Reviewer’s report

Title: A Systematic Review Protocol of Stigma among Children and Adolescents with Epilepsy

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Reviewer: Jermaine Dambi

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At present the article is seemingly addressing two distinct research questions and the methodology does not seem to be in synergy with the research questions. See attached report.

Background

- Line 15 – it’s important for authors to define terms ‘enacted and perceived stigma. Not all prospective readers will be familiar with these terms, yet they are the core concepts of the manuscript

- Lines 15-21 “The presence of stigma among children and adolescents has been associated with low self-esteem, a poor quality of life, retardation in neuro-cognitive development, and academic progress [9]– [11]. Stigma among patients with epilepsy has also been associated with poor health seeking behaviours, and increased rates of mortality (mainly through suicide) [12], [13].” Could be merge into a single, compound sentence as the concepts are essentially the same. Authors are especially encouraged to write concisely.

- Lines 29-30: “Whereas some literature indicates that the above factors associated with stigma of epilepsy, several other studies have not documented such association [16].” This is a very important point and needs to be fully expanded. Authors need to critic the cited articles and briefly explain the discrepancies between the studies.

- Lines 31- 32; “Additionally, negative explanatory models of the condition…”- this statement is not very clear, what do you mean by this?

- Lines 34 – 40: A number of studies have been done to determine the prevalence of epilepsy related stigma in high income countries (HIC) [18] and low and middle-income countries (LMIC) including sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) [14], [19]. However, findings from these studies have been conflicting with very high variations.”
Firstly, authors need to provide full context so that prospective readers can critique the evidence provided for instance, it’s worthwhile to cite the actual incidences to demonstrate the magnitude of the problem and perhaps provide evidence for the need of a systematic review on factors associated with stigma.

The statement “However, findings from these studies have been conflicting with very high variations” needs to be rephrased as it is not very clear.

What are the reasons for the “...high variations”? this needs to critically appraised as this forms a huge basis for the study e.g. could the variations be due to differences in methodologies or operational definitions?

• “... makes the extrapolation of findings from HIC to SSA inappropriate” I think this text is out of context as authors earlier on cited that some of the studies were done in SSA. Authors are advised to be consistent in their argument.

• The first aim is double-barrelled and therefore not succulent.

• “To document the various available interventions aimed towards reduction of stigma of epilepsy among children and adolescents with epilepsy globally.” I think authors need to take the systematic review a notch further and critically appraise the level of evidence of the available interventions. It’s not good enough to just identify interventions, issues such as acceptability, feasibility, efficacy among other issues need to be appraised if the goal of the systematic review is to ultimately work towards the eradication of stigma in epilepsy as authors argue. I think that the review is focusing on two distinct research questions which could warrant two separate systematic review. This is even reflected in the methods section, the way the PICO are outlined is just confusing.

• These findings will be used in guiding policy makers to allocate funds to effective interventions that tackle the burden stigma in epilepsy.- this point is a “bit far-fetched” as nowhere in the background was there a mentioning of the relationship between stigma and policy!
Methods

- There is no synergy between aims and the methodology

- There is need to justify inclusion of only cross-sectional surveys investigating various interventions

- Please use initials only under data extraction process, authors’ full names should be provided as per author instructions

- Please provide more information on the risk of bias assessment tool e.g. its psychometrics
  - What do you mean by this? “The methodological quality of the review will be assessed using Review Manager (RevMan) 5.3.5 at all stages of study and two independent people from the team will carry this out.”

- “Studies involving assessment of prevalence of stigma will be assessed for the appropriateness of the stigma tools used”. Again, please be more explicit, what psychometric of the tools are you going to evaluate and why?

- “Publication bias will be assessed using funnel plot and Egger regression test.” – do you expect the methodologies to be homogeneous? Again, this directly contradicts information provided in the background section. This also applies to the proposed meta-analysis.

Minor comments

- Punctuation error for words at least – line 8

- Page numbering will make the manuscript much easier to review

- Authors are also encouraged to format the article in accordance with the journal guidelines e.g. [6]–[8] ought to have been cited as [6-8]

- related stigma should be written as a single word i.e. related-stigma

- please avoid use of the word “vice”
**Level of interest**
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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