Reviewer’s report

Title: Ethical issues associated with HIV molecular epidemiology: A qualitative exploratory study using inductive analytic approaches

Version: 1 Date: 01 Mar 2019

Reviewer: Maureen Kelley

Reviewer's report:

Ethical issues associated with HIV molecular epidemiology: A qualitative exploratory study using inductive analytic approaches

Overall comments: This paper offers important insights from experts in epidemiology, public health, and bioethics on the ethical issues surrounding HIV molecular epidemiology, including distinctive concerns related to mapping and surveillance of HIV transmission dynamics and challenges in understanding the science for purposes of consent. The qualitative data reported are valuable for informing future research, study design, and governance for emerging techniques in infectious disease epidemiology.

Specific comments:

P 6 lines 5-10: It would be helpful to have a few more sentences describing the specific approach to qualitative analysis. Grounded theory is mentioned, but then the coding process described mentions beginning with deductive coding (driven by topic guides). However, on page 7, line 52 the authors say that "key ethical concerns were inductively derived from the data." Typically (though not always) grounded theory begins with inductive, open analysis of the data to identify latent patterns before moving to comparison/reflection with deductive concepts. A few more details on the analytic approach would be helpful to clarify this process for the reader.

Table 1 and Discussion: Since nearly half the sample were American experts it would be good to note this as a potential limitation in terms of this being a representative sample of experts in global HIV molecular epidemiology. This is not a major worry for an exploratory qualitative sample, but ostensibly you might see different concerns arising from those working in other cultural/socioeconomic regions - e.g., there were no Asian or Latin American scientists, and very few LIC experts (although presumably many of the HIC researchers from Europe and North America are running projects in LICs. If so, I would make this explicit on p. 5, line 22). This could be mentioned as a limitation and an opportunity to explore further in follow-on research.
The authors may already be aware of this guidance, but it might be worth referencing the WHO bioethics groups' ethics of surveillance guidelines from 2017. While the scope extended beyond HIV and infectious disease surveillance to include all public health surveillance, the principles and discussion might provide a helpful resource for thinking through, at least initially, how one might begin to address some of the issues raised in this paper.


https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(17)30136-6/fulltext

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.

Unable to assess

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.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?
3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal.