**Introduction**

The Southern African Litigation centre (SALC) based in Johannesburg, South Africa, works to promote human rights and the rule of law in southern Africa. SALC specifically works in Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. SALC’s HIV Programme focuses on strengthening and promoting the rights of people living with HIV as well as those populations who are most affected by HIV.

SALC’s HIV Programme recently undertook research on the status of policies related to cervical cancer, as well as the availability of and access to prevention and treatment services in southern African countries, focusing on Namibia and Zambia as case studies.

**Why is cervical cancer an issue?**

Cervical cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among women in southern Africa and is either the primary or the secondary cause of cancer death among women in all 10 countries in which SALC works. The negative impact of cervical cancer is exacerbated in southern Africa given the high prevalence of HIV among women. Studies show that women living with HIV are at higher risk for cervical cancer. The link between HIV and cervical cancer paired with the existing stigma around women’s sexual and reproductive health further entrenches discrimination and stigma against women, particularly women living with HIV.

**What did SALC find?**

The research conducted by SALC suggests that cervical cancer management in southern Africa remains under-recognised and under-prioritised. Consequently, a significant number of patients are diagnosed with advanced-stage disease, which carries a high morbidity and mortality rate.

However, based on the latest medical science, cervical cancer is easily preventable and treatable. There are currently enough medical and scientific tools available to reduce the incidence and mortality caused by cervical cancer in any resource setting.

Failure by southern African governments to adequately provide medical and other cervical cancer-related services may result in violations of the right to life; the right to health; the right to equality and freedom from all forms of discrimination; the right to dignity and freedom from cruel inhuman and degrading treatment; the right to bodily integrity and autonomy; and the right to information.

Using its research as a guide, SALC and its partners in the region will work with key stakeholders in southern Africa to ensure better access to and availability of cervical cancer prevention and treatment services in southern Africa.

**Want to know more?**

Please visit our website at [www.southernafricalitigationcentre.org](http://www.southernafricalitigationcentre.org) to find out more about SALC’s cervical cancer work.

Please also watch out for SALC’s cervical cancer research report “Tackling cervical cancer: Improving access to cervical cancer services for women in southern Africa” which will be available on SALC’s website by the end of September 2012. You can also contact us at [info@salc.org.za](mailto:info@salc.org.za) to obtain a hard copy of the research report.