

## INTRODUCTION

Since 1990, the Department of Health has been conducting an annual HIV and syphilis sero-prevalence survey of women attending public health antenatal clinics. This internationally applied method of HIV surveillance remains the most important source of information to estimate HIV infection among young sexually active adults. This information is used to guide policy formulation, to inform intervention programmes and raise public awareness. Pregnant women are examined, as they are representative of the general sexually active heterosexual population. They are also an accessible group as the drawing of blood is part of the routine antenatal care. The key findings of the 2000 survey in the Western Cape Province are presented below.

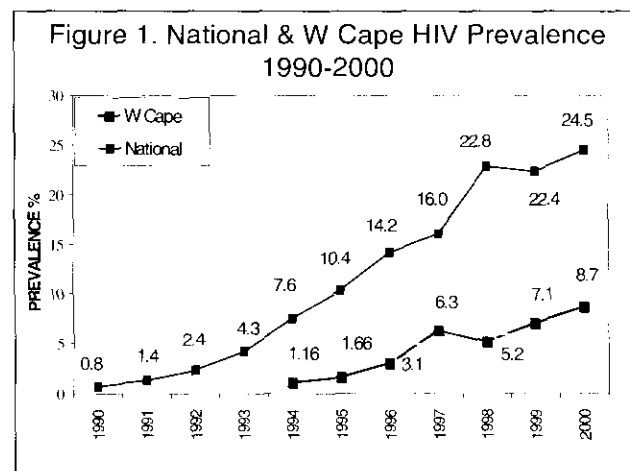
## METHODOLOGY

During the month of October 2000, an anonymous survey was carried out in selected public health antenatal clinics in the Western Cape. The same clinics are studied every year and pregnant women attending for the first time of their current pregnancy are examined. In addition to the provincial survey, a district level survey was carried to examine the prevalence of HIV and syphilis in five districts namely; Mitchells Plain, Tygerberg Eastern, Paarl, Worcester, and George District. A total of 105 facilities participated in the provincial survey and district survey combined with the sample size set at 2040 for the provincial survey and 1661 for the district survey. Women were examined after having consented to participate.

## RESULTS

Based on the 1977 women examined for the provincial survey, 8.7% were HIV infected. This means that one in

every eleven women attending public antenatal clinics is HIV infected. The provincial trends compared with the national trends show that the Western Cape is lagging 4-5 years behind the rest of the country (Figure1).



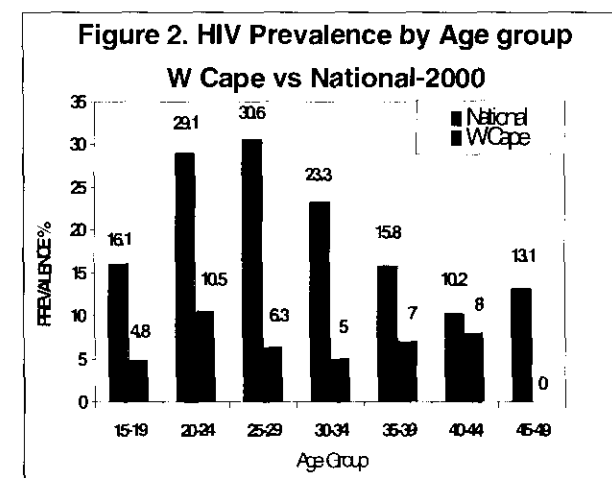
Although the Western Cape has the lowest HIV prevalence compared with the other provinces, it is experiencing the fastest growing epidemic.

**Table1. District, Provincial National: HIV & Syphilis Prevalence**

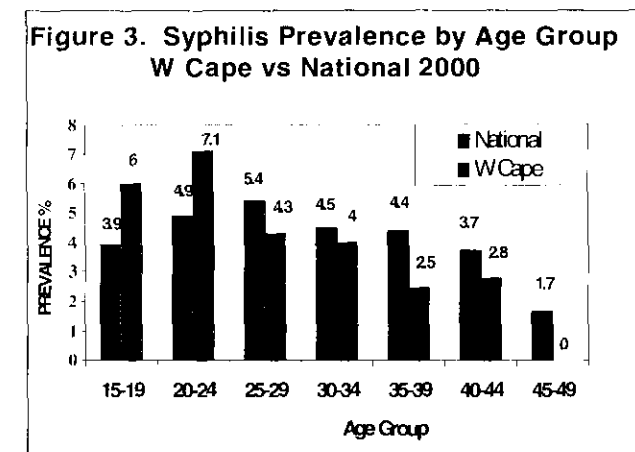
|                   | HIV % | Syphilis % |
|-------------------|-------|------------|
| National          | 24.5  | 4.9        |
| Western Cape      | 8.7   | 5.2        |
| Paarl             | 4.5   | 8.3        |
| Worcester         | 3.2   | 7.9        |
| George            | 5.6   | 9.7        |
| Tygerberg Eastern | 5.1   | 6.5        |
| Mitchells Plain   | 5.4   | 2.5        |

The prevalence of syphilis in the Western Cape (5.2%) was higher than the national figure of 4.9%. In the district

survey the syphilis prevalence ranged from 2.5% to 9.7%(Table 1).



The HIV point prevalence in the Western Cape was the highest among women in the 20-24 age group (Figure 2). Similarly, higher syphilis prevalence was evident in the same age group (Figure 3).



## ***DISCUSSION***

The findings of the survey show that the prevalence of HIV infection amongst public health antenatal clinic attenders increased from 7.1% in 1999 to 8.7% for the year 2000.

Although the Western Cape had the lowest HIV rates compared with the rest of the country, the percentage increase between 1999-2000 at 22.5% was considerably higher than the national figure (9.4%). The prevalence of syphilis in this province was also higher than the national prevalence of the year 2000. Therefore, the Western Cape should not be complacent in its effort against curbing the HIV epidemic, as there is the opportunity to intervene and prevent the further escalation of the HIV problem.

Women between the ages 20–24 reported to have the highest HIV and syphilis rates. These findings, together with socio-demographic and economic factors have serious health-service implications for maternal and child health care.

## ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

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## **HIV PREVALENCE IN THE WESTERN CAPE**

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## ***Results of the Annual Antenatal HIV Survey 2000***

