Reviewer's report

Title: Comparison of risk behaviors and socio-cultural profile of men who have sex with men survey respondents recruited via venues and the internet

Version: 1 Date: 28 May 2009

Reviewer: Ilan Meyer

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MS ID : 1319557165254033
Title : Comparison of risk behaviors and socio-cultural profile of men who have sex with men survey respondents recruited via venues and the internet
Authors: Hi Yi Tsui and Joseph T.F. Lau

Major Compulsory Revisions

This paper raises interesting methodological issues about sampling MSM. It suffers from several problems however: first, the authors seem to move from focusing on the methodological questions (comparison of the sampling methodologies) to focusing on the substantial findings (risk behaviors, intervention implications of people sampled in the two venues. Recognizing that these two issues are intertwined, the paper would be strengthened by a closer focus on one of these. I found the comparison of the survey methodologies interesting but if that is the focus, then the introduction, the presentation of the findings, and the discussion should keep this focus in mind. Although there are some interesting observations about the substantive differences between the two samples and what these differences may mean for prevention, it is important to first understand what these two sampling methodologies mean. The substantive areas could be covered possibly as a focus of another paper. Based on my observations, I believe that the paper should be significantly shortened. It is probably better to think of it as a brief report. Also, the paper needs better copyediting in terms of writing style. It is plausible that the authors could address both these foci in one paper but then there should be clear discussion of these as two separate (but related) issues. Analyzing the first question – about the sampling methodology – would help us understand how to interpret some of the substantive differences reported. For example, are these (internet vs. venues) really two somewhat overlapping but separate populations, or are these two biased pictures of the same population? If the former, then maybe two separate intervention strategies need to be developed, but if the problem is that the sampling methods we use are biased, leading to an incomplete and distorted description of the population, then the conclusions to be drawn may be very different.

It would also be important to address this: what does the location of this study in China mean, if anything, in terms of the structure of the gay/MSM community there? How does this compare with other sites of studies that the authors cited in
Some specific comments are:

- I don't see the need to adjust for the “five background variables” or any covariates (see p. 8). Since the point of this paper’s analyses is to show that the groups are different in some important ways, there is no justification to then go and adjust the findings. If there is some reason, it should be explained.

- Some of the sociocultural variables presented presumably form scales, I don’t understand why the authors present the items rather than scale scores as their results.

- The tables replicate the same results in various forms. It is sufficient to show differences between the samples (Tables 1-3). Table 4 replicates the same findings in a different format of analysis. Table 5 present different analysis that, as I say above, need not be the focus of this paper. This data would only be interesting (with the methodology focus in mind) if the ORs for group I are different from the ORs for group V. That is if conclusion about predictors of UAI taken from one sample are different than conclusions about predictors of UAI taken from the other sample. Looking at the results in Table 5, this does not seem to be the case for at least some of the findings, for example, the OR for age group do not seem different between group I and V, even though it is significant for group V and not significant for group I.

- The discussion especially is confusing in terms of the focus of the paper. Also in it the authors sometimes veer off the findings and venture on conjuncture.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interest