



**Disclosure decisions of HIV positive  
men who have sex with men (MSM) in  
Cape Town, South Africa**

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# Abstract

**Objectives:** Secrecy and concealment of either sexual orientation or HIV positive status characterizes many gay relationships in the context of homosexuality's taboo nature in many African societies. Both these characteristics have implications on safer sex behaviour. Therefore research focusing on disclosure of HIV positive status for MSM becomes important in the context of the prevention of the further spread of HIV. The primary objective of this study was to inform the adaptation and development of a risk reduction intervention for HIV positive MSM in Cape Town, South Africa.

**Method:** Anonymous venue based surveys were collected from 92 HIV positive MSM. MSM were purposefully sampled from venues where gay men congregate as identified by HIV positive MSM key informants. 51% of the sample were 25 years old or younger, 33% described themselves as indigenous African, and the average number of years since testing HIV positive was 2.7.

**Results:** Sixty eight of the 92 MSM living with HIV reported anal sex with more than one partner who were unaware of their HIV positive status. Almost 60% of the respondents indicated that it was difficult for them to tell other people about their HIV positive status. MSM did report experiencing discrimination (64%) resulting from being HIV positive, including loss of housing or employment (45%). Of interest is that 11% of the MSM reported that they were currently married. Whilst 36 of the 92 MSM indicated that they had unprotected vaginal sex more than once in the previous 3 months with partners who were unaware of their HIV positive status.

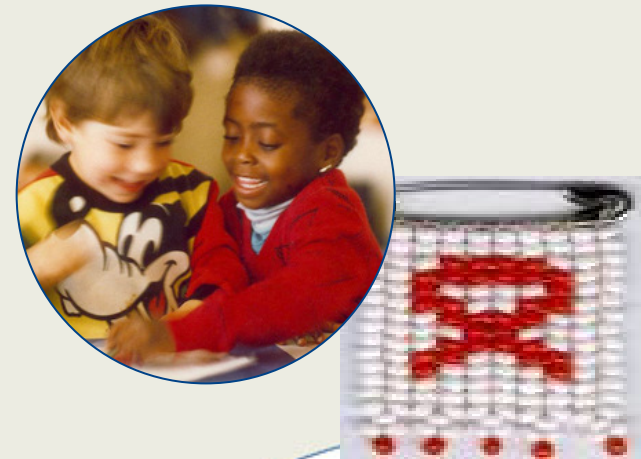
**Conclusions:** Disclosure should be understood within a framework of Aids related stigma and discrimination experiences. In developing risk reduction interventions for HIV positive MSM a strong component focusing on disclosure decisions needs to be included. In addition to this structural changes for protections against discrimination are needed for HIV positive MSM in South Africa.

# Introduction to the study

- Due to homosexuality's taboo nature in many African societies:
  - Gay relationships are characterized by secrecy and concealment of either sexual orientation or HIV positive status
- Both characteristics have implications on safer sex behaviour
- Therefore research focusing on disclosure of HIV positive status for MSM becomes important in the context of the prevention of the further spread of HIV

# Introduction to the study

- This research proposes to explore disclosure decisions of HIV positive MSM in the context of:
  - Stigma and discrimination experiences and,
  - Reported sexual behaviour



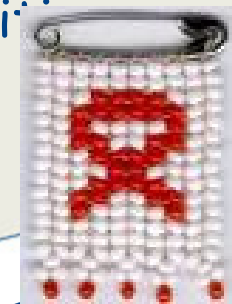
# Method

- Interviews were conducted with 92 HIV-positive MSM and 330 HIV positive men who reported no sex with other men
- MSM were purposefully sampled from venues where gay men congregate as identified by HIV-positive MSM key informants
- Men were interviewed anonymously



# Measures

- Measures were administered in a seven page survey that required approximately 15 minutes to complete
- The questionnaire included:
  - Demographic characteristics and
  - Health characteristics,
  - HIV risk history,
  - Internalised AIDS stigma,
  - HIV/AIDS discrimination experiences, cognition and affective depression, social support and substance use



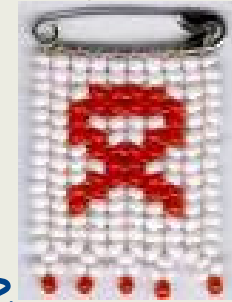
# Measures

- Surveys were available in the three languages
  - spoken by the vast majority of people living in Cape Town: Xhosa, English, and Afrikaans



# Potential limitations of the study

- Method of sampling led to the selective inclusion of MSM who frequented gay venues, so findings are not representative of all HIV-positive MSM
- Study did not include HIV-negative MSM, so doesn't provide information about the level of HIV among MSM, or about risk factors for HIV among MSM
- Many participants knew their interviewers
  - This may have influenced the way that they responded to questions



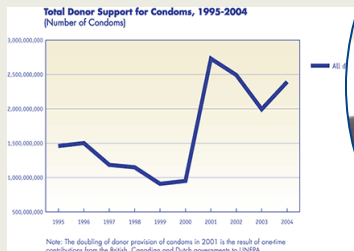
# Data Analysis

- For descriptive purposes, the frequencies of responses to the internalised stigma items and Aids discrimination experiences were first examined.
  - MSM and the men who only reported sex with other women who endorsed each item were compared using logistic regression, reporting odds ratios with 95% confidence intervals (CI).
  - Three regression models were conducted that compared MSM and MSW on demographic characteristics, health status variables, and stigma and discrimination experiences
  - The final model that tested stigma and discrimination experiences included covariates that controlled for differences on demographic and health characteristics that were either significant in the previous regressions or were conceptually relevant (e.g., years since testing HIV positive. Statistical significance was defined as  $p < .05$ .

# Data Analysis

- Cell sizes vary as participants were included for all analyses in which they had non-missing values
- The focus group discussion was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, translated where necessary, and thematic analysis was used to analyze and interpret the data

# RESULTS



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## Characteristics of Study Participants

Characteristic	MSM (n=92)	Other men (n=330)
≤ 25 yrs old	51%	28%
African	33%	73%
White	17%	4%
Coloured	31%	11%
Indian	19%	11%
Married	11%	87%
Time since testing HIV+	2.7 yrs	2.8 yrs
Taking ARVs	27%	58%

## Disclosure of HIV-Positive Status and Ongoing Risk Behaviour among MSM

- 68 of 92 MSM reported not disclosing their HIV-positive status to 1 or more sexual partners in the preceding 3 months
- Almost 60% of MSM reported having had unprotected anal sex with a partner who was HIV-negative or whose HIV status was unknown
- Whilst 36 of the 92 MSM indicated that they had unprotected vaginal sex more than once in the previous 3 months with partners who were unaware of their HIV positive status.

# Experiences of Stigma

	MSM	Other men
Difficulty with disclosing HIV+ status	64%	66%
Ashamed of HIV+ status	45%	43%
Hides HIV+ status from others	55%	58%
Able to disclose HIV+ status to sex partners	64%	63%

# Experiences of Discrimination

	MSM	Other men
Had experienced discrimination	64%	40%
Had lost a job because of HIV+ status	45%	22%
Had talked to a friend about AIDS	58%	74%
Unwelcome to visit after revealing HIV+ status	40%	33%
Treated differently by family & friends	46%	38%

## Reported Risk Behaviour

	MSM	Other men
History of an STI	64%	61%
Had received money for sex	28%	6%
Had given money for sex	28%	11%
Had injected drugs	46%	5%

# Key Findings

- HIV-positive men experienced a considerable amount of internalised stigma
- More than half of the MSM reported not disclosing their HIV positive status to more than 1 sex partner in the 3 months since data collection

# Key Findings

- Hence, impeding disclosure of HIV positive status for many MSM for fear of being rejected since many might have been rejected by either family or friends upon disclosing their homosexuality
- Of interest is that 11% of the MSM reported that they were currently married to other women

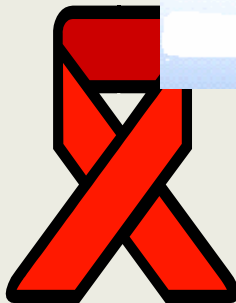
# Conclusions

- Disclosure should be understood within a framework of Aids related stigma and discrimination experiences
- In developing risk reduction interventions for HIV positive MSM a strong component focusing on disclosure decisions needs to be included
- In addition to this structural changes for protections against discrimination are needed for HIV positive MSM in South Africa.

# THANK YOU

Please send any queries/suggestions on the proposed research to:

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