Reviewer's report

Title: High prevalence of HSV-2 among rural pregnant women in Tanzania

Version: 2 Date: 19 October 2007

Reviewer: sia msuya

Reviewer's report:

General
In general, this is a very good and timely paper describing the prevalence and determinants of HSV-2 and syphilis in a pregnant rural population. Several important issues were addressed in a clear manner, including; 1) data from a rural setting (most studies are conducted in urban areas), 2) the high prevalence of HSV-2 in a remote rural community, where prevalence of both syphilis and HIV was relatively low, 3) predictors that placed women at risk for STIs, especially the number of sexual partners, using contraceptives other than condoms and being in a polygamous relationship, all of which can potentially be targeted for prevention 4) that anti-HSV-2 treatment might have an effect on reducing HIV transmission. Well done.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

None

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Introduction:
- In the first sentence the authors state that a substantial proportion of new HIV infections are associated with HSV-2 and syphilis. The references given, (references no1-6), focus on HSV-2 and do not suggest syphilis as an important player in new HIV infections, especially in mature epidemics in Africa. (See also the new paper by: Freeman EE et al; Sex Transm Infect 2007; 83 (Suppl I: i17-i24).

Methods:
- Please explain why and how age adjustment was done, in the analysis section.

Results:
- Can the authors describe the women (mean, SD or range) in terms of parity, age at sexual debut, or age at first pregnancy to get a clearer picture of the study population?
- Was a history of genital ulcers collected to give an indication of the GUD
Discussion:

- The introduction, methods and results were clear and to the point. The discussion was less clear, perhaps too long, especially the first 7 paragraphs. The aim was to describe HSV-2 prevalence and its potential impact on HIV transmission. Please re-write the 1st – 7th paragraphs of the discussion. I suggest that the same order of issues be used as in the results section. The last 3 paragraphs discussing syphilis and its risk factors were very clear.

References:
- There is a repetition of some references e.g. no 12 & 18.
- There is a need to check the way the journals have been identified, e.g. Aids instead of AIDS in ref no 2, 3, 5 etc; Bjog instead of BJOG in ref no 33.

Tables:
- Is the word pregnancy in the titles of the tables misplaced? It implies that these conditions are associated with pregnancy, while the authors investigated the prevalence of these infections in a group of pregnant women. It might be better if the title is rephrased e.g. “The prevalence of genital herpes and associated factors among pregnant women”?

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

- In several places the authors refer to the number of lifetime partners as 1 or > 1. Was the data collected in this categorical manner or was it an open-ended question to invite and allow a more correct answer? Were other questions asked in order to capture this information? There may be under reporting here (95% having only one partner).

Some possible style suggestions:
- Pg 1, Results, line 2, ……. antibodies “were” associated with………..
- Pg 1, Results; suggest adding that only one case of dual infection of HSV-2 and syphilis was found
- Pg 1, Conclusions, line 3; …….before suggestions “for” appropriate……..
- Pg 4, data collection tools, line 4; ….condoms and contraceptives, and “the number of” sexual partners.
- Pg 4, data collection tools, line 6;…Blood collection was “done” by…
- Pg 6, Results, Paragraph 2, line 3; ….varying between 7.0% and 32.9% , add “among the clinics”.
- Pg 8, Discussion, Par 1, line 2; …….7%-33% “among” the clinics……..
- Pg 9, Par 2, line 13; …….typographical error; change HDV to HSV-2 represented 83% of all GUD………..
- Pg 10, 2nd paragraph, line 5 (reg circumcision); …………male circumcision is
a
culturally “accepted”, “approved” or “recommended” practice…………
- Same page (11), last paragraph. The 3rd sentence “This risk…..” is a bit clumsy.
A rewrite might be something like; “This risk reflects women’s lack of control to protect themselves from infection.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that i have no competing interests