

Relationships between comfort from pets and HIV stigma among pet-owning people with HIV in Florida

Kaylinn Escobar¹, Deepthi S. Varma¹, Preeti Manavalan¹, Shelby E. McDonald², Maya Widmeyer³, Humberto E. Fabelo⁴, Robert L. Cook¹ & Jennifer W. Applebaum¹

1 University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 2 Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 3 Unconditional Love, Inc., Melbourne, FL 4 Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA

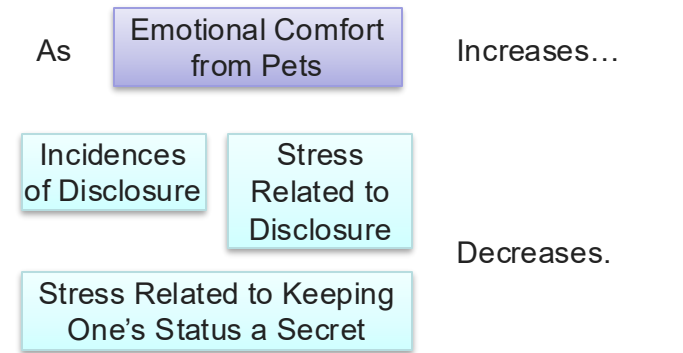
BACKGROUND

People with HIV (PWH) must make decisions about who they disclose their status to. **Comfort from pets:**

- *Compliments* human social networks
- *Influences* mental health outcomes
- *Impacts* barriers related to healthcare

Emotional attachment can **buffer stigma** and isolation, impacting **disclosure decisions**. These decisions may be a recurrent stressor for PWH. While the **impartial support** of pets may **reduce stress** associated with disclosure, an emotional reliance on one's pet may conversely **increase stress** around disclosure to other humans. This relationship has yet to be studied.

HYPOTHESES



METHODS

Sample from **Wave 3 of Florida Cohort study**, collected and managed by the Southern HIV and Alcohol Research Consortium (SHARC).

- Longitudinal survey of adult PWH in Florida
- Respondents (n=141) answered both Pet and Stigma Questionnaire

Measures included the:

- **Comfort from Companion Animal Scale** (CCAS; 12-items)
- **HIV Disclosure** (all, some, none of social network)
- **Stress related to disclosure** (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)
- **Stress related to keeping one's status a secret** (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)

Bivariate analyses and multivariate ordinal **logistic regressions** were used in R version 4.3.1.

RESULTS

| | Disclosure | Stress Disclosure | Stress Secret |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| CCAS (OR, CI*) | 1.01 (0.98, 1.06) | 0.98 (0.94, 1.01) | 0.98 (0.95, 1.01) |

Table 1. Bivariate relationships between CCAS and disclosure behaviors, *Odds Ratio, Confidence Interval.

After adjusting for social support (using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support), race, age, ethnicity, marital status and identifying as a sexual/gender minority...

- **Comfort** was **not** associated with **any of the disclosure behaviors** assessed.
- **Race** is a marginally significant predictor, and **age** is a significant predictor of **stress from disclosing one's status**.
- **Social support** is a **significant** predictor in **stress from disclosing one's status** (OR=0.94, p-value=0.00, CI=0.91, 0.97) and **stress from keeping one's status a secret** (OR=0.94, p-value=0.00, CI=0.91, 0.97).

CONCLUSION

We did **not** find evidence that comfort from pets impacts disclosure decisions in this sample. **However...**

- Significant effects that suggest that **as one ages**, they experience **higher odds of disclosure** and **less stress** related to disclosing one's status.
- Marginally significant effects in race suggest **Black participants** experience **more stress** from disclosing their status compared to White participants.

Limitations include possible under-sampling of Hispanic PWH, low power, exclusion of other relevant variables (e.g., income).



Future research should consider these factors when assessing the impact of the human-animal bond in navigating **complex, identity-based interactions**.

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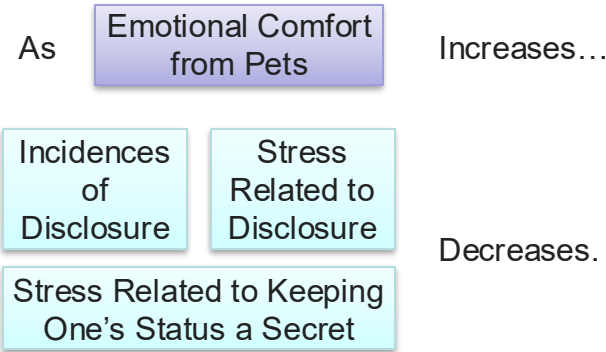
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CONCLUSION

Significant effects suggest that **as one ages**, they experience **higher odds of disclosure** and **less stress** related to disclosing one's status.

Marginally significant effects in race suggest **Black participants** experience **more stress** from disclosing their status compared to White participants (OR=1.80, CI=0.89, 3.67).

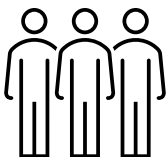
Ethnicity, SGM and marital status were not significant in any models; this may be due to:

- Less sampling of Hispanic PWH
- An **underpowered** sample
- Exclusion of other relevant variables (e.g. income)



As one increases...

Social support *may have* an interactive effect on comfort from pets.



The other decreases.