

# Self revealing of HIV positive serostatus by people living with HIV – a cross sectional study

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## Abstract

This article emphasizes the importance of self revealing and analyzes various reasons related to hospitals, work place and family for not revealing of serostatus. The study was conducted at a Non Government Organization in Chennai among 61 people living with HIV. In this study, it was observed that about 14 (22.95%) patients out of total 61 PLWH had undergone discrimination in hospitals mainly by qualified doctors(57.14%), nurse (28.57%) and paramedical staff (14.28%). Majority of the patients i.e about 42(85.71%) did not reveal the HIV status at work place out of which, 30 (71.42%) had fear of discrimination and the rest 12 (28.57%) had fear of losing job. Most of the PLWH 50(82%) had revealed their HIV status to family members among which 40 (80%) got support from them and only 10(20%) had been discriminated by family members after revealing the status. Hence it can be concluded from this study that most of them have not revealed their status because of fear of discrimination at various levels.

**Key words:** self revealing, serostatus, discrimination, People living with HIV (PLWH)

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## INTRODUCTION

People Living With HIV (PLWH) are in dilemma whether to reveal their serostatus to others or not. Self revealing of serostatus by PLWH (people living with HIV) has been considered an important objective for preventing transmission of infection and can have positive outcomes including adherence to treatment, psychological well-being and enhancement of social support 1,2. But, self revealing may not always be beneficial to the discloser. Numerous recent studies demonstrate that there are many valid cultural reasons why individuals do not reveal their HIV status, including fear of domestic violence, fear of familial or partner

abandonment, and community rejection 3. Although self revealing may be an important step in coping with HIV and can lead to receipt of important social support and medical services many people who are seropositive refrain from revealing their status to health care professionals until they become symptomatic or too sick to care for themselves. Reasons cited for not revealing one's HIV serostatus vary, including concerns about confidentiality and discrimination by health care professionals like dentists, family doctors and emergency room [ER] and obstetrics-gynecology 4. A report which is a synthesis of nine country studies conducted across the Asia and the Pacific region — Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand — and provides the first large-scale regional comparison of standardized HIV-related stigma indicators. Across the nine countries, discrimination in health care settings is documented as a recurring issue. In the analysis, data shows that many people living with HIV avoided clinics and hospitals for fear of being discriminated against because of their HIV-positive status. In health-care settings, confidentiality and involuntary testing for HIV were also cited as issues of concern 5. Many people with HIV have no or limited access to job opportunities, still more are at risk of being

deprived promotion or having their employment terminated as a direct result of their HIV status. This was illustrated in a 2009UNAIDS survey on discrimination against people with HIV, which found that 14.8% of respondents had either been denied employment or fired as a result of their HIV status (16.3% of men and 13% of women). A further 16.7% had been forced to change jobs and 3.8% had been denied promotion. Another survey released in the Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology found that 89.47% of respondents had lost their jobs at least once as a result of their HIV status. According to a research done by Positive Women’s Network-USA from a National Working Positive Coalition survey, of the 84 percent of HIV-positive respondents who were employed at the time of their diagnosis, 81 percent reported losing employment. Of that 81 percent, 64 percent reported that their HIV status had played a role in their lost of employment. Revealing serostatus of HIV to family members would bring always mixed reactions like some may accept others may reject. Nevertheless, disclosure actually has many benefits—studies have shown that people who disclose their HIV status respond better to treatment than those who don’t. That may be because people who disclose their HIV status are more likely to have a good support from family members which is the key factor for healthier sero positive.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This cross-sectional study, using simple random sampling, was carried out on 61 seropositive patients

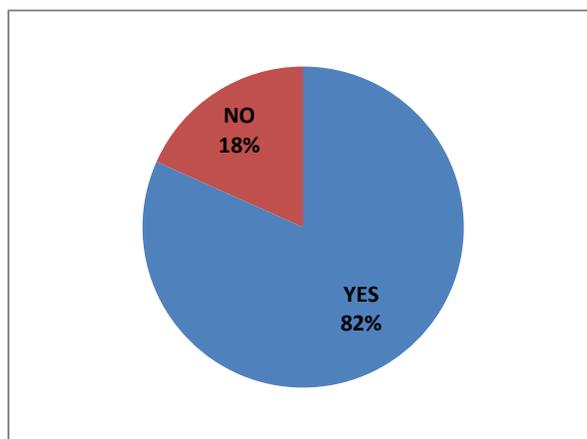
(male 32, female 29) linked to a Non-governmental organization in Chennai. The purpose of the study was well explained to the patients and written consent was also obtained from them. A questionnaire which had objective type of questions, typed in English and vernacular was used to access the revealing of the HIV positive serostatus and discrimination faced by PLWH in family, work place and health care settings.

### RESULTS

Around 42 (85.71%) revealed their status in workplace and 7 (14.28%) did not reveal their status in workplace. Out the 7 who revealed their status, 5 (71.42%) have revealed to their co-worker and 2 (28.57%) had revealed to their employer. Out of the 42 who have not revealed 30 (71.42%) had fear of discrimination and 12 (28.57%) had fear of losing their job (Table 1). Among the total 61 PLWH, 47 (77.04%) had not been discriminated in hospitals and 14 (22.95%) had undergone discrimination, out of which 8 (57.14%) were discriminated by qualified Medical Practitioner, 4 (28.57%) were discriminated by staff nurse and two (14.28%) by other paramedical staff (Table 2). About 50 (82%) PLWH revealed their serostatus to family members and 11 (18%) did not reveal their status to family members. Among those who revealed their status, 40 (80%) of them got support from their family and only 10 (20%) were discriminated by their family members (Table 3).

Table 1: Revealing of serostatus at work place

REVEALING OF STATUS (n=49)	No. OF PLWH & PERCENTAGE	IF YES, REVEALED TO (n=7)		IF NO, REASON (n=42)	
		Co-Worker	Employer	Fear of Discrimination	Fear of Losing Job
Yes	7 (14.28%)	5 (71.4%)	2 (28.6%)	30 (71.42%)	12 (28.57%)
No	42 (85.71%)				

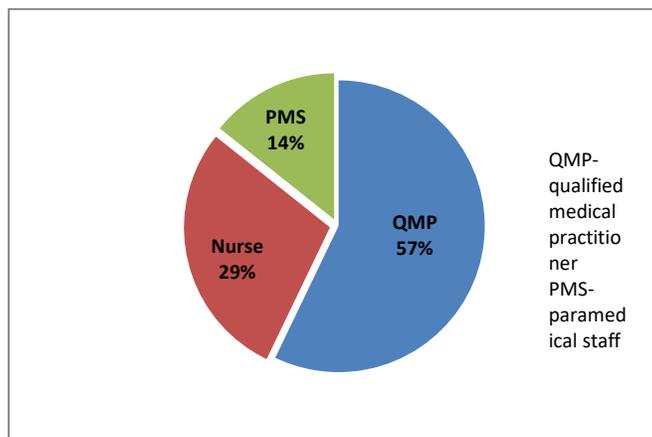


Graph 1: Revealing of serostatus at work place

Table 2: Hospital discrimination

DISCRIMINATION	No. OF PLWH & PERCENTAGE	DISCRIMINATED BY (n=14)
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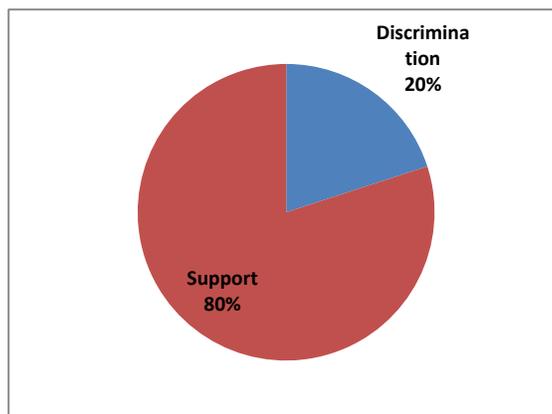
( n=61)	Qualified Medical Practitioner	Nurse	Para-Medical Staff
Yes	14 ( 22.95%)	8 (57.14 % )	4 (28.57%)
No	47 (77.04%)		



Graph 2: Discriminated by

Table 3: Revealing of serostatus to family members

REVEALING OF STATUS (n=61)	No. OF PLWH & PERCENTAGE	IF YES, RESPONSE(n=50)	
		DISCRIMINATION	SUPPORT
Yes	50 ( 82%)	10 (20%)	40 (80%)
No	11 (18%)		



Graph 3: Response of the family members after revealing

## DISCUSSION

Majority of the PLWH 47(77.04%) had not undergone discrimination in Hospitals. Out of 14(22.95%) who have been discriminated, majority of them were discriminated by Medical Practitioners.(57.14%). Hence more awareness has to be created among health care professionals to protect the rights of PLWH. Because this kind of discrimination done by Medical Practitioners , treating HIV infection would definitely prevent the self revealing of HIV status to other Medical Practitioners who are doing non HIV service. In our study, majority of the PLWH (85.71%) had not revealed their HIV status at work place because of the fear of discrimination in most

of them i.e 71.42% , and 28.57% because of the fear of losing the job. Previous few studies also had the same observation 6,7. In this study majority of the PLWH 50(82%) revealed their HIV serostatus to their family members and most of them i.e 80% of them have gained support from them .This finding is consistent with finding of an article published in Iran Red Crescent Med J9. Therefore, it makes sense that,PLWH share their HIV status more with their family members who were considerably perceived as more supportive.

## CONCLUSION

It is concluded that, PLWH were not willing to reveal their serostatus at work places in view of fear of discrimination and fear of losing job. This can be managed by educating employers particularly about the ways of transmission and by enacting strict rules to abolish the pre employment mandatory testing for HIV. Regarding discrimination in the hospitals, ironically most of these PLWH were discriminated by qualified medical practitioners treating PLWH. By giving proper sensitization, this particular attitude of the doctors can be changed. Pertaining to the family, most of the PLWH revealed their serostatus to family members which shows their awareness about the importance of family support for managing this disease which reflects the effectiveness of the AIDS control programs in Tamilnadu. Still few (18%) had not revealed their status to family members because of the fear of discrimination, for which effective post test counselling would be the ideal solution. Sometimes, counselor can also be asked to reveal their serostatus of PLWH to the family members (Third party revealing)..

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