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: Mijna Hadders-Algra

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This study reports motor development in 44 children aged 3-6 years who either received foster or institutional care. About half of the children was HIV infected. Motor abilities were tested with the Peabody Developmental Motor Scale (PDMS II) in all children at baseline and in 33 after an interval of 6 months. The results revealed that HIV infected children had a significantly worse motor condition than non-infected children and that children receiving foster care had a worse motor development, especially fine motor development, than the institutionalized children. Motor condition had improved after 6 months and it was suggested that this may have been caused by extra input of social workers to foster care families.

General comments
This is an interesting pilot study as it indicates that foster care and residential care differ across societies and cultures and thus may have a different effect on child development.

Specific comments

1. Abstract
Discussion: I got the impression that foster parenting was associated with multiple problems, but in the abstract you write that “foster parents were well supported”. Conflicting, confusing?

2. Introduction: easy to follow.

3. Methodology: I would suggest to include here the changes in foster care over time.

4. Results: Major compulsory revisions.
- I would suggest to investigate whether (statistical) interactions were present between care setting and HIV status. The presence of such an interaction would be very interesting and support your notion in the discussion (page 8, 2nd paragraph).
- last sentence of the results: note that time on ARVT had a non-significant contribution.

5. Discussion: adequate.
6. References: adequate.

7. Tables:
Table 1: status = HIV status positive or negative (I would suggest to spell this out).
Table 2: TB = tuberculosis (use full expression)
Table 3: I would suggest to provide the data for the 4 subgroups. This illustrates the effect of both factors, i.e. care setting and HIV-status. Consider presentation of the data in the form of a figure (box plots).
Table 4: OK, but I would be interested in the interaction
Table 5: I would suggest to replace the table with a figure.
Table 6: can be summarized in the text.

Minor comments
1. page 8, 2nd para, line 2 hand eye, co-ordination: omit the comma.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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'