Reviewer's report

Title: Stigma trajectories among PLWH embarking on a life time journey with Antiretroviral drugs in Jinja, Uganda.

Version: 1 Date: 11 March 2013

Reviewer: Fabian Cataldo

Reviewer's report:

General comments:

1. This paper is based on some interesting work, one of its strength comes from presenting data collected over an extended period of time. An interesting analogy brought up by the authors is the asymptomatic nature of HIV whilst ARV treatment itself seems to become increasingly the object of stigma in this context.

Major Revisions:

2. The overall writing style is clear, however the text would need to be reviewed in some places (see details below).

3. The insertion of interview extracts and quotes from respondents helps to illustrate the data presented, however these are long and sometimes repetitive. The extracts are not always introduced properly in the text, and stand alone ‘observations’ following quotes and interviews segments could be rephrased and linked to the relevant paragraphs (see notes below).

4. Although the study follows individuals over a long period of time, the way individual circumstances have also changed is not much developed in this manuscript. We know that individuals have resumed their sexual, social and economic lives, but there are few examples of this to help to contextualize the extracts from interviews.

5. There is little mention of any difference within the group of 41 informants – were there any observations that are worth exploring in relation to their age, gender, education, location, etc.?

6. The authors describe PLHIV strategies to ‘withdraw from the public eye’ in order to avoid stigma – the discussion and conclusion sections could perhaps explore this with more depth, and in relation to the literature on utilizing ‘silence’ as a social strategy (suggestion).

Minor Essential Revisions:

7. Write out numbers under 10 in full in the text.

8. P2, line 9: Suggestion to indicate by whom ART related stigma was more recognized.
9. P2, Line 10, Conclusion: Rewrite the first part of the sentence to introduce a more nuanced presentation of the link between ART and reduced stigma.

10. P2, Line 11, conclusion: Specify what new form of stigma is introduced

11. P3, Line 9 and 10, Background: close quote marks after each citations.

12. P3, Line 14: The first two sentences of the paragraph are quite general - indicate in which context HIV is closely associated with morality.

13. P4, Line 9 and 15: Use the acronym TASO on the first use of the term (line 9)

14. P7, Line 13: Replace ‘or one to six’ with ‘of one to six’

15. P15, Line 4: suggestion to use a different term than ‘mingling with the general public’

16. P16, Line 10-14: Refer to the respondent using a similar identifying reference as in the other interview extracts

17. P17, Line 12 and 14: Check consistency between the use of ’30-month interview’ or ’30 months interview’ throughout the manuscript

18. P18, Line 4: Rephrase

19. P19, Line 13-15: Interview extract is repetitive with extract on P15

20. P19-20 sero-sorting: this is an interesting theme which is left undeveloped

21. P21, line 3: rephrase the observation at the end of the quote

22. P22, line 4: suggestion to use a different word than ‘disappearance’ of visible signs, as they have not completely disappeared

23. P23, line 10: is 'resurrection' the right word here?

Discretionary Revisions:

24. The acronym ‘PLWH’ is not widely used in the literature, consider using PLHIV instead.

25. P1, line 3, Background: Suggestion to move ‘of PLHIV’ behind ‘trajectories’, i.e. ‘We describe the stigma trajectories of PLHIV over a five year period from the time they started ART’.

26. P1, line 8 of methods: delete hyphen between ‘3’ and ‘years’.

27. P2, line 10, Conclusion: suggest to specify: ‘visible signs of illness’ or ‘symptomatic signs of illness’ instead of ‘visible illness’.

28. P4, line 4, suggestion to delete ‘full blown’
29. P5, last line, end of sentence missing?
30. P9, line 20: Is ‘spotted’ the right term here?
31. P10, suggestion to revise some of the sentences, specifically lines 13-17
32. P10, line 21, suggestion to add a footnote to describe how TASO defines a medicine companion
33. P12: use either italic or quote marks for extract from interviews but not both italic and quote marks together – be consistent with the way quotes and interview extracts are presented.
34. P13, line 19: Did any of the reported signs include gender differences, for instance as long term use of ART and lipodystrophy especially are reported to ‘masculinise’ women’s traits and bodies in other contexts?
35. P14, line 4: delete or incorporate in the previous paragraph.
36. P15, lines 13-21: shorten the interview extract
37. P15, line 8: ‘typical’ might not be the right word here
38. P19, line 18: were there any ethical issues to highlight when TASO staff assisted in identifying other PLHIV for sero-sorting strategies?

**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