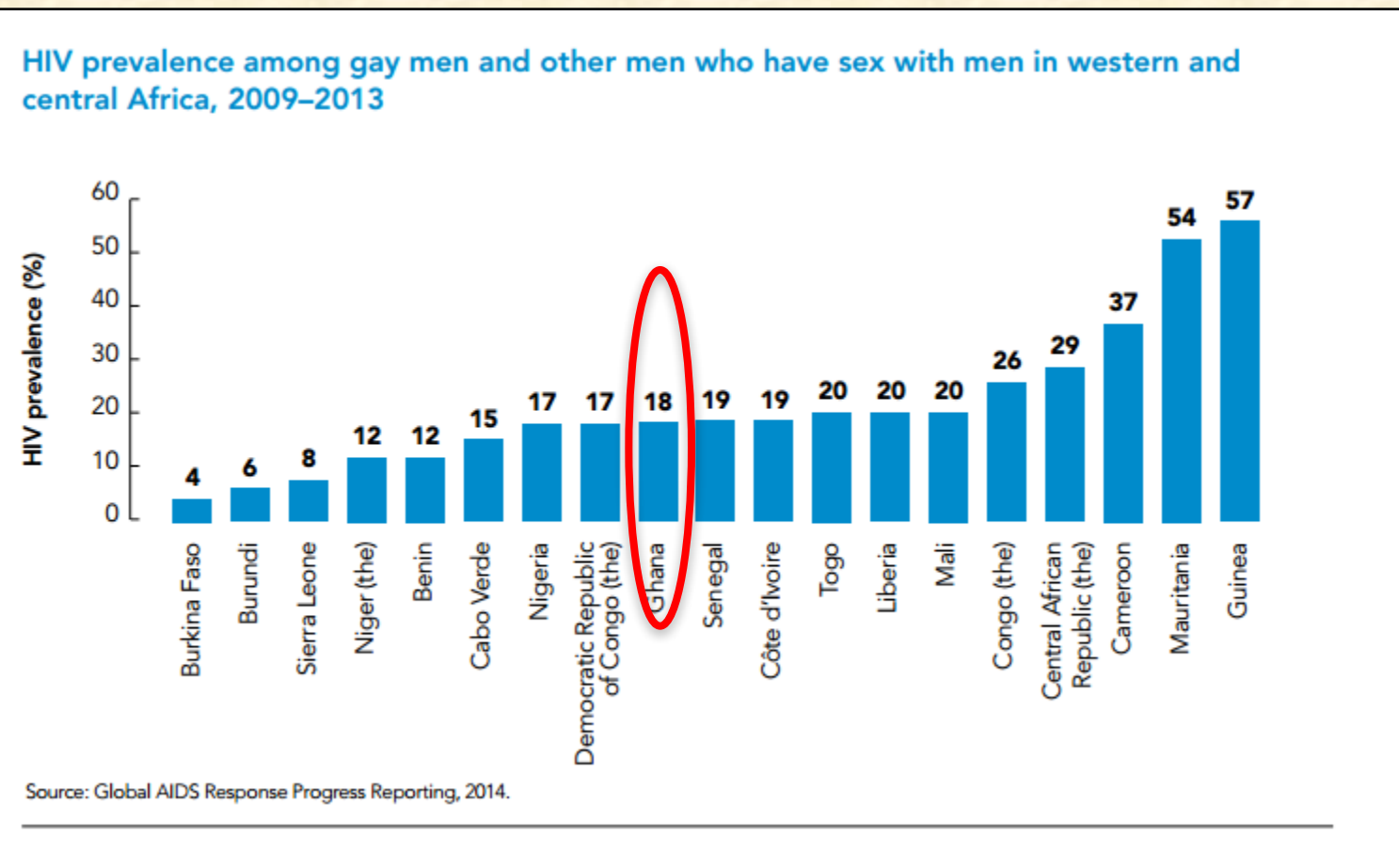


# Self-Disclosure of HIV-Status: Perception and Experiences of Ghanaian Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) Living with HIV

Adedotun Ogunbajo MPH, MHS,<sup>a</sup> Trace Kershaw PhD,<sup>a</sup> Francis Boakye,<sup>b</sup> Nii-Dromo Wallace-Atiapah,<sup>b</sup> LaRon E. Nelson PhD RN FNP FNAP<sup>c</sup>  
<sup>a</sup>Yale School of Public Health, Department of Social & Behavioral Sciences, New Haven, CT; <sup>b</sup>Priorities on Rights and Sexual Health, Accra, Ghana; <sup>c</sup>University of Rochester, School of Nursing, Rochester, NY;

## Background

- Disclosure of HIV status to family, friends, and sexual partners may help reduce risk of transmission and facilitate social support for people living with HIV
- However, the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV might deter HIV positive individuals from disclosing their status
- To date, no studies have explored factors that influence HIV status disclosure and non-disclosure among Ghanaian men who have sex with men (MSM) living with HIV
- **Consequently, we conducted a qualitative study to investigate the reasons why Ghanaian MSM may or may not disclose their HIV status.**



## Methods

**Study Population and Recruitment:** 30 Ghanaian MSM living with HIV were recruited. Participants were recruited through key informants and snowball sampling

**Data collection:** Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted by trained interviewers between May 2015 and July 2015. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Data analysis:** All interviews were coded (NVIVO 10). Emergent barriers and facilitators were discussed with other authors and disagreements were discussed until consensus was reached.

## Results

### Disclosure

**Trust**

- *“She [sister] is the only one I can trust with my issue and she is aware I am gay, I am comfortable telling her anything because she knows me, better understands me so she is the only one I can trust.”*

**Shared serostatus**

- *“They (friends) are also positive. So, I can share with them. So, that’s why I told them.”*

**Financial difficulties**

- *“I was owing at the center so they ask me to come with my relative that was how she got to know about it, I would not have informed her if I was not owing and the center never ask me to come with a family member.”*

**Positive Role model**

- *“Some of friends got tested so I have to use myself as an example for them to also have more hope because sometimes they do get sacred, they do feel like poisoning themselves there is no life after this so they knowing me or using myself as an example.”*

### Non-Disclosure

**Breach of Confidentiality**

- *“Because I can’t trust anyone with this, the person may spread the news to everyone.”*

**Fear of discrimination & stigma**

- *“Stigma and discrimination is very high in Ghana. Most Ghanaians don’t want to learn more about HIV so telling someone that you don’t know about your HIV is like you killing yourself straight away.”*

**Uncertain response**

- *“I think he [brother] will be okay but you don’t know what goes on in people minds, he is my brother but I can’t trust him and it’s not like he has loud mouth, I just don’t know how he will feel about that.”*

**Anticipate violence**

- *“I have not told anyone in my family because they will poison me within seconds.”*

## Table: Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	N (%)
Age (in years) Mean (SD)	29.1 (7.7)
Sexual Orientation	
Gay/homosexual	16 (53%)
Bisexual	12 (40%)
Straight/heterosexual	1 (3%)
Don’t know	1 (3%)
Highest Level of Education	
Primary School	2 (7%)
Middle School/JSS	8 (27%)
Secondary School/SSS	7 (23%)
University or higher	13 (43%)
Stable Housing	
No	11 (37%)
Yes (living with family)	12 (40%)
Yes (living alone)	7 (23%)
Currently Employed	
No	22 (73%)
Yes	8 (27%)
Number of years living with HIV Mean (SD)	4.7 (3.6)

## Conclusions

- This study offered insight into issues surrounding comfort with HIV status disclosure in Ghanaian MSM: why it comes easy to some and others have a difficult time in dealing with it .
- It appears status disclosure to family may be more arduous than disclosure to friends and sexual partners.
- This may be due to HIV and same-sex attraction being highly stigmatized in Ghana
- Healthcare providers may help counsel patients around strategies for disclosing status to family, friends, and sexual partners, as appropriate.

**Acknowledgements and Disclosures** This study was funded by the Maureen and Antoine Chiquet Fund for Global Health Fellowship administered by the Yale School of Public Health. The authors extend our thanks to all the participants who were brave enough to share their stories. Also, we thank Abubakar Sadiq Yussif (Executive Director of Solace Brothers Foundation), Francis Dugbartey, Nelson Azumah, and the entire team at Priorities on Rights and Sexual Health (PORSH) for their help with recruitment and providing private office space to conduct the interviews.