Author's response to reviews

Title: Partner Notification for sexually transmitted infections in developing countries: a systematic review

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Author's response to reviews:

Reviewer's report

Version: 2
Date: 19 November 2009
Reviewer: Michael Sweat

Response: Thanks to the reviewer for his comments as version 2. We are pleased to address them as below:

Discretionary Revisions:
1. There are formatting errors in Table 1 for the Klisch reference.

Response: The reference for the Klisch et al. has been correctly formatted in Table 1.

Minor Essential Revisions
1. It was suggested that the authors reference the 2001 systematic review in Cochrane on STD Partner Notification by Mathews (see: http://www.cochrane.org/reviews/en/ab002843.html). The title is “Strategies for partner notification for sexually transmitted diseases”. This seems an important reference given the topic. The authors responded that they did not want to include an “In Press” paper as a reference. I mistakenly referred to it as “in Press”. This is a published review. It is online, as all Cochrane reviews are, but it published. I cannot imagine that the authors would not want to reference this analysis.

Response: Suggested article is now cited as reference # 11 in page 3 under the introduction section and listed in the reference section as below:

2. Various typographical errors have been corrected.
Response: Thanks for picking up those typos in the earlier version.

Major Compulsory Revisions
(1) Framing of the research question – This reviewer is satisfied with the revised write up with regard to how the questions are framed.
Response: Thanks for the comment

(2) Identifying relevant work – the revision on comments in this regard is adequate.
Response: Thanks for the comment.

(3) Assessing the quality of the studies – Revision in response to the description of how quality assessment was utilized is adequate.
Response: Thanks for the comment.

(4) Summarizing the evidence – the authors revision improves on the tendency to not summarize across studies. They have been less responsive to the critique of vote counting. However, given that this is not a meta-analysis I do believe that there is greater tolerance for vote counting techniques. There is a well developed literature on this issue, (See Cooper and Hedges, and guidelines from the Cochrane Collaboration, and the Campbell Collaboration for more). The response to this critique was that they have “identified five research questions a priori”. The fact that there are five outcomes does not in any way mitigate the risk of introducing bias through vote counting techniques, which were done within each of the 5 research questions. I do believe that the authors need to explicitly state this as a study limitation.
Response: We have explicitly stated in page 14 as a study limitation that some data presented in study are absolute numbers, while such vote counting in systematic review is known to frequently bias the interpretation of results, as it ignores the effect size and sample size from studies.

(5) Other items mentioned in this section were adequately addressed.
Response: Thanks for the comment.