Author's response to reviews

Title: Facilitating HIV status disclosure for pregnant women and partners in rural Kenya: A qualitative study

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Author's response to reviews: see over
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The Executive Editor
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Dear Executive Editor:

Re: MS: 9051052121015976 - Facilitated HIV status disclosure for pregnant women and partners in rural Kenya: A qualitative study

Thank you for taking the time to review our manuscript titled “Facilitated HIV status disclosure for pregnant women and partners in rural Kenya: A qualitative study”. We have revised the manuscript and provided point-by-point responses immediately below the reviewers’ comments/suggestions in italics.

Reviewer's report, Referee 1:
This is a qualitative study with in-depth interviews of 20 HIV positive pregnant women, 20 male partners of HIV positive women and two focus groups with 16 service providers. The study assessed the acceptability of three assisted disclosure approaches as a groundwork for an intervention study. The approaches are: the first the health worker gives HIV positive woman advice on how to disclose their results and subsequently the woman disclose her results to her partners, the second approach is health facility couple counseling and the third is home based couple counseling. The finding indicated that many participants displayed a strong preference for couples HIV counseling and testing with mutual disclosure facilitated by a trained health worker. Both home and health facility based couple counseling were equally acceptable. PMTCT services are continued to be challenged due to lack of HIV positive disclosure to partners, therefore studies such as this are very important to find alternative ways of HIV status disclosure to sexual partners. The authors should be thanked for taking this forward. Generally the manuscript is well designed and written. The title, the methods and the findings and the conclusions go along very well. I have few comments which could contribute to further improvement of the manuscript.

Abstract:
• The abstract is well written and reflects the findings with proper conclusions and recommendation. Minor comment is in the statement “Participants felt that that home-based support for HIV disclosure..” the word ‘that’ is repeated.

We have removed the repletion of the word “that” in the sentence, which now reads: “Participants felt that home-based support for HIV disclosure....”

• In the conclusion “Home-based facilitated disclosure could serve as an effective method to assist women and men with safe disclosure of HIV status.” Should be rephrased to reflect only acceptability. The study did not assessed safety and effectiveness of the method. These could be assessed in the future planned intervention.
We have changed the word “effective” to “acceptable” in this sentence. The sentence now reads: “Home-based facilitated disclosure could serve as an acceptable method to assist women and men with safe disclosure of HIV status.”

• The introduction is well written and gives reasonable background for the study.

• The method is well written and contains all the details needed for describing the work. Including how the services providers and HIV positive women were selected would improve the clarity.

We have included additional information on the recruitment of these participant groups in the following paragraph on page 7.

This formative qualitative research included in-depth interviews with HIV-infected pregnant women (n=20) and male partners of HIV-infected women (n=20) as well as two focus groups with service providers (n=16). HIV-positive pregnant women were purposively recruited from four antenatal clinics at local government primary healthcare facilities to capture variation in socio-demographics and partner disclosure status, based on information in clinic records. Male partners of HIV-positive pregnant women were recruited via HIV-positive women who attended the ANC clinics. To avoid unwanted disclosure and potential negative consequences, men had to already be aware of their female partner’s HIV-positive status in order to be recruited for the study and permission was obtained from the women before their partners were invited to participate in the study. Service providers recruited for the study included health professionals, community health workers, and other community service providers in the two selected study communities. Providers were purposively selected to obtain a range of those who have experience working with HIV-positive clients in the clinic and the community, and included clinic-based lay health workers, community health workers, clinicians, social workers/counselors, religious leaders, and local government representatives. Participants in this study were 18 years of age and older and were given a reimbursement of 400 Kenyan Shillings (an equivalent of around US$5.00) for any travel expenses incurred related to their participation in this study.

• The discussion is well written except is overstretched towards promoting home based disclosure. The authors should be explicit in recommending this mostly in line with Home Based HIV Counseling and Testing.

We agree with the reviewer and have adjusted the language in the Discussion in several places to more clearly emphasize home-based couples HIV counseling and testing, a strategy which includes facilitated disclosure.

• The Author’s contributions should be corrected according to the journal’s guideline. Stating that all authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

We corrected the Authors’ contribution section according to the journal guidelines:

MW conducted the qualitative coding and data analyses and drafted the manuscript. AH participated in data analyses and helped to draft the manuscript. ZK trained and supervised the qualitative research team in Kenya, contributed to data analyses, and
helped to draft the manuscript. JT conceptualized the study, supervised data collection, participated in data analyses, and helped to draft the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published
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

Reviewer’s report, Referee 2:
This paper presents a cogent and engaging discussion of an issue that is central to HIV management in generalised epidemics. The paper uses interviews with HIV positive women and their male partners to explore perceptions around modes of HIV testing and disclosure. While there are clear limitations arising from the inclusion criteria, these are acknowledged by the authors, and the conclusions do not go beyond these limitations.

Discretionary Revisions
It would be informative if the authors included some information on the extant disclosure experiences of the participants, as it is likely that these would temper their views of alternative options. This could be included a table, or brief descriptive paragraph.

Table 1 (page 35) includes information about whether the pregnant women and male partner participants reported that they had disclosed their HIV status to their partner or not. We recognize that this information is somewhat buried. To remedy this we have a) changed the title of the section of the paper and the table to reflect they it include both socio-demographic and HIV-related characteristics of the participants. The partner disclosure experience of the study participants is relatively high, partially due to the fact that we selected from HIV-positive pregnant clients engaged in care and that we could only recruit men who already knew their wife’s HIV status. This limitation is discussed in the Discussion section.

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

Additional Editorial Request:

a) Competing interests:

E: manuscripts should include a ‘Competing interests’ section. This should be placed after the Conclusions/Abbreviations. Please consider the following questions and include a declaration of competing interests in your manuscript:

Financial competing interests
In the past five years have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future? Is such an organization financing this manuscript (including the article-processing charge)? If so, please specify.

Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organization that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future? If so, please specify.

Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript? Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript? If so, please specify.

Do you have any other financial competing interests? If so, please specify.

Non-financial competing interests

Are there any non-financial competing interests (political, personal, religious, ideological, academic, intellectual, commercial or any other) to declare in relation to this manuscript? If so, please specify.

If there are none to declare, please write ‘The authors declare that they have no competing interests’. For more information please visit the instructions for authors on the journal website.

We have now included a Competing interests section and have declared that the authors have no competing interests.

b) please adhere to RATS guidelines for reporting qualitative studies (http://www.biomedcentral.com/info/ifora/rss).

We have reviewed the RATS guidelines and feel that this manuscript includes all the recommended elements for qualitative articles.

Additional changes:
- We are slightly changing the title of the manuscript to “Facilitating HIV status disclosure for pregnant women and male partners in rural Kenya: a qualitative study”.

We would be grateful if you could address the comments in a revised manuscript and provide a cover letter giving a point-by-point response to the concerns.

Please also ensure that your revised manuscript conforms to the journal style (http://www.biomedcentral.com/info/ifora/medicine_journals). It is important that your files are correctly formatted.

This has been done.
Once again we thank you for your suggestions and recommendations, which were very helpful in improving the quality of our paper.

Sincerely,

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