Reviewer's report

Title: The people living with HIV stigma index: an exploratory study measuring stigma and discrimination experienced by people living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa

Version: 3 Date: 9 July 2013

Reviewer: Dickens Akena

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revision

This research is important and will add to the current body of knowledge regarding stigma in PLWHA. However, the authors still need to do some work to make the paper better.

General comments

1. Referencing: The authors need to generally improve their referencing of the article. Take an example of the first paragraph, a number of ideas appear, yet there are two references for a whole section. The authors report that history provides an unfortunate abundance ....but this statement is not referenced. The second paragraph is long with the single reference number 1 covering a number of issues. Clearly, the study referenced as number 1 couldn’t have looked at all these aspects of stigma. Throughout the introduction, whole paragraphs with multiple ideas have single references. See pages 2,3,4.

2. The authors repeatedly use inappropriate referencing styles while quoting studies. Take an example of Holzemer, Human, Arudo, Rosa, Hamilton et al 2009. Usually the case would have been ‘in a study by Holzemer et al.(2009)

3. The use of words like ‘an international sample of 726 participants’ is equally inappropriate.

4. Instead of naming all countries in which a research was conducted, the authors could simply state that in a multisite study, and then reference the information. This is repeated a number of times in the text.

Specific comments

1. The authors state that a target sample size of 500 was determined by available resources and time constrains. How can the authors convince readers that their study was adequately powered if they never conducted any power calculations apriori? The authors go ahead to state that it was believed that 500 were ‘adequate’. Against which assumptions does the author base their arguments?

2. Why did the authors choose to conduct a convince sampling? How can the reader be convinced that such maneuvers didn’t lead to selection bias since it
can be inferred that the research assistants would only choose those they felt like interviewing?

3. The authors state that patients with mental health disabilities were excluded/avoided. How did they arrive to such conclusions? Was this done by mere looking at patients? Which mental health disabilities are the authors talking about?

4. For a first time reader, the PLHIV index needs abit more description. For example, could the authors explicitly state what it measures? Of critical importance is a reference to this scale. How used it first? Has it been validated in any setting? The authors seem to state that this scale can be altered/was altered and some items added with regards to the South African context; this makes the reliability of the scale questionable. More explanation will be needed to clarify this.

5. In the data analysis section, it would help if the authors state which variable was the outcome variable and the predictor variables.

6. The Authors give 8 pages of results!!!! Certainly this is very long and exceeds the word limits of most results sections. The result section needs to be made tighter, reporting only significant results, and avoiding the use of words and explanations all through this section

7. In the discussion, the authors abandon the abbreviation of PLHIV and state it in full. In page 20, section paragraph, the authors make a 5 line single paragraph sentence, these need to be corrected.

8. Table 2 needs to be formatted so that it looks neat (the variable rows).

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

**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 no competing interests