



Youth, sex and beliefs

Pieter-Dirk Uys, the well-known political satirist, has launched an assault on South Africa's most serious crisis, the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Through personal contact with youth in the course of innumerable educational school visits, he obtained first-hand information about their understanding and practice of sex. (His two recent memoirs, *Elections and Erections* and *Between the Devil and the Deep*, tell his tales amusingly and poignantly.) His in-your-face approach has had prudes protesting, but two reports in this issue of *SAMJ* provide further solid backing for his views.

The Birth to Twenty longitudinal study of child health and development at the University of the Witwatersrand provides insight into some issues around teenage pregnancy as children who formed part of the original birth cohort have begun to fall pregnant (Richter *et al.*, p. 122).

By the 1970s teenage pregnancies were recognised as a problem worldwide. While early concerns focused on potential obstetric complications, subsequent studies showed that adolescents do not present any problems unanticipated in other primiparas. The paper highlights that lack of social support is a risk factor for the adjustment and development of both young mothers and their children.

Rachel Mash and colleagues surveyed sexual behaviour among Anglican youth in the Western Cape (p. 124). Since church organisations reach into most communities, their study explored both behaviour and the relevance of messages such as 'no sex before marriage'. For some readers of the *Journal* who are sheltered from experiences of youth the findings may be shocking. The experiences among Anglican youth are similar to other surveys reporting sexual activity of 38% for Grades 8 - 11 in the Western Cape. Recommendations include peer educators who are closer in age to the youth; training courses initially focusing on these peer educators; emphasis on building healthy relationships; equipping parents to be more able to deal with these matters; and avoidance of stigmatisation.

Both papers stress the importance of open and accepting communication among people who can help. This is a task for us all including family, educators, health professionals and religious organisations. We are also grateful to many individuals including writers, activists and 'entertainers' such as Pieter-Dirk Uys for their courageous example and often self-sacrifice in showing the way.

The stress of Africa

The euphoria of post-colonial independence that swept Africa from the 1950s often gave way to warfare, kleptocracies and general economic decline (characteristics often also part of colonial rule!). With new initiatives such as NEPAD and debt relief for the poorest countries, there is evidence that economic and organisational fortunes are changing in Africa.

Okulate and Jones report on 'post-traumatic stress disorder, survivor guilt and substance use' in hospitalised Nigerian army veterans (p. 144). This paper provides useful insights because of the sheer volume and the long duration of conflicts on the African continent. They found that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was common among Nigerian soldiers exposed to combat in Liberia and Sierra Leone (22%, which is much higher than in the general population). Soldiers' adaptive capacity weakens with increased duration of exposure to combat.

The debilitating effects of PTSD and commonly occurring co-morbidity deserve more attention. For example, the effects of the intensity and long duration of defending or liberating apartheid South Africa through military or civil action have taken their toll on untold numbers of South Africans. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided a glimpse of this.

Vitamin C: History and controversy

Historical evidence points to scurvy being present in ancient Egypt and afflicting Roman soldiers. Kay de Villiers (p. 106) reviews its history and provides a historical account of its importance to the sailors of the Dutch East India Company, hence the victualling station at the Cape. The hardships that sailors endured and the serious nature of scurvy, which resulted in large numbers of deaths, fills one with awe for their amazing achievements against such enormous odds. Despite several observations over many decades that, in particular, 'sower oranges and lemons' were most fruitful for this disease, sailors continued to succumb to scurvy. Albert Szent-Györgyi was awarded the Nobel prize in 1937 for the synthesis of ascorbic acid and proof of its antiscorbutic action.

HIV/AIDS initiatives interrogated

Three papers explore important aspects of managing the pandemic in South Africa.

The financial and economic costs of providing HAART to HIV-infected health care workers in KwaZulu-Natal are explored by Deghaye *et al.* (p. 140). They find that costs are reasonable and suggest that providing HAART first to health care workers could assist in alleviating the skills crisis.

A study by Stevens *et al.* (p. 134) at Anglo Platinum showed that information gathered from prevalence surveys assists and monitors workplace programmes.

Connelly and Rosen investigated treatment for HIV/AIDS at South Africa's largest employers (p. 128). They conclude that the extent of current private-sector contribution to national treatment goals is less than media coverage suggests.

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