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

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

The modifications to the article look very good. This paper still needs editing since it does not read very well. I still have a few comments which I hope the authors will consider.

These are all Minor Essential Revisions

BACKGROUND

I think the first paragraph can flow more easily.

1) First sentence: I would leave out “which are large enough for detailed analysis”.

2) Consider not mixing sampling and recruiting and also recruitment from venues can reach large number of geo dispersed MSM but your sentence does not read that way. First of all, define convenience sampling: Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. (Use your own words since I just got this from a website).

Then I would just say: Effective convenient sampling techniques used among MSM include recruitment through sexual health clinics and gay venues and, more recently, online surveys.

Then provide some of the disadvantages to these convenience methods. Something like this: However, convenience sampling methods are prone to biased estimates because the sampled population is not representative of the entire population.

Then I would say a simple sentence introducing RDS without going into detail, for instance, Respondent driven sampling (RDS) is an alternative approach which is capable of recruiting unbiased samples of hard to reach populations (Heckathorn 2002; Salganik, Heckathorn 2004).

Second Paragraph

Describe RDS
3) Have an intro sentence about RDS and MSM such as RDS has been shown to be effective in recruiting representative samples of MSM throughout the world (Malekinejad; Ramirez Valles: MSM in Chicago, Johnston: MSM in Bangladesh, etc.)

Consider changing this sentence, Members of the target group are recruited and, having completed the survey, they invite three other members of the target group to participate in the study, to this: To begin RDS, a handful initial members of the target group are selected by researchers and, upon completion of the survey, invite up to three of their peers (members of the target group who are part of the participant’s social network) to participate in the study.

Consider writing this: These three peers who enroll in and complete the survey are also asked to recruit three more contacts and so on until the sample size is reached. The minimization of bias occurs through the production of long recruitment chains whereby the sample is no long dependent of the non-randomly recruited initial participants.

Third Paragraph:

This paragraph needs some work: You are mixing two issues here. First talk about what has happened with internet surveys. In the first sentence you mention that the internet is well established as a means for recruiting MSM in OECD. But this is not necessarily using RDS so that should be stated since it is confusing. Then you talk about sampling of MSM using RDS but state that it is mainly in developing countries which is not really the case as the USA with CDC has conducted several RDS studies of MSM. Just to cite the Ramirez article is insufficient.

A simple search on the internet shows other studies: J Urban Health. 2010 May;87(3):467-79.

What makes a respondent-driven sampling "seed" productive? Example of finding at-risk Massachusetts men who have sex with men.

Reisner SL, Mimiaga MJ, Johnson CV, Bland S, Case P, Safren SA, Mayer KH.

Then the purpose of the paper by Johnston et al on Estonia was to say that there has been other papers (or at least one other) where RDS among MSM was compared to internet sampling methods.

Fifth paragraph.

This looks good and is clear.

We initially selected RDS as a potentially expeditious means for accessing CEE MSM in London because they form a minority, hidden high-risk (high risk for what…more like vulnerable) group within the CEE migrant community that would be difficult to reach by other means.

Sixth Paragraph.
This looks good and is clear.

Section under RDS: Seeds and recruits were asked the number of CEE MSM in London that they knew. Please state your entire network size question to see if you are actually measuring the social network.

Section under statistical analysis: Standard statistical tests including chi-square and Student’s t-test were used to examine associations between (add: which samples? RDS and internet samples) samples on background characteristics and partner numbers.

Discussion:

This is important: Although it is suggested that RDS does not require formative research,[4] our findings support previous research which highlights the importance of exploring social networks and acceptability of RDS among the target group before implementing RDS.[21] However, tell us how you would include formative research to assess this population in the future. How could you have avoided this problem if you had conducted formative research? What question would you have asked so people can learn from this experience?

Should change this: Secondly, the failure of RDS may be related to language problems. This is not a failure of RDS, but rather a failure in planning and logistics.

This sentence does not make sense: The instructions on the RDS coupons were in English, however, as the common language between CEE MSM in London. Could say that it was assumed that the common language between CEE MSM in London was English and so the RDS coupons were in English. However, I am not sure what you are trying to say with this information.

Need to be clear here: future RDS studies among migrant populations should consider the impact of respondents’ language abilities on data collection. Most RDS studies do consider language issues and most times coupons are printed in more than one language and questionnaires are in more than one language. This is not a problem with RDS, but rather a problem with the study design and is applicable to all studies.

You might want to separate out what were they problems related to how the study was planned in implemented which is related to all studies and then those problems specific to RDS such as the population not being sufficiently networked and issues with the incentive.

Other problems may have been that the study site was not open at convenient times or not conveniently located. May want to touch on this.

While the Internet recruits MSM with higher levels of sexual risk behaviour than the general population of MSM,[22] You just have one citation. Is this always true in all internet studies or was this found just in this internet study?
Very last paragraph under discussion needs some mention that although the recruitment with internet worked well, the data are not representative of the MSM population.

Very last paragraph. Need to explain the last sentence better. Also, in RDS the financial incentive is not the key to RDS success. There are many factors one of which is modified peer pressure. What burden does RDS put on respondents that researchers try to avoid? Recruitment? If this is the case then you are only referring to the secondary incentive as the burden. Actually this sentence does not make sense and could be clearer.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I have no competing interests