

PREVALENCE OF HEARING LOSS AMONG FORMER MINeworkERS OF THE FORMER BLACK HOMELAND OF THE TRANSKEI, SOUTH AFRICA

BL Meel

Walter Sisulu University, South Africa

Background: Most miners who worked in apartheid South Africa came from the Transkei, which is one of the four former nominally independent black homelands of South Africa. Thousands of mineworkers returned home when they became disabled. Little research has yet been conducted into the needs of those mineworkers who developed hearing loss, which is recognised as a major problem in the mining industry.

Objective: To study the prevalence of loss of hearing among the retired mineworkers of the Transkei.

Method: Between May 1997 and May 2000, 2027 ex-mineworkers were examined at the Benefit Examination Clinic, which is located in the Chest Section of Umtata General Hospital (UGH), the teaching hospital of the University of Transkei Medical School in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. A structured questionnaire was posted to 677 randomly selected ex-mineworkers. Data from the 406 (63%) completed questionnaires

received back were compiled and analysed by means of the Epi 6 Info computer program.

Results: Hearing loss was indicated by 219 (54%) of the respondents, of whom 72 (33%) were between 40 and 59 years of age. Of the 182 (45%) workers who had worked between 10 to 19 years in the mines, 40 (22%) indicated experiencing a loss of hearing. A strong association between hearing loss and years spent mining was detected ($p < 0.05$ and X^2 is 12.4).

Conclusion: Many (54%) of the ex-mineworkers from the Transkei were found to be afflicted with hearing loss. Such a health problem demands much attention from occupational hygienists and the compensation authorities.

meelbanwari@yahoo.com