Reviewer's report

Title: Central and East European migrant men who have sex with men in London: a comparison of recruitment methods

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Reviewer: Lisa S Johnston

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript presents a comparison of different data collection methods among Central and East European migrant men who have sex with men in London. The sampling methods reviewed include a chain referral sampling method, two samples from websites for gay men and two clinic based samples. Overall, the potential of this article seems useful and interesting. However, I think this article needs substantial revision before it is published. Therefore, I request: 1) Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached) and 2) Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions. I declare that I have no competing interests when reviewing this article. I hope my comments below will be useful.

My first comment about this article is that there are several gaps in the presentation and discussion of these data collection methods to add anything to what has already been presented in the current literature. There is already a similar article which compares respondent driven sampling (RDS) and internet sampling (also in Europe) that should be reviewed as a basis for adding knowledge to this topic: Johnston LG, Trummal A, Lõhmus L, Ravalepik A. Efficacy of convenience sampling through the internet versus respondent driven sampling among males who have sex with males in Tallinn and Harju County, Estonia: Challenges reaching a hidden population. AIDS Care. 2009. 21 (9): 1195-1202.

Some additional points:

• The paper needs careful editing.

• The paper is not well written and could be clearer and more specific. For instance the first sentence in the background could be better written as: Convenience sampling is a cost-effective and easy method for recruiting non-representative samples of men…….

• The second sentence in the background does not make sense to me. Why is “for instance” in this sentence? It does not add anything. Why not, Convenience sampling has been successfully employed to sample MSM from sexual health clinics and gay venues, and through online sources…….

• As I continue to read the background, I see that it can be more concise and have a better flow.
• RDS is a variant of chain referral sample, not “chain sample”.
• There should be a citation for first sentence in second paragraph in background.
• Put the description of RDS in your own words.
• The literature review to say that RDS has been conducted in other countries with MSM is weak. There is a lot of literature out there. See the biblio of the Efficacy of convenience sampling through the internet versus respondent driven sampling among males who have sex with males in Tallinn and Harju County, Estonia: Challenges reaching a hidden population article

• Page 4, 1st paragraph. What in the previous sentence does “This” refer to in This may impact (take out upon as it is redundant) the sexual knowledge….. Also add a citation.
• Page 4, 2nd paragraph. Change first sentence to: We conducted a survey of sexual behavior in London among migrant.
• Page 5. There needs to be more information about how it was decided to even do an RDS study. How was it determined that migrant MSM formed one complete network structure (an important criteria for RDS)? Just thinking about it, why would a MSM from Bulgaria know an MSM from Latvia?????? What type of formative research was conducted to determine that RDS was an appropriate method for this population as it appears that only after the fact that it was determined that there may not have been sufficient networking among the groups to warrant a chain referral sampling method. One article on conducting formative research before using RDS is: Johnston LG, Whitehead S, Simic M, Kendall, C. Formative research to optimize Respondent Driven Sampling surveys among hard to reach populations in HIV behavioral and biological surveillance: Lessons learned from four case studies. AIDS Care. 2010. 22(6):784-92.
• Page 6, Results. Overall it looks like conducting RDS was not a good idea in the first place and that this endeavor resulted in a big waste of resources.
• Page 7, Results. This section is fairly weak. It would be interesting to have a breakdown on the Eastern European Countries from where these men came. Did they all come from the same place? Do they all speak English or the same language? This may provide more information about the social network qualities of these MSM and why RDS may not have been a good sampling method.
• Page 7, Discussion. Should back up the statement that homophobia and stigma may have encouraged movement to the UK. I thought migration was usually due to economic reasons. Best find a citation.
• Page 8, Conclusion. What does “Respondents must understand what to do and be prepared to do it“? And the next sentence is vague.
• Overall the Discussion needs more work and some contribution to what already exists.

SUMMARY
When assessing the work, I have considered the following points:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined? Could be improved
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? Could be improved
3. Are the data sound? Could be improved
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? Not sure
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? Could be improved
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? Could be improved
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? No. Need to improve the literature review.
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Yes
9. Is the writing acceptable? Needs a great deal of editing.