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**Strategies used by perinatally infected adolescents to protect the HIV status: Qualitative data from South Africa****Mathildah Mpata Mokgatle, Sphiwe Madiba, Eva Molapisi**  
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Disclosure of the HIV positive status to adolescents who are perinatally infected by caregivers remains a challenge in South Africa. The challenges experienced by caregivers, also affect onward self-disclosure by perinatally infected adolescents. We explored the context of how the perinatally infected adolescent girls learnt about their HIV status and their onward HIV self-disclosure to romantic partners and friends. In-depth interviews were conducted with a purposively selected sample of 30 perinatally infected adolescents aged 14-19 years. The adolescents were recruited from an HIV clinic in Gauteng province, South Africa. Adolescents learnt about their HIV-positive status from caregivers, some were told about their HIV status by health care workers, others read about their diagnosis from hospital records, while the rest figured it out as they read their medication information leaflets. Of the 30 adolescents, 27 did not disclose to romantic and sexual partners. The reason for non-disclosure to romantic and sexual partners was fear of judgment and rejection. They also felt that it was not necessary to disclose if they were not engaging in sexual activities. Strategies used to protect their status were postponing sexual activities and those who were sexually active enforced condom use with their sexual partners. These findings show that the perinatally infected adolescents choose not to disclose their HIV status particularly to romantic partners. The strategies they used to keep their HIV status secret protect them from potential transmission of HIV to their sexual partners. Health care workers should support and encourage them to delay sexual initiation and negotiate condom use.

**Biography**

Mathildah is an associate professor in the School of Public Health at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University. She is a public health specialist with 15 years of experience in postgraduate teaching across the various disciplines of public health. Her expertise lies in teaching quantitative research, health program evaluation, quantitative statistical analysis. She successfully graduate numerous students in the Master of Public, postgraduate diploma and public health doctoral program. Her research niche is in social aspects of HIV and AIDS with a focus on orphans and vulnerable children, adolescent sexual health and STI/HIV prevention and control.

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