Reviewer's report

Title: Couple experiences of provider-initiated couple HIV testing in an antenatal clinic in Lusaka, Zambia: Lessons for policy and practice

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Reviewer: Joanna Orne-Gliemann

Reviewer's report:

This paper reports on a qualitative study conducted among couples and professional health workers in an urban antenatal clinic in Zambia. The aim of the study was to assess the implementation of provider-initiated couple HIV counselling and testing in the centre: to assess providers' practices and perceptions and to investigate the experience, positive and negative. WHO has recently recommended improving the availability and coverage of couple HIV counselling and testing, but there is a lack of evidence and operational data on the implementation conditions and challenges and the social consequences on such a couple approach. This paper is thus informative.

The qualitative design proposed here is adapted to the study aim; the methods, study population are well described. The authors outline some of the limits of their study sample, in the sense that the data presented here cannot be extrapolated to other populations and settings, but this data certainly invites to conducting similar studies elsewhere and accumulate as much information as possible, and as soon as possible, on how to implement couple HIV counselling and testing, how to prepare the community, and how to support couples throughout the process.

It is interesting to see that, among the couples interviewed, which have accepted couple HIV counselling and testing, and thus that most statistics would classify as in favour of a couple approach to HIV, likely to subsequently prevent sexual risks, communicate about HIV and support HIV, there are many cases where it is not the case. As outlined by the authors, the issue if not only coverage of couple HIV counselling and testing but quality of service provision.

The "lessons for practice" section is useful. But, as often it is the case within research papers, it lacks operational guidance, pragmatic suggestions for public health actors to go home and organise appropriate couple HIV counselling and testing services. If authors could share further about their personal/site experience and give good ideas, it would further improve the potential impact of the paper.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The paper is long, and it would greatly benefit for a reduction in size. The discussion especially, there are even some repetitions with the conclusion: precision and concision are needed. The results are also presented at length,
and although they are logically presented, the message could be provided in shorter words.

- Minor Essential Revisions

2. Page 12, the authors mention that couples lack “social time and space” to reflect on the implications of testing. This concept can be understood by social sciences specialists but should probably be explained in a few words to the public health workers that will read the paper.

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

**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