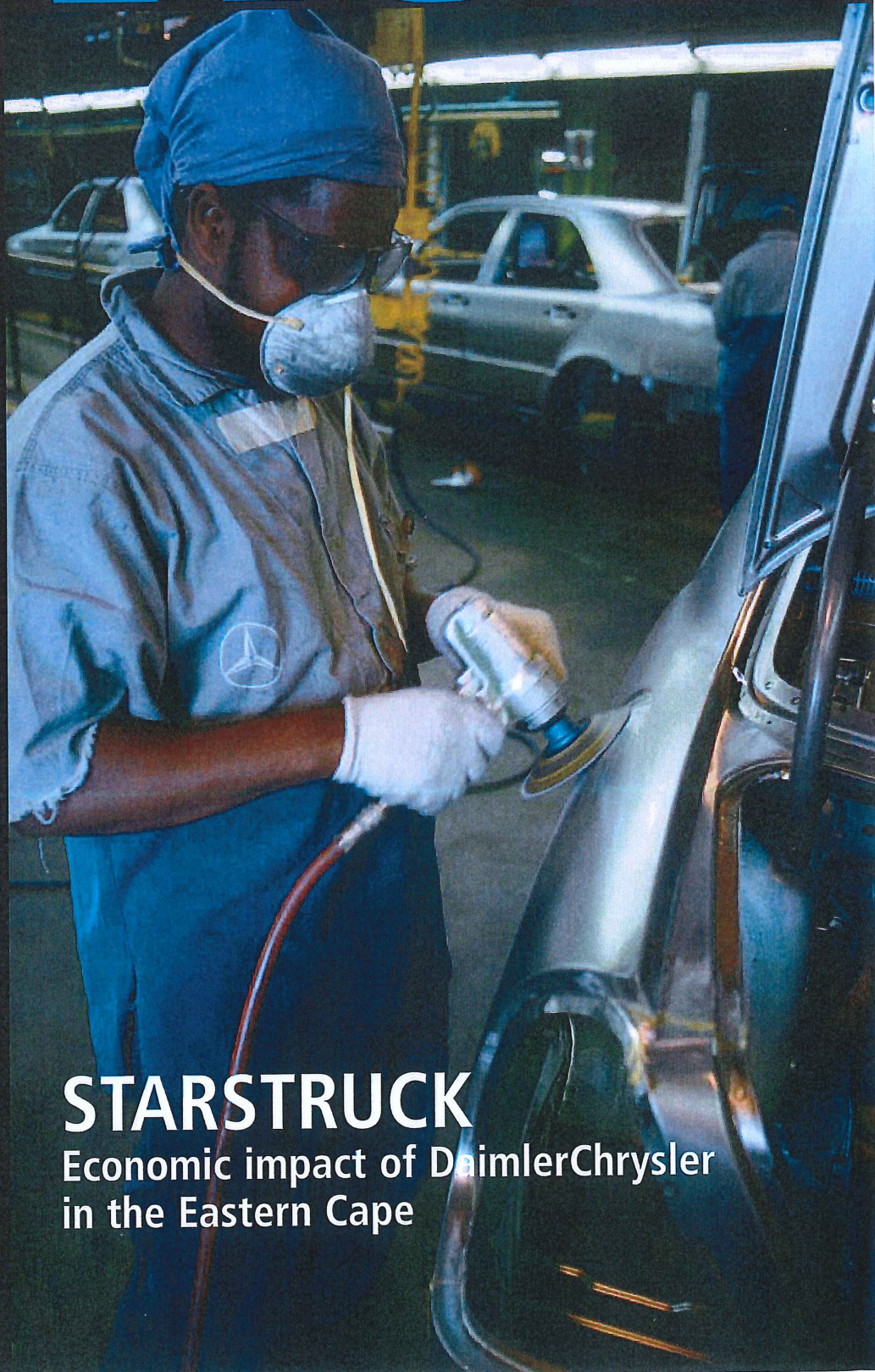
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