

Stigma as a barrier to the use of occupational health units for tuberculosis services in South Africa

CITATION

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ABSTRACT

Setting: Tuberculosis (TB) is the leading cause of death in South Africa, and health care workers (HCWs) are disproportionately affected. The resulting absenteeism strains the already overburdened health system. Although hospital occupational health care units (OHUs) are cost-effective and of crucial importance in tackling the TB epidemic, the fear of being stigmatised by other colleagues might lead HCWs to avoid using OHUs.

Objective: To investigate whether the perception of TB stigma among colleagues has a negative effect on the willingness to use OHUs for TB services.

Design: In the Free State Province, South Africa, a representative sample of 804 HCWs from six hospitals were surveyed on workplace stigma as a predictor for the use of OHUs for TB services. Applying structural equation modelling, we also controlled for exogenous variables.

Results: There was a significant negative relationship between the perception of stigmatising attitudes and behaviours among co-workers and the use of OHUs for TB screening (b0.21, P¼0.000), treatment (b0.16, P¼0.001) and isoniazid preventive therapy (b0.17, P¼ 0.000).

Conclusions: The negative effect of TB stigma on OHU use among HCWs can impact upon their health and increase hospital costs. This needs to be addressed by interventions combating TB stigma among HCWs in the workplace.