Formal employment, social capital and health-related quality of life: A cross-sectional analytical study among people living with HIV in Johannesburg, South Africa

Willis Odek

University of Aberdeen, UK
odekw@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT

Ever since the seminal Marienthal studies during the Great Depression of the 1930s, studies have linked employment to health and well-being of individuals. However, employment participation for people living with HIV (PLHIV) may not necessarily provide positive health outcomes given negative social responses to HIV infection, particularly stigma and discrimination. Using causal steps approach, the study examines the extent to which the linkage between formal employment status and health-related quality of life is affected by both social capital and HIV-related stigma among PLHIV. Quantitative data were obtained from 554 male and female adults on HIV treatment for at least two years in South Africa. Health-related quality of life (HRQoL) was measured using the validated Medical Outcomes Short Form (SF-36) (Quality Metric, USA) and is represented by physical and mental component summary scores. Formally employed study participants experienced superior HRQoL in comparison to those not formally employed. Both employment status and physical and mental component summary scores were unrelated to objective measures of HIV disease status - CD4 count and viral load. Levels of social capital did not vary significantly by formal employment status. Perceived HIV-related stigma was significantly lower among formally employed study participants than those who were not formally employed, but only in the dimension of personalised stigma, after controlling for potential confounders. Social capital indicators were significantly positively associated with mental but were unrelated to physical component summary scores. All HIV-related stigma scale scores were inversely associated with social capital indicators and with physical and mental component summary scores, after controlling for potential confounders. These results provide little support for mediation of the relationship between formal employment status and HRQoL by social capital and HIV-related stigma. Both social capital and HIV-related stigma have independent relevance to, but formal employment accounts for the largest effect on the health and well-being of PLHIV.

Keywords: employment; social capital; HIV; Health-related quality of life; South Africa; Stigma