Reviewer’s report

Title: Experience of violence and adverse reproductive health outcomes, HIV risks: a cross-sectional behavioural study among mobile female sex workers in India

Version: 1 Date: 8 February 2011

Reviewer: Ademola Ajuwon

Reviewer’s report:

Title of paper: Experience of violence and adverse reproductive health outcomes, HIV risks: a cross-sectional behavioural study among mobile female sex workers in India

Reviewer: Ademola Ajuwon, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Main points of the manuscript

The major strength of the study from which this manuscript was derived is its large sample size. The measures and methods of analysis of data collected are appropriate. However, there are some methodological and editorial issues that the authors need to address before the paper can be considered suitable for publication in BMC Public Health. The details of the areas that require revision are provided below;

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. I suggest a slight revision of the title to read ‘Experience of violence and adverse reproductive health outcomes and HIV risks among mobile female sex workers in India’. This is a more suitable title of the paper

2. The whole of the background section needs to be re-written because there are many vague statements in it. For example, the first sentence in this section is difficult to understand. I suggest that the authors revise this to make it clearer. The authors stated that FSW ‘… face poor economic conditions back home’ (page 4). Where is home for the FSW? The authors also stated that ‘local community criminals and police perpetrate violence on FSW’. Who are these persons? Are criminals not expected to be in jail? If so how come they have access to FSW? Please clarify

3. What do the authors mean by the statement that previous studies among FSW have ‘either being area specific or conducted at the micro-level’? Is the current study at the macro-level? Please clarify. The statement ‘additionally, far less is known about reproductive health risks…’ is not clear because it is incomplete.

4. The authors stated that the study was conducted in four states in India with high prevalence rates of HIV but have given the figures that make these states high HIV prevalence areas.
5. There are many unclear statements in the section of methodology. For example, how many districts are actually in each state from which respondents were selected; what do the words ‘pockets’, ‘cruising points’ mean? The authors should keep in mind that BMC is read by an international audience, therefore local terms should be explained to enable a reader understand the meaning of local terms.

6. There is need to provide greater details about how FSW who work on the streets were actually interviewed. For example, where did the interview of this category of respondents actually took place on the street? In which language (Hindi, English) was the interviews conducted? Why did the authors not use a uniform method of data collection: some interviews were recorded on PDA while data for others were through printed questionnaire? Could the use of these methods have introduced bias in the data collected? Please clarify.

7. Why is verbal and not written informed consent obtained from the women? Were the women compensated for their time in participating in the study? What was the appropriate duration of these interviews? What have the authors done to care for the women who reported experience of violence, RTI and STI? In short, in what ways, if any, have the women involved in this study benefited from it?

8. The results section needs some revision. It is pejorative to describe someone as ‘illiterate’; a suitable word would be someone without formal education. What does the word ‘destitute’ mean the way it was used in the results section. The statement ‘Among those who experienced violence episodes, sexual …’ is not clear because it is incomplete. The authors constructed three tables but reference is made to only Table 1 in the text. Please revise.

9. The authors have acknowledged the limitations of their study. However one other limitation that must be pointed out is that data on RTI and STI may be under-estimates given the fact that these data were self-reported and that many women infected with STI actually do not have symptoms.

Minor Essential Revisions

10. The authors may wish to review an important publication by Michael Koenig and colleagues on the relationship between violence and reproductive health outcomes published in Bulletin of the WHO, 2003, 81 (1): 53-60

11. The conclusion reads like a discussion of the implications of the results for reproductive health intervention and programming targeting FSW in India. I suggest that the authors provide fuller and more specific intervention activities that will address the problem of violence among FSW in India. A sub-section for conclusion should be created.

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

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'