Reviewer's report

Title: The motor development of orphaned children with and without HIV: Pilot exploration of foster care and residential placement

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Reviewer: Carl Gabbard

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Title: The motor development of orphaned children with and without HIV: Pilot exploration of foster care and residential placement

The study aimed to compare the motor development of children aged 3-6 years with and without HIV/AIDS in institutions and foster care. The researchers used the PDMS II to assess 44 children with and without HIV at the beginning and 6 months later. Comparisons were made between residential settings and between HIV groups. 21 children had HIV and were significantly delayed compared to their healthy counterparts. Antiretroviral therapy did not restore DQ to normal over the study period. HIV status and place of residence emerged as a predictor of DQ.

General Comments:

First of all, I commend the researchers for addressing a much needed area of motor development in special populations – children with HIV. With that said, from a motor development perspective, several weaknesses in the study are apparent. For me, the most evident problem is the clarity of the intent and aims of the study. The introduction is difficult of follow in regard to settings and groups – which I finally understood in the methods section. In addition, there are too many confounding effects that could account for the outcome. The researchers mention this in the discussion – ‘result of either HIV status or setting...’ Furthermore, the paper appears to be a status report of care for these children, ‘well managed in both settings...’ In essence, not enough about HIV effects on motor development. The best section is the Conclusions and Recommendations.

In addition:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1- State clearly, the settings, aims and results.

2- The research settings need to be described. What are the primary differences that might account for child outcome? Then, let your motor development results support your case – if, it clearly does so --- at this point, it is not clear. If appears that both settings do a good job. If that is the case, what is unique about the groups?

3- More is needed on HIV assessment and length of condition.

4- The abstract does not summarize the primary findings. The results seem to
indicate the all children improved over time. Make it clear, what did not and in what group.

Discretionary Revision
To me, the main intent seems to be care for children with HIV, therapy and setting. Your motor development results may support, in a general way, this observation. In any case, a major rewrite is needed.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests