

## Book review

# “Letting them die” - how HIV/AIDS intervention programmes often fail

- Why do people knowingly engage in sexual behaviour that could lead to a slow and painful premature death?
- Why do the best-intentioned HIV-prevention programmes often have so little impact?

These questions are addressed in a new book by Catherine Campbell, Reader in Social Psychology at the London School of Economics and Adjunct Professor at the University of Natal (Durban).

The book's title is derived from Pieter-Dirk Uys's comment: "In the old South Africa we killed people. Now we're just letting them die."

This is a three-year study of a large HIV/AIDS prevention programme in a Gauteng gold mining community that failed to have any impact on HIV-transmission, despite the investment of millions of rands, and the involvement of an impressive array of stakeholders.

Firstly the book provides a detailed account of sexuality and HIV prevention amongst three groupings: migrant mine-workers, commercial sex-workers and young people (groups identified as living in situations that placed their sexual health at particular risk). It highlights the mismatch between state-of-the art HIV prevention and the realities of peoples' daily lives.

Secondly it tracks the complex relationships between the 'stakeholders' committed to implementing this ambitious programme: local residents and workers; the gold mining industry; trade unions; local and national government; biomedics, nurses, social workers and traditional healers; overseas donors and researchers.

The book highlights how difficult it is to create partnerships in contexts where so-called 'partners' have very different levels of commitment to reducing HIV transmission, very different understandings of the problem and very variable access to power and influence.

"Letting them die" is a forceful presentation of the earliest and most comprehensively researched critique of state-of-the-art approach to HIV prevention in South Africa. It also contains recommendations for reinvigorating the approach, both in the interests of reducing HIV transmission and

strengthening communities so that survivors of the epidemic might reconstruct their lives with some prospect of success.

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The book is available at all leading bookstores in South Africa, including Adams Campus Bookshop at the University of Natal in Durban (Telephone 031- 261 2320), or can be ordered directly from the publisher, c/o Kathy Pittaway on the following email address: [kpittaway@juta.co.za](mailto:kpittaway@juta.co.za)

To view the author's research profile and publications, visit the following webpage address: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/socialPsychology/whosWho/campbell.htm>

