

## Policy Brief: HIV-status disclosure does not correlate to safer sex in adolescents

*Citation: Elona Toska, Lucie D. Cluver, Rebecca Hodes & Khameer K. Kidia (2015) Sex and secrecy: How HIV-status disclosure affects safe sex among HIV-positive adolescents, AIDS Care, 27:sup1, 47-58*

**The Question:** How does the knowledge of one's own HIV-status, partner HIV-status, and disclosure of HIV-status to sexual partners affect rates of safe sex among HIV-positive adolescents in South Africa?

### Why is this important?

- 90% of the world's HIV-infected adolescents live in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- High rates of unprotected sex (27-90%) with other adolescents in this region.
- Low rates of disclosure of HIV-status to sexual partners are strongly linked to psycho-social issues and societal factors linked to HIV.
- Limited research on how different types of HIV-status disclosure may be linked to safe sex among HIV-positive adolescents in the region.

### The Research:

- Cross-sectional interviews, 858 HIV-positive adolescents (<4.3% refusal rate), 2014-5.
- Participants were patients aged 10-19 who had ever initiated ART at clinics in the Eastern Cape, South Africa.
- Chi-square tests and multivariate logistic regressions were used for analysis, controlling for age, gender, poverty, residence, mode of infection, time on treatment, sexual activity, relationship status and other HIV-related factors.

### Quantitative Findings:

#### Knowing one's own status

Finding 1: Sexually active adolescents who knew their status were four times more likely to report safe sex.

#### Disclosing one's status

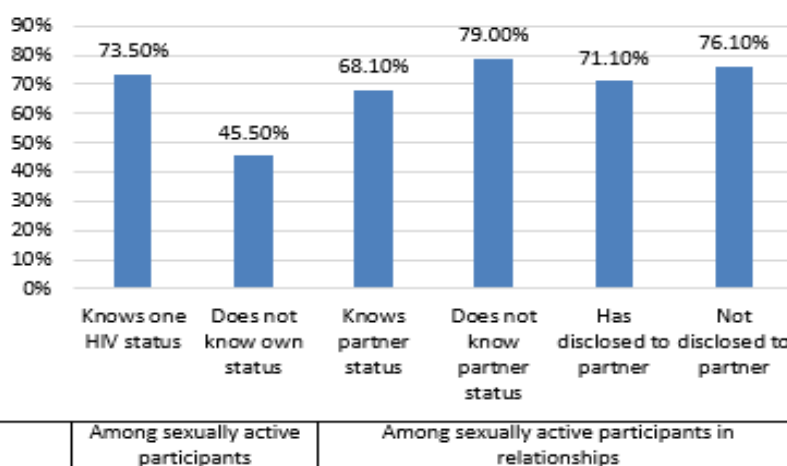
Finding 2: Disclosing one's HIV-status to a partner was not associated with safer sex.

#### Knowing partner status

Finding 3: Knowing a partner's status was not associated with safer sex.

Finding 4: Fear of pregnancy was a stronger motivation for safe sex than infecting partners or children with HIV, infection by STIs, or potential re-infection by other strains of HIV.

### Safe sex at last sexual encounter



*"When I had the test, they counselled me, and the sister told me that I must disclose to my sexual partners. But no-one is going to do that, no one can. Maybe some can, but they are scared that their partners will blame them..."*

*Siphe, 18-year-old female*

### Policy messages:

- Supporting HIV-positive adolescents to know their HIV-status may support them to engage in safer sexual practices.
- Guidelines on counselling HIV-positive adolescents should focus on promoting safe sex with all sexual partners as the first priority, rather than promoting disclosure to sexual partners.
- Counselling practices by healthcare providers should capitalize on pregnancy prevention as a motivation for safe sex, and address the risks and benefits of disclosure, without exacerbated fears surrounding disclosure through shaming strategies.

This study is a collaboration of the Universities of Oxford and Cape Town, UNICEF, the South African National Departments of Health, Basic Education and Social Development and Paediatric AIDS Treatment for Africa, and local CBOs: the Keiskamma Trust, the Raphael Centre and Small Projects Foundation.

*This research was generously funded by:*