Author’s response to reviews

Title: Challenges with seeking HIV care services: Perspectives of older adults infected with HIV in western Kenya

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear editor,

BMC Public Health

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We wish to appreciate the reviewer and the Editor for the comments. We believe that after incorporating the suggestions and responding to the raised comments our manuscript is stronger than when it was submitted. Please find below a point-by-point response to each comment.

Reviewer 1 Comments

I would like to commend the authors on a much-improved manuscript. However, there are still a small number of issues that must be addressed.

1) The authors have added a conceptual framework and outline how it connects to the data on the top of page 10. This listing should fit with/mirror the organization of the results section to ensure that evidence is provided for each item in the list in the results section.
Response: The listing on top of page 10 provides a summary of the results that are then elaborated thereafter. While the listing provides the summary of the key challenges faced by older adults, we choose to present the results within the three main themes as follows: i) Lack of resources, ii) Clinic facilities and staff, and iii) Social relationships. Evidence is provided for each item listed even with grouping done within the three main themes.

2) Are poverty and food insecurity policy level or individual factors? They are experienced at the individual level; if the authors want to make an argument for why these are policy level factors, it needs to be more explicitly stated.

Response: Though experienced at individual level, food insecurity and poverty are as a result of the larger system that oppresses the old in the community. As such most of the older people remain poor. Cash transfers are meant to be provided to senior citizens (70 years and above) in Kenya. However, this, according to our participants in this age category was not happening. Due to lack of economic purchasing power as a result of poverty older people are faced with food insecurity. Population growth has also seen large agricultural land subdivided into small pieces for residential reducing food produced for consumption resulting in food insecurity in most parts of the country. We have added a sentence in the manuscript to contextualize what we mean by policy-level and hope this provides more clarity.

Changes made on page 13 line 303-308

3) Each quote needs contextualization. There are several places where 2 and sometimes 3 quotes are just listed one after the next. This is appropriate in a report, but unless there is text prior to that outlines why these multiple quotes are being listed together, there should be text interpreting each quote before/after it.

Response: In the sections that we provided 2 or 3 quotes following each other, we have revised to include text before the quote with an interpretation of the same.

4) The section on discordant couple still does not fit/is not properly set up as part of the social support section. The authors do a much better job in the discussion explaining why this is a component of social support, but it needs to be clearer in the shift from the quote at the top of
page 19 to the discussion of discordant couples, why this is an issue of social support, and the complexities that are introduced when couples are discordant. How does this experience look different from the way social support is discussed in the rest of the section? To this end, the conclusion of the section says that 'Additionally' discordancy affects adherence, but not in the same ways for men/women, or those who aren't in discordant couples.

Response: The results section on page 19 line 461-462 and in page 20 line 473-474 and line 485-492 related to discordancy has been revised to reflect the reviewer’s comments.

5) The results highlight both barriers and facilitators, the setup of the discussion should as well.

Response: As the focus of this paper is on challenges faced by older adults, our discussion section focuses on commenting on the issues presented in our results, such as disintegrated service provision, stigma, and lack of social support, and we hope this is convincing and in line with what we set out to do with this paper.

6) The discussion section on social support (lines 572-582) should also include the paragraph on the top of pg. 25 - this is also about social relationships and the ways that supporting others can benefit/detract from ART adherence. This should highlight the ways that kids and grandkids support adherence.

Response: The revised manuscript has the two paragraphs that discuss social support follow each other.

Discussion on social support is now covered in page 24 and 25 from line 585-605

7) Pg. 25, lines 605-610, say that the factors interact with one another - other than presenting the different aspects of each, there really isn’t any discussion of HOW these different levels of the socio-ecological model interact with one another. If the authors want to claim this, there needs to be more evidence presented in the results or bring out the interaction between levels more explicitly in the discussion.
Response: Though this is evident in the results section, we have added two sentences to the paragraph that describes (with example) in hopefully a clearer way the interactions between various levels of the socio-ecological framework.

The revisions are made in pages 25 and 26 line 622-626

8) The first sentence of the conclusion (lines 624-626) basically replicates the sentence at the end of the methods section, and the beginning of the discussion. In all places it lists out barriers but misses the facilitators. It also just feels repetitive. See if there is another way to summarize the key findings that doesn’t repeat this list again.

Response: The first sentence on the conclusion section has been edited to avoid repetition.

The change has been made on 642-643

There are a number of typos that need to be caught - bottom of page 12 in quote; reread lines 328-331 on Page 14 as it is hard to follow; pg. 14, line 335 - not sufficient, should be insufficient; pg. 20 lines 484-486 treatment not treatments/ is seen to should be is seen visiting/ shunning away not right word choice.

Response: We appreciate the corrections on the typos. These have been corrected accordingly as suggested.

Once again, we wish to convey our sincere appreciation to the Editors and reviewers for taking time to review our manuscript and providing the critical comments and input.

Yours Sincerely,

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