**Reviewer’s report**

**Title:** Challenges and Support for Quality of Life of Youths Living With HIV/AIDS in Schools and Larger Community in East Africa: A Systematic Review

**Version:** 0  **Date:** 18 Sep 2018

**Reviewer:** Ruth Gwernan-Jones

**Reviewer's report:**

The authors have conducted a review to synthesise evidence to inform the design and implementation of interventions that support the wellbeing of youths living with HIV/AIDS in an East African context.

I think their study meets this aim; their findings provide a potentially valuable contribution to intervention development.

I have a number of comments about the methods adopted, particularly around the reporting of methods and analysis of qualitative findings.

1) Abstract. At the beginning of the abstract, I think it would be better to include the aim of the review that the authors state in the introduction (to inform the design and implementation of interventions that support the wellbeing of youths living with HIV/AIDS in an East African context).

You use an acronym in the abstract without explaining it.

From reading the abstract I understood that the review was a synthesis of mixed methods and qualitative studies, so included quantitative and qualitative data; I think a sentence needs to be added to the abstract to clarify that there were no quantitative results that met the inclusion criteria.
A central purpose of qualitative synthesis is to synthesise new information, rather than only describing what research has been done on a particular topic, so the authors should identify what they are adding in the abstract. What seems to be the 'new' understanding from this synthesis is that although the bulk of challenges studies identify arise in schools, and there are supportive approaches available, there weren't studies that explored how supportive interventions might work in schools. The authors already state this in the abstract, but could frame this findings as important information that they are adding to the field.

2) I think the Introduction section does a good job to contextualise and rationalise the study.

3) There are a few points for the Methods section to clarify information reporting.

a. Please separate information about 1. the search methods, 2. inclusion/exclusion criteria, 3. Data analysis, 4. Included studies (description of the prisma process, summary about included studies), and 5. Findings (your analysis of qualitative findings) into separate sections. At the moment the search section has search information, inclusion/exclusion information, information about search results and/or included/excluded studies. It will make things much easier to access if these can be signposted and discussed separately within each relevant section.

b. Please explain within the inclusion/exclusion section your rationale to limit studies to those of the past 10 years, and to only include studies from East Africa.

c. I have some concerns about the use of 'outcomes' in this manuscript. Outcomes are effects of interventions and so are relevant to the quantitative evaluation of interventions, and more specifically link to measures. Qualitative studies explore the perceptions and experiences of people in relation to interventions they have received and/or other aspects of their lives, these are not outcomes. Please find any use of 'outcomes' in the manuscript and make sure they are accurate.

d. Please extract the included study aims and report them in your table of study characteristics, they make it possible for the reader to understand each study more easily.
e. Did you conduct quality appraisal? If you did, please report the method and then findings at the beginning of the findings section; if not, please provide a rationale for why you did not conduct quality appraisal.

4) Findings. The authors seemed to have stopped the analysis process with their initial framework of challenges and supports which I see as descriptive codes rather than themes. This to me is the greatest problem within the manuscript. Usually the analysis would continue by looking at relationships between codes, and potentially developing some explanatory theories (themes). For example, stigma/discrimination seems to be the main explanation around challenges; supports could then be looked at in relation to how they prevent or ameliorate stigma/discrimination. This is a more likely main theme. I would encourage the authors to think further about this. At the very least, if it were possible to create a diagram showing the relationships between codes, this would greatly improve their ability to communicate their findings to others. Discussing 'challenges' and 'supports' in separate sections means there is repetition, as these link to each other in many different ways. The authors could better organise and report their Findings section.

Please cite each paper that reported the general theme you are discussing at the beginning of each theme section.

5) I thought the discussion section was good - the authors contextualise and discuss implications of their findings well. I would draw greater attention to the finding that the bulk of challenges are faced within schools, but none of the research on supports was conducted in schools, as this seems to be an important way this synthesis adds to existing knowledge.

6) This paper needs a good deal of work on the analysis to be of publication standard, but I think it is worth publishing so would recommend 'major revisions'
Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

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

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

Needs some language corrections before being published

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