



“This is my secret ... I haven’t told even God”: Perspectives from People Living With HIV/AIDS about HIV/AIDS disclosure within Christian churches in Soweto South Africa.

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Background and objectives

- Statistics South Africa estimated that 16, 6% of the South African adult population aged 15–49 years was living with HIV, in 2015.
- The church plays a major role in influencing decision-making among HIV infected individuals.
- The Black Church has long been involved in the social, political, physical and emotional welfare of its communities.
- Churches in South Africa have been actively engaged with the community to increase awareness and education, to reduce stigma, and to encourage care and compassion for those infected with HIV
- This study sets out to explore the role of religion in the lives of adults living with HIV/AIDS in Soweto.

Methods

Study setting

- ▶ The study took place at the PHRU in Soweto

Study Participants

- ▶ Twenty in-depth interviews were held with ten men and ten women who were:
 - ▶ HIV infected, willing to participate in the study,
 - ▶ between the ages of 21 and 61,
 - ▶ identified as African, lived in Soweto, and
 - ▶ reported to be of Christian faith.
- ▶ All were willing to participate in the study, some more talkative than others, naturally

Data collection methods

- ▶ People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) were recruited at ZAZI HIV testing centre of the Perinatal HIV Research Clinic. In total, 10 men and 10 women living with HIV/AIDS were interviewed for this project.



Methods

Data analysis

- In-depth interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and translated into English.
- Data were analyzed using framework analysis.

Results

- ▶ **Religiosity and spirituality contribute positively to the seeking and adherence of treatment regimen for PLWHA.**

- ▶ ***Religiosity/ spirituality***

Faith/ spiritual practices seem to contribute positively to the adherence of treatment regimen for PLWHA, and in general PLWHA have reported to be living better lives as a result of their belief and faith in God. It seems religion, or religiosity, serves.

“God gave me the strength to raise that child, so I could live for him”
(Female, 43)

- ▶ ***The role of the church in the making of a Christian***

This theme talks to how the church is instrumental to the making of a Christian or a spiritual being. This includes church attendance, and the activities

- ▶ **Church activities included:** reading the Bible, attending Sunday school, being a part of the choir.
- ▶ Participants stated attending church from a young age, and attended church regularly with either a parent or grandparent, until they were old enough to go on their own.



IT'S NOT ME WHO CAN'T KEEP A
SECRET. IT'S THE PEOPLE I TELL
THAT CAN'T.

- ABRAHAM LINCOLN

“

➤ ***Diagnosis and a new reason for living***

- accepted their diagnosis and are making a conscious effort to live healthier, happier lives
- found a new reason for living

➤ **On condom use:**

“If they also don't...like, the person you're sleeping with must (insist) on a condom. If they're not willing to then there's nothing I will do dude, you get me. ”

On church practices:

“P: Like, there are people who go to church to have enemas administered, and self-induced vomiting.” He practices these regularly at church, even after his diagnosis. (Male, 32)

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Disclosure (and lack-of)

While the majority of adults in this study have disclosed their status to family and friends, there seems to be 1) a reluctance by males in this study to disclose their status to their partners due to a fear of rejection...

➤ **On the fear of rejection:**

“So far (my partner is not someone I have known for a long time, it’s only been 3 or 4 months since we fell in love” (Male, 32)

- *Disclosure (and lack-of) contd...* a general distrust of the church community, church leaders in particular. Participants feel that if the religious leaders were to know their status, they would tell others in the church and the community as a whole.

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“Yes, there are people here at the church I can share with... The priest’s wife and the priest... I haven’t spoken to them about my status... If they then spread the information to everyone, then the church will obviously collapse... You see then that it is not wise to inform the priest and his wife... This is my secret, no one knows... I haven’t told even God.” (Male, 31)

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“I’m a 61 year old woman, married, with 8 children. Who can I tell. Eh, even when they say okay there is someone, so and so’s mother is sick or their child, what what, i would join them talk like that about other but fr them to know about me (.) no, it’s difficult man, we have been hearing about (HIV) for a long time but eish. It is painful when you hear people talking about this when it is someone else (.) now imagine it is you”(Female, 61)

”

“Yes they know like in my church, at my church they know. Ah like... um like I told like... like I told the (.) um who this... who’s this guy? There’s a... there’s a women who... who talk with youth”(Female, 33)

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Suggestions for further support

- Home visits to the sick
- Food parcels for the needy
- Counselling and support groups
- Prayer

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Conclusions and recommendations

- There is a need for training to be provided in the religious community about HIV prevention and care
- Messages delivered by the church should reflect people's lived experiences and shared realities, so as to reduce stigma, encourage disclosure in the church

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