

Couples' Level of Education and Gender Differences in Disclosure of HIV Status in Ibadan, Nigeria

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Background: Disclosure of HIV status is a major problem confronting prevention of the disease in Africa. The prevention and control of HIV infection depends on the success of strategies to prevent new infections and treat currently infected individuals (WHO 2004). Disclosure is an important public health effort because it helps to motivate sexual partners to seek testing, change behaviour and ultimately decrease transmission of HIV. Also it may facilitate other health behaviours that may improve the management of HIV. Women who disclose their status to partners, for instance, may be more likely to participate in programmes for prevention of HIV transmission from mothers to their infants. Through disclosure of her status, a woman may receive support from her family or others in her social network and may also be able to access available support services. By adequately addressing the emotional, social, and practical sequelae of her positive status she may be more willing to adopt and maintain health behaviours such as cessation of breastfeeding or adherence to treatment regimens (WHO 2004).

People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) face a number of barriers when sharing their test results with friends, family and, most importantly, sexual partners (WHO 2004). There is considerable interest in finding strategies to encourage disclosure because of the public health benefits that may accrue from it. Potential solution to the problem of disclosure of HIV status would benefit much from knowledge about gender differentials in disclosure of test results with ones spouse. This paper discusses the influence of education on gender difference in sharing HIV test result with spouse and family members.

Methodology: A total of 350 male and female respondents were randomly interviewed in Ibadan, the capital city of Oyo State through structured questionnaire The questionnaires were administered in face-to-face interaction to the respondents. Questions were asked in the Yoruba language to the respondents and those who could not speak and understand Yoruba language were interviewed in “pigeon English” widely spoken across Nigeria . Special Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.0 was used to analyze the quantitative data. Univariate and bivariate analysis were performed using the chi-square statistical tool.

Results: On the question whether respondents will share their HIV test result with their spouse, data showed that only one third of the female respondents (33.0%) and males (31.9%) indicated that they will disclose their HIV status to their spouse. More females with secondary education (41.9%) and higher education (41.9%) than 4.1% males with secondary education and (14.9%) males with higher education indicated that they would disclose their HIV status to their spouse. While 15.6% of the male respondents with no formal education will disclose their HIV status to their spouse only 1.1% females in that category want to do so

On the question whether respondents will disclose their HIV to their spouse in polygynous union, more females with less than six years of schooling 22.2% than males 2.2% indicated that they will disclose their HIV status. More males with more than ten years of schooling up to 16 years 64.0% than females 32.0% indicated that they will disclose their HIV status. There is no significant gender difference between those with more than 17 years of schooling (14.9%) and 7.1% respectively ($P>0.05$).

Data revealed that there is gender difference between male and female respondents regarding why they want to share their HIV status with their spouse. Majority of the male respondents regardless of level of education and gender 71.4% no formal education, 79.2% primary, 67.6% secondary and 38.5% higher education indicated that they will do so to avoid continuous spread of the disease. On the other hand, females differ in their reasons for doing so. The only female respondent with no formal education will do so for care and support while majority of those with primary/Koranic education 36.4% will do so in case their spouse has the virus while more than one third of those with higher education will do so for reason of love. Equal proportion of female respondents with primary/koranic education will disclose their HIV status to their spouse for reason of care and support (18.2%) and love (18.2%) while equal proportion of those with secondary education will do so in case their spouse have the virus (16.2%) and love (16.2%). A negligible proportion of the male respondents with primary/koranic education (4.2%) and secondary education (2.7%) respectively and female respondents with secondary education 5.4% will do so for fear of problem that may arise if they should know later. One female respondent with primary/koranic education said she will tell her spouse because she did not misuse herself. At least one female respondent compared with males will tell their spouse for family protection. Only two male respondents with higher education will do so for family protection.

On reason why they will not want to share their HIV test with their spouse, respondents differ by gender and level of education. More male respondents with no formal education 40.0% and primary/koranic education 40.0% than females with the same level of education (9.1%) and 27.3% respectively indicated that they will not share their HIV status with their spouse to avoid shame and isolation. Equal proportion of female 33.3% and male 30.8% respondents with secondary education will not do so to

avoid shame and divorce and separation. More female respondents with primary/koranic education (36.4%) and (33.3%) with secondary education than males in the same category (16.7%) and (6.7%) respectively will not disclose their HIV status to their spouse to avoid divorce or separation. The only female respondent with no formal education will not disclose her status to avoid shame while the only male respondent with higher level of education will no disclose his status for other reasons.

Respondents were asked whether or not they will disclose their HIV status to family members. Data revealed that majority of the male and female respondents who indicated that they will share their status with family members have secondary education (44.6%) and (41.8%) respectively. Data also showed that more males with no formal education 13.0% and females 10.2% than males 5.2% and females 1.0% wit koranic education will share their HIV status with family members. Two third of both male and female respondents who indicated that they will disclose their status to family members have primary education. Although half of the male respondents and about one third of the female respondents who indicated that they will not share their status with family members have secondary education majority of the female respondents who will not disclose their status have higher education (41.2%).

On the question about the member of family who will first be told of HIV status, data showed that majority of the respondents regardless of gender and level of education indicated that they will tell their mothers. A considerable proportion of male respondents with no formal education said that they will tell their brothers. While a good proportion of male respondents regardless of level of education will tell both father and mother only one female respondent with primary/koranic education said that they will tell both father and mother. While none of the male respondents with higher education wants to tell their fathers no female respondent with no formal education want to tell father. Majority of both male and female respondents 64.7% and 48.4% respectively said that they will not tell anybody. Also a significant proportion of those with secondary education regardless of gender said that they will not tell anybody.

Majority of the respondents regardless of gender and level of education said that they will tell family members for reason of care and support. The next reason offered for telling family members was to keep them informed as indicated by a significant

proportion of the respondents regardless of gender and level of education. While one male respondent with primary/koranic education said that they will tell family members because his wife was promiscuous one female respondent with secondary education said that she would do so because her husband was promiscuous.

Conclusion: Data revealed that willingness to disclose HIV status by female respondent increases with increased level of education compared with males whose willingness to do so reduce with increased level of education. Regardless of level of education more females than males showed willingness to disclose their HIV status to mothers who will do so to brothers for reasons of care and support and reduction of spread of the disease respectively. Hence, formal education may increase spouse communication and improved relationship between spouse and family members, especially mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship.