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"The (human) body is like a car - it needs service": exploring the factors influencing the health seeking behaviors of working class men in Modimolle Town, Limpopo province

Madhuha, Edmond

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Abstract

This study is founded on the argument that the health of a population is dependent on both structural factors and human agency. Literature shows that men are generally poor at attending to their health needs as compared to women, with statistics confirming higher mortality rates and lower life expectancy among them. This research study aimed to explore the factors influencing the health seeking behaviours of black South African working class men in Modimolle Township, Limpopo Province (South Africa). The study followed a qualitative approach where semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used for data gathering. A snowball non-probability sampling technique was used to select 15 black working class men between the ages of 29 and 50 years. All the interviews were conducted and audio recorded in Modimolle Township between two residential locations. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Thematic content analysis was employed for data analysis in which emerging themes bordered around the identities of men, their relationship to their bodies and their perceptions of health care systems. The construction of masculinities among men created multiple and varied ways to their health seeking behaviours. Men engaged in multiple practices ranging from preventive medical check-ups, the use of various types of enemas as well as the use of traditional medicines for the maintenance of their health. These practices were associated with the construction of a responsible masculinity among the participants which challenges the notion that masculinity is associated with negative health seeking behaviours among men.

Key words: Responsible masculinity, *maikarabelo*, working class, health-seeking behaviours, men, Modimolle