Reviewer’s report

Title: Attitudes of the Serbian mothers with preschool children: should a HIV positive female teacher be allowed to continue teaching in school

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Reviewer: Abraham Mukolo

Reviewer’s report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   Overall the question posed is relatively well defined on page 8, lines 168-171, i.e., what is the “…correlation between socio-demographic characteristics and behavior, knowledge, attitudes and practices of mothers with preschool children, and their attitude towards whether a HIV positive female teacher should be allowed to continue teaching in school.” However the authors also tend to discuss some variables, such as gender disparity, the efficacy of stigma reduction interventions and mental disorders, which are either not part of this research question or not answerable from study design that is presented in the paper. The gender inequality issue is an important and interesting issue that has to be explored (as fairly well justified on p.8, lines 163-167), but it would require either a different research question or different study design, e.g., data permitting, one could compare the attitudes of female vs. male respondents towards HIV positive female teachers to look for any gender disparity in attitudes towards HIV positive female teachers. Alternatively, one could look for possible differences in female participants’ attitudes towards HIV positive male vs. female teachers to see if the gender of the teacher matters—-are attitudes more favorable/unfavorable towards male than female teachers?

   Major compulsory revision
   The gender inequality question should be framed as clearly and precisely as possible and then explored in the data analysis. If not, it should not be posed as a question and it should not be presented in the introduction in ways that imply authors want to pose as a question (e.g., p. 6, lines 119-129 and p. 8 lines 163-167) or be discussed in the discussion section as if it is supported by the findings that have been presented (see p.18, lines 401-416)

   Minor Essential Revisions
   If the authors decide not to specifically explore the gender disparity question in this paper, they might still bring the issue up in the discussion as a possible consequence of the results they have presented, possibly as the next avenue of research that needs to be explored. So the paragraph on p.6, lines 119-129 would then be moved to the discussion section, e.g., to expand on p. 18, lines 401-416.

   On p. 7, lines 138-140, I suggest that authors delete the 2nd potion of the sentence, i.e., “…and only three of them can be considered to be of higher
quality and could be recommended for replication in similar and other cultural contexts" because it gives the impression that the paper will also explore stigma reduction intervention. The real issue that the authors are highlighting in this section seems to be related to the paucity of studies about the stigmatization of HIV positive workers like HIV positive teachers. This should be stated more clearly here.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
Yes, they are appropriate to the question posed on page 8, lines 168-171, but are not suited to the gender disparity issue---see comments above. Two of the independent variables that the authors have chosen---willingness to take care of a family member sick with AIDS in one’s own home and not to keep the HIV status of a family member secret---could have been presented as evidence of the stigmatization of an HIV positive person in as much as the attitudes towards HIV positive female teacher. There is a possibility of multicollinearity in the regression models. In other stigma models the stigma outcomes (dependent variable) are generated from several indicators---I presume the authors are aware of such models since under the limitations section they have referred to alternative (possibly, enhanced) ways of measuring stigma. Understandably, the outcome chosen is consistent with the question posed and should be retained, but the possibility of multicollinearity needs to be addressed.

Discretionary Revision
• Since I am not a statistician, authors could test for possible multicollinearity and how that changes their findings. They could also elaborate on alternative ways of measuring the stigma variable (p. 19, lines 423-433).
• The sentence on p. 15, beginning line 340, could be moved to either page 7 or 8 (before or after the research question, as a justification for the focus on a women’s attitudes and behavior towards a HIV positive woman.

3. Are the data sound?
Yes. I hope the original study has data relevant to the gender disparity issue so the authors can retain their focus on this issue.

4. Do the figures appear to be genuine, i.e. without evidence of manipulation?
Yes

5. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Data reporting is standard. Data deposition isn’t clearly described. If the journal has specific policy, then the editor could request a brief narrative.

6. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
Yes, to a large extent, if the issues raised in points 1 and 2 above are addressed

7. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Yes, except for the limitations related to the gender disparity issue. If the authors still want to cover the gender disparity issue, but are constrained by the study
design or data availability, then they will have to refer to this limitation. See also the discretionary revision in point 2 above.

8. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes. I didn’t review the references thoroughly enough for to comment on consistency with journal policy

9. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes

10. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes. A few minor grammatical/syntax errors, e.g.:
• the reference to “researches” instead of “research” or “many/several/a number of studies” (e.g., p. 6, ln 119; p. 8, ln 163; p. 15, ln, 340; p.17, In 365, p. 18, In 407).
• Also the sentence on p.6, lines132-134 could be clarified by adding a comma in line 132 between “Advances in health care” and “increasing life expectancy”
• Page 18, line 389, “a” is missing between “in” and “French group”
• P.17, In 365-367---reference to informal communication adds a confusing dimension to the point authors want to make. Since informal communication isn’t explored I suggest it be removed from this sentence so it reads as: “Research shows that increasing knowledge about HIV/AIDS can contribute to the alleviation of HIV/AIDS-associated stigma. For example, it has been noted that families of HIV positive persons often display negative initial attitudes towards HIV which is altered by means of education, making them more accepting of the family the member living with HIV(50).”

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests