



StrataMark Dynamic Solutions is proud to partner with the Southern Africa HIV/AIDS Collaboration (SAHAC) by providing research services for an important study among students in South African schools. The purpose of the research is to assess the impact of a unique pilot program focused on the prevention of HIV infection among teens and pre-teens.

SAHAC and the Motivation for Research

In 2009, the latest year for which data is available, an estimated 5.6 million people in South Africa were living with HIV and AIDS—a disease that cannot be cured, but can be prevented. SAHAC is a South African/North American collaboration of nine Christian non-profit organizations, businesses and churches responding to the HIV-AIDS pandemic in South Africa. The goal is to reduce new HIV infections by 30%-50% over five years in participating communities by seeding a youth movement - a positive counter-epidemic - in which an increasing number of youth embrace the only behavior that eliminates the risk of HIV infection - postponing sex until marriage - and persuade their friends to do the same.

The Courage Movement comprises four key elements:

- Courage Curriculum, character-based life skills taught in required Life Orientation classes in public and private high schools and junior highs.
- Courage Clubs and Camps, extra-curricular affiliation activities that provide peer support and leadership development for youth.
- Courage Careers, in-school and extra-curricular career counseling that leads to college scholarships, on-the-job training placements with local businesses, or entrepreneurship opportunities.
- Courage Campaign, a social networking campaign currently under development with the Johannesburg office of a global communication agency.

The aim of the program is to bring about a change in beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors that contribute to HIV infection, and to attain sustainable prevention by giving the next generation hope for a meaningful, AIDS-free life.

In March 2006, a pilot project was launched at Orlando High School in Orlando East, one of the historic Soweto Townships in Johannesburg. The program has since been expanded to eight schools and three churches, with a goal of eventually expanding the program to hundreds of schools and churches throughout Soweto and, eventually, across all of South Africa.

Research

The overall purpose of the SAHAC Research is to track changes in attitudes and behaviors as a result of the Courage Movement initiative. The specific objectives of the Baseline Survey conducted in January 2010 were to:

- Assess current behavior, attitudes and awareness of the Courage Movement at Orlando High School.

- Develop a benchmark for four neighboring schools in the early stages of expansion.
- Determine linkages between attitudes and behaviors - both positive and negative - to help tailor current programs and provide inputs for a new social networking campaign.
- Provide an objective, data-based framework for discussions with program stakeholders such as school and government officials, corporate and private funders, businesses participating in the jobs component, church leaders, and other agencies addressing AIDS prevention.
- Qualify research design and utility in anticipation of expansion beyond current geography, and possibly by other organizations.

A questionnaire to address the above objectives was initially developed by the SAHAC team, based on their extensive knowledge of factors affecting sexual attitudes and behavior among youth in Southern Africa. After being pilot-tested among a sample of students at Orlando High School, StrataMark collaborated with SAHAC to finalize the survey content. It was then distributed to students at the five pilot schools during their “Life Orientation” class at the beginning of the 2010 academic year.

In February 2010, a total of 3,359 hard-copy surveys from the five schools were completed and returned to StrataMark for data entry and tabulation. StrataMark met the challenge of producing a high quality data set by developing and implementing a special data editing algorithm to assure data integrity. In supporting the SAHAC team’s need for significant analytical drill-down capability, StrataMark generated a series of complex data tables that facilitated data exploration at a very granular level based on post hoc segmentation. Working closely with SAHAC teams in the U.S. and Soweto to ensure their specific needs were met, StrataMark prepared report-ready graphs and charts to accelerate their analytical and reporting process.

Results

Results from this baseline survey suggest that the Courage Movement is already beginning to have an impact on attitudes and sexual behaviors among teenagers in the participating schools. Survey findings are being used to help tailor current programs and to assist in the development of a new social networking campaign. Additionally, the SAHAC team is taking intelligence gleaned from this survey to other schools, businesses, and churches in South Africa to help promote the program and encourage participation throughout the region.

The next survey iteration is planned for 2012. It is expected that trending research will confirm the positive changes already documented in the baseline study and observed by the SAHAC team. StrataMark will continue to support SAHAC as the Courage Movement expands to additional schools in South Africa.

The baseline survey findings were presented by SAHAC to the International Business Conference for Partners Worldwide in October 2010, where the SAHAC team was recognized for their work in South Africa.

For more information about SAHAC, visit: <http://www.sahac.org/>