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
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Reviewer: Julianne M Serovich

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the manuscript titled “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.” The manuscript was well-written overall and focused on the important topic of social support from partners and family members during pregnancy, and after pregnancy among adolescents with and without HIV. However, some changes are needed to better contextualize previous research with the objectives of the current study, especially in the Background section. In the results section some consistency would be helpful. For example, sometimes quotes are included in the paragraph and sometimes they are placed in a paragraph by themselves. Is there a reason for this distinction? If not, please be consistent with formatting The Discussion section also needs to “flesh out” more important findings of the current the study. Suggestions for each section are given below.

Background

1) Please provide some estimates pertaining to words such as “majority” and “greater proportion”, especially in the first paragraph of the Introduction. For example for “majority” in the first sentence in the Introduction, state if this is close to 55% or 80%. Same thing for the term “greater proportion” in second sentence.

2) In the third paragraph of the Introduction, line 51, Options B/B+ came out of nowhere. For readers who are unfamiliar with this, there needs to be a brief description of what Options B/B+ are.

3) There is a relatively large focus on social support and ART adherence lines 51-73. The dedication of one page of the Introduction to what is known about social support and adherence is misleading as the analyses in the current study and reported results mention nothing about adherence. Not to say that adherence is not important, it is, but for the purposes of this manuscript, it does not warrant so much information being given in the Introduction…it should be mentioned but should not be one of the main focal points of the manuscript. Authors, should instead focus more on what is known about the link between social support and HIV during pregnancy (albeit, not among teen populations) and also focus on literature on social support and HIV disclosure. The idea here
is to focus the Introduction more on the relationships that are the focal points of the current study.

4) Change “of” to “on” in line 74.

Methods

5) Lines 132-133 state that “After translation, the transcripts were reread for accuracy.” Does this mean that the translated transcripts were read with the Zulu transcripts for accuracy? Please clarify.

Results

6) Lines 155-156 state “All four pregnant HIV-positive women had disclosed their status to someone. What does this “someone” include? Family? Friends? Partners? Please clarify.

7) Clarify in line 161 that the six HIV-positive participants were those that were interviewed during the postpartum. Therefore authors should write “Of the six HIV-positive participants interviewed postpartum, …” or something along those lines.

8) Lines 209-210 state “In contrast to disclosure experiences with family, none of the women expressed worry over disclosing their pregnancy to partners.” Are we supposed to imply from this statement that all partners knew about the pregnancy? Please put a statement clarifying that this was actually so, if true.

9) Lines 215-216 state that “In some cases women attributed their partner’s positive reaction to the news of pregnancy to the fact that they were older and thus more prepared to become parents than the women themselves.” Because of this statement, it is very important to know the age range of the partners of the women. Please include this information here.

10) In lines 232-233, authors state that “Sisters often provided material support as well, particularly when parents were unable or unwilling to buy young women what they needed during this period.” Then in lines 233-235, authors provide an example of when a participant’s sister had provided help when her mother could not. This statement suggests that this is an example of help given by the sister when the parent was unable. Please include another example of help provided by a sister/sister figure when the parent was unwilling.

11) The last paragraph in the results state that two women discussed ongoing close, supportive relationships with their partners with continued intimacy. Give an example of a quote portraying this statement.

Discussion

12) Lines 364-365 state “The dominance of pregnancy-related concerns over HIV-related concerns in this population has been echoed in other studies” but only one study has been cited here. Please cite more studies or change end of statement to read “…has been echoed in one other study….” or something
13) Line 379 states “…it is critical to develop programs that encourage open dialogue between adolescent women and parents or guardians earlier in pregnancy.” Are there current examples of these programs that can be defined briefly and what they do? Giving this example will add much more meaning to this paragraph and to this very important public health implication of the study.

14) Lines 388-389, again, are there examples of interventions that can be defined briefly?

15) Line 416-417 state the importance of engaging family members. Does this mean that partners should not be engaged? We see that the relationships with partners shifted from the time during pregnancy to postpartum. Shouldn’t there be some intervention programs for new fathers encouraging them to play a stronger role in the lives of their teen partners and new children’s lives, irrespective of being in relationships or not? This issue has to be addressed. Lines 386-387 state that many efforts have been made to engage partners in prevention of mother-to-child transmission. However, what about efforts to engage fathers beyond PMTCT? The results show that HIV status or disclosure of such was not a major concern among this population compared to being pregnant, therefore partners’ role beyond issues surrounding HIV has to be addressed in the Discussion section.

16) Another key issue that was not addressed is the fact that there were teen women who discovered their partner’s status upon disclosing their own status. The discussion should address the issue of HIV disclosure among younger populations and HIV disclosure during pregnancy, and how the current findings related to what has been found in prior studies.

17) Lines 150-152 mentions the heightened closeness that women felt with their partners during pregnancy. However, in majority of the cases, this “closeness” was not extended in postpartum. Authors should state here why they think that this was the case for majority of participants interviewed and what explanations have been suggested in previous studies.

Conclusion

18) Please specify, even briefly, what type of “programs” in line 423.

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.