Reviewer's report

Title: Provider attitudes about childbearing and knowledge of safer conception at two HIV clinics in Malawi

Version: 1 Date: 9 June 2014

Reviewer: Sarah Finocchario Kessler

Reviewer's report:

Summary Statement: The topic of better understanding provider perspectives regarding childbearing among their HIV+ patients and knowledge regarding safer conception is important and as the authors point out, is not yet well represented in the literature. The discussion section is well written and integrates important aspects of this topic. Enthusiasm for this manuscript is diminished by the limitations of the methods used and lack of rigor in reporting the qualitative findings.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. The current presentation of data in the results doesn't give a sense of who provided quotes... did quotes come from 3-4 very vocal participants in FG or did the quotes represent many different voices. The way it is currently written, one cannot determine this. When presenting participant quotes, associate them with an ID number that indicates a unique numeric assignment (e.g. 1,2,3,4, etc) and the type of provider they are (e.g. P, N, etc).

2. The manner in which these data are presented does not give the reader confidence in how relevant the expressed themes were for the sample of providers. More specificity is needed, e.g. A majority of providers (9/12) expressed an appreciation for the cultural importance of childbearing for couples.... Or something to that effect. Statistics in this context are not for the purpose of statistical significance, but can provide a sense of how representative the selected quotes were.

3. The manuscript needs a Table 1 to describe the participant characteristics... what kind of providers where these? Gender? Age? How many participated in each focus group.

4. The method of focus groups (only two) are not ideal or adequate to assess knowledge of a content area. Semi-structured or quantitative survey would be better to assess attitudes and knowledge.

5. Authors provide no information on informed consent. Did providers provide oral or written informed consent?

Minor essential revisions:

1. Details regarding recruitment of providers, length of focus groups and amount of remuneration (if any) were not included in the methods section.
2. The limitation section acknowledges that FG discussions were not an ideal method to elicit provider perspectives on these topics, a follow up sentence should be added indicating these themes require validation with a larger sample of providers and more appropriate/rigorous methods such as in depth or semi-structured interviews.

3. Authors report the use of grounded theory, however, the structure of the interview guide and responses provided suggest a thematic or content analysis.

**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 have no competing interest to identify.