Reviewer’s report

Title: Disclosing HIV to partners: results from a mixed-methods study in four African countries

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Reviewer: Sharmistha Mishra

Reviewer’s report:

Using a mixed-method approach, this study documents variability in the prevalence of disclosure across countries, and nicely uncovers reasons for non-disclosure. The paper is very well written, and the methods are sound and clearly explained. In addition, the work is timely and of interest in light of international recommendations to prioritize antiretroviral treatment to sero-discordant couples. I have a few suggestions and questions for clarification, which I hope will be helpful.

Discretionary Revisions:

1) It could be helpful to outline the rationale for a mixed-methods study, and how the qualitative analysis perhaps helped to formulate the potential determinants in the quantitative analysis? In the opening of the methods, it seems to me the quantitative description was followed by the qualitative analysis – yet, in the analysis and results, the work was presented the other way around.

Minor Essential Revisions:

1) Abstract: Results: Technically, sentence 1 should use the term ‘prevalence’ of disclosure, rather than ‘rates’ of disclosure. Similarly, ‘rates’ should be replaced with ‘prevalence’ in the main text.

2) Discussion, page 13: It is suggested that perhaps the association between membership in support groups and lower levels of exposure may be partly due to ‘caution’ advised by support groups, or because individuals who are less likely to disclose may be more likely to attend support groups. In light of either reason, what could be the role of support groups to help enhance improve disclosure?

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1) Discussion, page 14, paragraph 3: ‘...unable to explain the differences observed in partner disclosure rates between countries. Why are they lower in Malawi than in the other three countries?’ However, from my understanding, the multivariate model did not include ‘country’, nor was there an adjusted analysis performed with ‘country’ as an independent variable to determine if the association between ‘country’ and disclosure dissolved in the presence of a confounder. In the qualitative results, it was unclear whether thematically, the reasons of non-disclosure varied between countries. Given the difference in the prevalence of disclosure across countries (Malawi vs. the others), it would be helpful to include a slightly more in-depth analysis of heterogeneity between
countries in both the quantitative and qualitative sections to support the discussion statement.

**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.