

## **Abstract**

**Background:** Early diagnosis is important for HIV treatment. In Japan, support for partner notification leading to early detection and treatment of sexual contacts has not been established nor standardized. This study was conducted to explore the factors associated with HIV status disclosure to sexual partner, focusing on fear of relationship collapse.

**Methods:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three men with HIV to explore their subjective experiences regarding HIV status disclosure. A qualitative study design was used to understand how fears of relationship collapse affect HIV status disclosure to identify what needs to be done to improve support for partner notification.

**Results:** Individuals with HIV internalized stigma through their own and others' stigma experiences and were concerned that their relationships would collapse if they disclosed their HIV status. They decided whether to disclose their HIV status or not based on the expected understanding and acceptance of their partners and others. Interviewees felt they were encouraged to have freedom of choice of disclosure and positively accepted the advice, and partner notification was not promoted. They did not mention ethical obligations, which require notifying the fact of HIV infection to their partner.

**Conclusion:** Fear of relationship collapse was negatively associated with HIV status disclosure. HIV-related stigma increased fear of relationship collapse and was severe enough to suggest social death. Measures to reduce stigma are needed. The expected partner's understanding that undetectable equals untransmittable (U=U) might have a positive impact

on fear of relationship collapse. However, the understanding that U=U might not be enough for partners, and concerns may appear on the surface and in their attitudes.

**Keywords:** HIV, status disclosure, fear of relationship collapse, stigma, understanding