Reviewer’s report

Title: Stakeholder views of ethical guidance regarding prevention and care in HIV vaccine trials

Version: 2
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Reviewer: Jonathan Ives

Reviewer’s report:

This is an interesting paper that is mostly well written, although arguably of limited interest to anyone who does not have very closely related interests. This is primarily because the authors do not draw any wider conclusions or engage in any theoretical discussion that might inform the field more generally. This is not a criticism of it, but an observation.

Whilst I can recommend acceptance, I feel there are a number of issues that ought to be addressed that sit on the cusp of being 'major'.

1) This paper falls within the broad field of empirical (bio)ethics, and I feel it needs some discussion of where that paper is located within that methodological literature. Even reference to something like Sugarman and Sulmasy’s text (methods in medical ethics), in which they talk about the role of surveys in medical ethics research, would go some way to addressing this gap.

2) The results are quite confusing to read, and this is not helped by tables and figures that look like too much like raw data. The results text reads like more like a description of the tables, rather than an explanation, and the latter is really needed, especially if the paper is going to be accessible to a general audience. I think the paper would be much improved, and would be much more digestible, if the authors condensed that section, made the figures and tables more simple and transparent, and explained more clearly and simply what their findings are in a narrative rather than what seems at times to be a list.

3) I felt that whilst the conclusions appeared sensible and plausible, it was not really clear how they were arrived at from the data that was presented; or at least more argument is needed before they can be convincing. For example, the conclusion that prevention recommendations need to be prioritised because they tended to be lower ranked does not follow. They may be lower ranked because they are less important. More argument is needed to explain why they are important and why participants were wrong to rank them so low. This ties into my first point about situating the study within the empirical bioethics literature. Does this paper aim to simply describe attitudes (which it seems to do) or use those descriptions to derive some kind of normative conclusions about what ought to be done (which it seems to want to do, but does not provide adequate argument for). In addition, the speculation about the causes of the different rankings seems plausible but the authors need to make clear why it is interesting and why it
counts as useful new knowledge.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests