

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

Vanessa Sánchez-Mendoza<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fundación Universitaria Konrad Lorenz

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Dear editors,

Thank you very much for inviting me to review this manuscript. Below are my comments about it. For a quick identification of the aspects to be improved, they have been written in bold.

This paper presents a comprehensive and methodically structured systematic review protocol aimed at elucidating the prevalence of mental health challenges following HIV status disclosure among children and adolescents living with HIV (CALHIV) globally, as well as identifying associated factors. The background effectively outlines the criticality of the issue, given the large population of children living with perinatally acquired HIV, predominantly in low- and middle-income countries, and the multifaceted nature of HIV status disclosure. It rightly highlights the psychosocial ramifications of disclosure during adolescence, a period marked by significant developmental changes.

The research questions are clear and directly pertinent to addressing significant gaps within the existing literature, focusing not only on the prevalence of mental health issues post-disclosure but also on the factors contributing to these challenges. This dual focus is crucial for developing targeted interventions to support CALHIV effectively.

The methodology, following the PRISMA-P 2015 guidelines, demonstrates a rigorous approach to ensuring the systematic review's comprehensiveness and reliability. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are well-defined, promoting a focused yet extensive review of relevant studies. **However, the exclusion of non-English studies could limit the review's comprehensiveness, particularly concerning data from non-English speaking regions that are significantly affected by HIV.**

The search strategy is detailed and appears robust, with an appropriate selection of databases and search terms designed to capture a wide range of relevant literature. The use of both MeSH terms and free-text searches should enhance the search's sensitivity. Including gray literature and the process for backward and forward searching are strengths that could uncover additional valuable data not captured in traditional databases.

The risk of bias and quality assessment strategy, utilizing the NIH quality assessment tool and the Cochrane Collaboration's tool, is appropriate and indicates a commitment to reviewing only high-quality evidence. **However, the review could benefit from elaborating on how discrepancies in study quality might influence the synthesis of**

**evidence and the subsequent conclusions drawn.**

The data extraction and analysis plan is thorough, indicating a structured approach to handling the data. The proposal to use both a narrative synthesis and meta-analysis, depending on heterogeneity, is appropriate and suggests flexibility in dealing with varied study designs and outcomes. Subgroup and sensitivity analyses could provide insightful distinctions within the data, **although the paper could further detail how these analyses will be specifically conducted and interpreted.**

The ethical considerations and dissemination plan indicate a well-thought-out approach to the responsible conduct of research and the effective communication of its findings to both the scientific community and policymakers, which is commendable.

In the discussion, the paper aptly outlines the potential impact of the systematic review in filling significant knowledge gaps and informing interventions and policy. **However, it might further benefit from a critical discussion on the limitations of the proposed review, including potential biases in publication and language, and how these might affect the generalizability of the findings.**

Overall, this systematic review protocol is well-conceived, with a clear potential to contribute valuable insights into the mental health challenges faced by CALHIV post-disclosure and the factors influencing these challenges. Its findings could be instrumental in guiding future research, policy, and practice aimed at supporting this vulnerable population.

Best Wishes

Reviewer