

Peer Review

Review of: "Mental Health Challenges among Children and Adolescents Associated with HIV Status Disclosure: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocol"

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Major Concerns

1. Conceptual Clarity of Exposure and Outcome

The protocol groups multiple mental health outcomes (stigma, depression, anxiety, and suicidality) under one composite concept of “mental health challenges.” These outcomes may differ substantially in measurement tools, diagnostic criteria, and clinical significance. The authors should clarify:

Whether pooled prevalence estimates will be calculated separately for each mental health outcome

How variability across measurement scales will be standardized

Whether validated diagnostic thresholds will be required for inclusion

2. Statistical Analysis Plan

The statistical methodology requires additional clarification:

The decision threshold of $I^2 < 75\%$ for fixed-effect modeling is unconventional and may underestimate heterogeneity. Typically, fixed-effect models are considered when heterogeneity is low or moderate.

The protocol indicates calculation of a “standardized mean estimate of prevalence,” which requires clarification since prevalence meta-analyses generally use transformed proportions (e.g., logit or Freeman–Tukey transformation).

3. Inclusion Criteria and Language Restriction

Limiting inclusion to English-language studies introduces potential language bias. The authors should either justify this limitation or acknowledge it as a potential source of bias.

4. Disclosure Definitions

Disclosure is described as full, partial, non-disclosure, or deception. However, the protocol does not clearly specify:

How these categories will be operationalized

Whether subgroup analyses will be conducted across disclosure types

How studies using inconsistent disclosure definitions will be handled

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.