Reviewer’s report

Title: Facilitators and barriers to cotrimoxazole prophylaxis among HIV exposed babies: a qualitative study from Harare, Zimbabwe

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Reviewer: Christopher Gill

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Review of Sibanda et al, BMC PH 2015

The authors present results from a small qualitative study examining barriers to use of prophylactic cotrimoxazole (CTX) among HIV exposed infants in Zimbabwe. The paper is clearly written, interesting and credible, and though the results were not surprising, relatively little has been published on this topic formally and so they will be a useful addition to the literature in my opinion. I had a few comments, queries and suggestions, all 'minor compulsory revisions', as follows:

1. Intro – the author notes that HIV exposed/uninfected children may suffer various immune deficits which Dr. Sibanda attributes to maternal health, poverty, and as a source of exposure to the infant. To note simply that there is growing recognition that such infants may suffer from more innate immune deficiencies, not just acquired by the post natal environment, but due to alterations in T cell function in utero. It may be worth expanding this point, since it speaks to the rationale for Ctx prophylaxis even if early HIV infection can be excluded.

2. Intro – it is stated that barriers to CTx ‘at various steps of the PMTCT cascade.’ will be assessed. That was a slight disconnect with the result section, which wasn’t structured clearly with that theme in mind. Perhaps this point could be clarified, or the results section organized in such a way as to make this more transparent?

3. Methods – please clarify that subjects were interviewed individually, not in groups.

4. Methods – can you provide the question guide in a table in the paper, or an appendix if it is quite long?

5. Results – the tricky part of reporting on qualitative results is understanding how generally held were certain key attitudes. Through most of the results, the authors make an interpretative statement about their data (a theme, if you will), and then back that up with a representative quote. That’s fine, but leaves open whether the quotes were cherry picked to reflect a point of the author’s? Or whether the quotes were representative of similar statements? Presumably you are arguing for the latter, but to strengthen that case it feels insufficient just to state, as you did for example on line 116, “All women desired their baby’s health above all else.” That assertion makes me question, ‘All, really?’ and, ‘Above all
else, really?’ Very strong statements, but the only thing backing that up is the single quote. This seems like a general problem throughout the results, but relatively easily addressed by providing more summary data on the %s of women who made such assertions, and perhaps offering further supportive quotes.

6. Results – from Line 170, how many husbands/partners? Were they interviewed directly? Or were their attitudes as reported by their wives (which is what lawyers would call ‘hearsay’)? Please clarify.

7. Results – same section. You report a ‘striking dose response’ relationship. The use of such strong language begs strong evidence to support it, but really you don’t present data to back up this assertion. Please do so.

8. Results – same section, please provide N of husbands in each category up front.

9. Results – line 220 – how many women were taking CTx?

10. Discussion – I was in broad agreement with your interpretations. However, you lacked a limitations section and need one. The sample size is small; its hard to be sure your findings were typical; not clear how they were recruited; single point in time; single region surveilled; etc . . . . These are typical problems in qual research, so not a barrier per se, but please at least acknowledge them.

11. Discussion – I was struck by the fact that stigma WITHIN the married couple (i.e., husband stigmatizing HIV positive wife) was so pronounced. A reminder that stigmatization is not just about the individual and their larger peer community, but even exists within a couple. Sad.

**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