

ABSTRACT

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic has spread throughout the world and its prevalence in sport has received increasing attention. The aim of this exploratory study was to examine the knowledge, attitudes and relationship behaviour with respect to HIV and AIDS among athletes participating in contact sport. In addition, this study included a preliminary investigation into whether sport participation facilitates the development of life skills which would act as a buffer against the risky behaviours that increases vulnerability to infection. A self-report questionnaire was specifically constructed to address the aims of the study. The sample comprised of 38 male athletes between the ages of 18 and 30, from the following codes of contact sport: boxing, rugby, and taekwondo in Gauteng. Content analysis and descriptive statistics were used to analyse the participants' responses. The findings indicated that the athletes had a good level of knowledge, but some misconceptions still remain. Attitudes of the athletes appeared to be in favour of mandatory testing and disclosure of one's status. Positions on the participation of HIV-positive athletes in sport alternated between exclusion on the basis of safety and inclusion so as not to facilitate the proliferation of stigma. Few athletes reported continued involvement in high-risk behaviour, but it was encouraging that the largest part of participants declared exhibiting preventative behaviour. Sport participation was found to have some biopsychosocial impact on participants, which may extend to enhance health-seeking behaviour. Research findings may be fundamental in directing future AIDS prevention efforts within and beyond the sports arena.

KEYWORDS: HIV and AIDS Prevention, Knowledge, Attitudes, Relationship Behaviour, Life Skills, Contact Sport.