

POWER DYNAMICS, HIV DISCLOSURE DECISIONS, AND STIGMA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF BLACK MIGRANTS FROM SSA LIVING WITH HIV IN AUSTRALIA

Adu C¹, Brener L¹, Broady T¹, Treloar C¹,

¹Centre for Social Research in Health, The University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW 2052, Australia.

Abstract

Background: Despite advances in HIV treatment, HIV-related stigma remains a significant barrier to improved health outcomes for black migrants from sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) living in Australia. This issue is intensified by the intersection of social, cultural, and structural factors that influence both experiences of stigma and decisions about disclosure. This study explores how power dynamics influence HIV disclosure decisions and stigma among black SSA migrants living with HIV in Australia.

Methods: A qualitative study was conducted with 14 black migrants from SSA living with HIV between July 2024 and February 2025. Semi-structured interviews were analysed thematically, which was supported by iterative categorisation.

Results: The study identified three key themes on HIV disclosure and stigma among black SSA migrants living with HIV in Australia. First, participants' narratives showed that HIV-related stigma functioned as a form of social power, shaping decisions not to disclose one's status. Second, negotiating disclosure across trust boundaries illustrated that disclosure decisions were selectively controlled across different relational boundaries. Third, structural and institutional contexts, as protective and risk environments, highlighted how structural and institutional power enable and constrain disclosure.

Conclusion: Findings show that power dynamics shape HIV disclosure decisions and stigma. This study highlights the need for culturally responsive and structurally informed HIV interventions aimed at reducing stigma and which assist in shaping the control of disclosure decisions with this population.

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