

Asbestos related diseases in women spotlighted during Cancer Week

Ahead of Cancer Week (1-7 August) and Women's Month in South Africa, John Doidge, chairman of the Asbestos Relief Trust (ART), pointed out that the plight of women affected by lung-related occupational diseases is generally unacknowledged and under-reported. "Women suffer from asbestos-related diseases (ARDs) more often than is perceived."

Asbestos-related diseases include asbestosis, which is a scarring of the lung tissue, asbestos-related lung cancer and mesothelioma, a fatal tumour in the lining of the lungs. These diseases manifest decades after exposure.

Doidge explained that many women in mining areas were exposed by cleaning, sweeping and washing their husband's dusty overalls, as well as by living on or close to asbestos mines. If they worked on mines either formally or informally, they typically also did the 'dustiest' jobs.

"Sadly, many women were not aware of the health risks and went to work with small babies strapped to their backs."

Few women with work-related ARDs now qualify for compensation because of the informal nature of their work and poor record keeping. Furthermore, the state does not compensate men or women for environmental exposure to asbestos.

"In addition to suffering from ARDs themselves women are often primary caregivers to their spouses, children and even ageing parents who have ARDs."

Phiroshaw Camay, chairman of the Kgalagadi Relief Trust (KRT), a sister Trust to the ART, said that it was important to highlight the plight of these women, to raise awareness about ARDs and to offer advice on compensation available from both the state and the private sector.

"Some women will qualify for state compensation - if they have the correct paperwork. We can sometimes help with this. Women who worked at the mines covered by the ART and KRT may also qualify for additional compensation, if they have an ARD or are the dependent of a mineworker who passed away as a result of an ARD."

Camay says that since the inception of the ART and KRT in 2003 and 2006 respectively, 17% of the claimants were women.

With regard to structural support for ARD sufferers and their families - the trusts fund the Kuruman Palliative Care Programme, which offers counselling and support to patients with asbestos-related cancers and supports a number of non-

governmental organisations (NGOs) that are active in the former asbestos mining areas. These include the Asbestos Interest Group which works to make people aware of asbestos-related issues in the greater Kuruman area (call Stephen Kotoloane on +27 (0) 53 712 2947) and the Cancer Charity Workers, a voluntary organisation started and run by women in Kuruman to support cancer patients (call Sister Haarmans on +27 (0) 83 332 8974).

For a full explanation of asbestos-related diseases and the claims process, go to www.asbestostrust.co.za.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>