

## Fishermen and Fishing communities in East Africa: Most-at-Risk population of acquiring HIV infection; Results from a population-based survey

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### Background

In East-Africa, fishing communities are considered HIV most-at-risk population but knowledge about the epidemic in these contexts is scarce. Objective: To estimate the HIV-prevalence rate among adults and children in 12 fishing communities surrounding Lake George and Edward, Uganda; and to assess the HIV cascade of care in these settings.

### Methods

We conducted a household-based survey. Trained-nurses visited 890 randomly-selected households interviewing adults of 15-69 years old. Blood samples of HIV-positives were collected for viral load measures. Children <15 years old were eligible for testing only if parents were HIV-positive. Logistic regression models, adjusted on socio-demographic behavioral variables were used to identify factors associated with HIV testing and being HIV-positive, and factors associated with HIV-status unawareness and viral suppression among HIV-positive adults.

### Results

Overall, 1 738 adults and 148 children were included. The HIV-prevalence rate among adults was 17.5% (95%CI: 15.8-19.4) and among HIV-exposed children 6.1% (95%CI: 3.1-11.4). HIV-prevalence rate was higher among women (20.9%;95%CI: 18.4-23.5) than among men (13.5%; 95%CI: 11.3-16.1). According

to occupation and sex, farmers had the highest HIV-prevalence rate among women (27.6%) and fishermen among men (18.7%). After adjustment, only fishermen remained with a 4-fold higher risk of being HIV-positive (aOR: 3.9; 95%CI: 1.6-9.4), compared to men of other occupations. Among HIV-negatives, 81.0% declared having had a test in the preceding 12 months. Among HIV-positives, 86.0% declared HIV-status awareness, 78.0% were on ART and 56.0% virally suppressed. Men had a higher risk of being untested than women (aOR: 2.2; 95%CI: 1.4-3.7) and being virally detectable (aOR: 6.6; 95%CI: 1.9-22.0).

### Conclusions

HIV-prevalence rate in Ugandan fishing communities is high, particularly among women and fishermen. Although HIV testing and ART initiation rates are high, viral suppression rate remains poor, especially among men. Nevertheless, fishermen do not seem to have a lower access to care than other men. More HIV preventive interventions are needed in these settings, particularly targeting women and fishermen. Strengthening ART-retention, particularly among men, should be a priority in these settings.

HIV-prevalence rate in Ugandan fishing communities is high, particularly among women and fishermen. More HIV preventive interventions are needed as well as strengthening ART-retention, particularly among men