Reviewer’s report

Title: Social Support Among HIV-Positive and HIV-Negative Adolescents in Umlazi, South Africa: Changes in Family and Partner Relationships During Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period

Version: 2
Date: 27 January 2015

Reviewer: Michael Evangeli

Reviewer’s report:

Abstract
• It is unclear if the results apply for the HIV+ women, the HIV-ve women or both.
• It is unclear if the stress related to HIV disclosure refers to the period prior to disclosure or from the moment of sharing their diagnosis onwards. This is important to clarify as the results section suggests that the post-naming period is influenced by the HIV+ status of the partner.

Introduction
• The introduction is very well-written.
• Lines 29 and 30 – please define ‘mistimed’.

Methods
• Again, very clear, although lacking in detail. For example:
  o What was the average age of the children born to the mothers?
  o What proportion of women were in relationships?
  o What proportion of womens’ pregnancies were unplanned?
  o What was the nature of the training for interviewers?
  o How many interviewers were there?
  o What was the educational background and income level of the participants?
  o What was the background of the interviewers?
  o What was the response rate?
  o What was the background of the staff?
  o How was the interview schedule constructed?
  o What steps were taken to maintain the quality of the qualitative analysis (independent validation of coding, attention to negative cases, inter-rater agreements, reflexivity etc)?
  o Was the data analysed according to a recognised qualitative approach?
  o What determined the sample size? Was the issue of data saturation relevant to the sample size?
Why was there no attempt to go beyond initial coding?

Results

• HIV disclosure
  o Lines 161-162 – how did participants become aware of their partner’s HIV status? For example, did their partners’ tell them or did the partner subsequently get tested? This may have influenced the experience of the post-disclosure process.
  o How did the women respond to the knowledge that their partner was HIV+ and yet (presumably) had not disclosed to them previously?
  o The findings are described very briefly. It is therefore difficult to assess whether the participants’ experience is captured accurately.
  • Pregnancy disclosure
  o Were all women both surprised and disappointed?
  o Lines 174-175: why is it clear that unplanned pregnancies cause surprise and disappointment?
  o There are too few quotes from participants to establish whether the narrative is accurate.
  o How often were fears grounded in conversations that young women had had with parents?
  o How many families responded with anger?
  o How many sisters were disclosed to first?
  o The quotes chosen are often factual descriptions of events.
  o There is insufficient grounding in examples in this section (e.g., the role of sisters).
  o There is a tendency towards making causal statements with little evidence to support such claims.
  • Relationships during pregnancy and postpartum relationships
  o Again, it is unclear how representative the quotes are of the sample as a whole.

Discussion
  • The findings are, in general, over-interpreted.
  • The limitations of the study (in relation to commonly used qualitative criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) are not reflected on. These limitations undermine the study as a whole.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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'