Reviewer’s report

Title: A Structural Equation Model of Perceived and Internalized Stigma, Depression, and Suicidal Status among People Living with HIV/AIDS

Version: 0 Date: 30 Aug 2017

Reviewer: Whitney Rice

Reviewer’s report:

The authors present a methodologically rigorous and, for the most part, thorough and well-written manuscript on a study topic of importance to the public health field - examination of the specific implications of HIV-related stigma for the mental health of people living with HIV. Nevertheless, several refinements to the manuscript should be made prior to publication. My suggestions are as follows:

Background

* Page 6, paragraph 1: It seems contradictory to suggest that morbidity has decreased among people living with HIV/AIDS in the first sentence and subsequently mention the illnesses and infections that PLWH suffer from in the 3rd sentence. I would suggest introducing a transition sentence or statement before the 3rd sentence. For example, you might acknowledge that although the life expectancy among PLWH has increased due to ART, many other challenges to health (including the challenges mentioned in the final sentence of the paragraph) persist.

Methods

* Page 10: There are a few grammatical errors in the "participants and sampling" section. Consider revising the sentence structure of the first sentence or adding an article (ex. "a") to the beginning of the sentence. The term "requested" should be replaced with "request" on line 34.

* Page 10: In the description of study inclusion criteria, the specific method of verifying HIV-seropositive status is noted. Consider including the same level of detail for the age criteria to describe whether age was self-reported by patients.

* Page 10: Similarly, in the description of exclusion criteria, please describe how presence of mental illness was determined. How was mental illness defined? Also, was this information self-reported?

* Page 10: The authors should elaborate upon their decision to delete cases with missing values rather than to replace them or leave the data as is. In particular, indicate why did
you made this choice. Also, did the authors examine the characteristics of the subjects excluded from the final data sample included in this study? If so, were the excluded participants systematically different from those that were included?

Results

* Table 2: Please indicate in the heading for the total column (or somewhere else within the table) what the numbers in parentheses represent. I assume they are represent proportions (except where otherwise indicated), but it would help the reader to know rather than assume what the figures represent.

* Table 2: Similarly, the authors should also indicate in the "Suicidal status" heading (or elsewhere within the table) what the numbers below represent. Again, I assume they represent total and proportions (in most cases), however it would be helpful to somehow clarify.

Discussion

* Page 18: The term "rate" is used throughout this first paragraph of the discussion section in circumstances where "proportion" would be more accurate. Please revise the use of this term.

* Page 18, lines 40-48: The relevance of comparing proportion of depressive symptoms in the present study with that of the general adult U.S. population is unclear. I would suggest removal of this comparison.

* There is no need to present results again (i.e., p-values, coefficients) within the discussion. The discussion should focus mainly on discussing the results within the context of extant literature.

* Page 23, line 58 - page 24, line 21: Several important study limitations are not acknowledged or discussed in this manuscript in its present form. More specifically, the authors should discuss the potential implications of the study recruitment location. In particular, how might PLWH engaged in care at the hospital from which participants were recruited differ from PLWH who are not engaged in HIV care, and what are the implications for the generalizability of this study? How might your results differ if your sample were not clinic-based?

* Relatedly, what implication does the exclusion of "mentally ill" persons have for your results? Furthermore, what does the inclusion of this important population (in the context of HIV) have for the generalizability of your results?

* Additionally, how might the exclusion of patients with missing data affect your analyses, and their generalizability?
Lastly, how might having a sample comprised primarily of recently diagnosed PLWH have affected your results, and the generalizability of the study?

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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