Reviewer's report

Title: "The time I was in the hospital, I had fears'. Experiences of stigma among women living with HIV attending SRH services in Kenya: a qualitative study

Version: 2 Date: 10 March 2014

Reviewer: Janet Turan

Reviewer's report:

This revised manuscript addresses the important topic of fears and experiences of stigma experienced by women living with HIV who use sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services in a sub-Saharan African setting. The authors have improved the manuscript in this revision, and have responded well to most of the critiques of the reviewers. In particular, the additional methodological details provided, and the new limitations paragraph, are very useful in understanding the research. Some remaining concerns are specified below. Also, some minor editing of the English language is still needed.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

Results:

1. Although the use of the term “anticipated stigma” is appreciated, the authors should be careful to use the term correctly to describe women’s fears of HIV-related stigma and discrimination. Saying “experiences of anticipated stigma” or “experiencing anticipated stigma” (page 6) or especially “fear of anticipated stigma” (first sentence of the Conclusions on page 21) do not seem like correct usage. The authors can just say things like, “women reported anticipating stigma”.

2. Section 3. Results, Page 6: The authors should also mention sub-themes of the second topic, i.e., breastfeeding and drug adherence, in this introductory paragraph. It is a little unclear why breastfeeding and drug adherence are considered to be sub-themes of lack of disclosure. I think it is because lack of disclosure affects these two behaviors significantly, but it would be better if the authors can spell it out.

3. Section 3.1, Page 7: The first quotation presented (on enacted stigma) is a little confusing, as I guess it presents the exception rather than the general trend. I think it would be better if the authors present this quote at the end of this section, and make it clear that they consider lack of confidentiality/privacy leading to unwanted disclosure as a form of enacted stigma. Also, is there more to the quotation describing what the woman experienced in terms of enacted stigma afterwards, as a result of this unwanted disclosure?
4. Section 3.2, Page 10, first paragraph of the section: I would suggest cutting
the sentences about stigma and reduced fertility intentions, as this was not
mentioned above as being part of the study objectives.

Discussion:

5. Page 17, last paragraph: The second sentence about the effects of anticipated
stigma could use a citation from the literature. See for example Quinn et al., in
the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2009; and Earnshaw et al., in
AIDS & Behavior, 2009. Given the focus on anticipated stigma, it would be good
to ground this in existing theory and literature on this topic.

6. Page 18: The discussion of breastfeeding is still confusing. It seems like fears
of stigma would lead women to continue to breastfeed (as cessation of
breastfeeding is associated with HIV), whereas fears of transmission to the baby
would lead them to stop breastfeeding. Yet the 3rd sentence in the second full
paragraph on this page seems to indicate that both of these would lead to early
cessation of breastfeeding.

Minor essential revisions:

Abstract:

7. The authors should make sure to define each acronym at first use. PNC is
used in the abstract before having been defined.

8. In the last sentence of the abstract, I would still use more tentative language,
such as “appears to override fears”.

Introduction:

9. Section 1.0, Page 4, first full sentence: Cut the “Fears and experiences of” at
the beginning of the sentence, since these are ways that stigma and
discrimination manifest, not really how fears of stigma manifest.

10. Section 1.0, Page 4: first full paragraph: I would say that the number of
studies examining stigma and discrimination among WLWH accessing ANC and
PMTCT services is more that “a few”. I would say “many” or “several” instead.
(The Turan and Nyblade article cited in the paper is a review describing many
studies.)

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 that I have no competing interests.