Author's response to reviews

Title: Limited access to HIV prevention in French prisons (ANRS PRI²DE): implications for public health and drug policy.

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editor,

Please find attached our revised version of the manuscript entitled “Limited access to HIV prevention in French prisons (ANRS PRI²DE): implications for public health and drug policy”.

Comments were very helpful to clarify various points.

We hope that our manuscript will now be suitable for publication in your journal.

Yours Sincerely,
Dr Laurent MICHEL

Answer to the Reviewers and the Editor

Reviewer 1:
Minor essential revisions, mostly in the text and revise some language. i.e. in abstract: last sentence ‘to motive prison staff’ should address ‘those in charge of prison health’ rather than or in addition to the staff. in background: reference to sexual promiscuity should be changed to sexual violence or non-consensual sex. and ‘continuity of care for prisoners’ should be ‘continuity of care between the community and prisons and back to the community’.
All sentences have been changed in the text following these recommendations. The language has been revised.

In results: under OST numbers and percentages are given on prisoners on OST, but this does not tell us the percentage of those dependent on opioids, which
would be more appropriate.

Unfortunately, recent data concerning the percentage of those dependent on opioids in prison settings are not available in France (the most recent data are from 2003 and 2004). Other ongoing projects will answer this question in a year’s time.

Under HBV vaccination last sentence is not correct. There is guidance from WHO on this, but perhaps not in the particular guidance of 2007. This is a general problem, there is much more developed by WHO on health in prisons that is not included here.

The reviewer is absolutely right. Although there is no specific recommendation in the 2007 report, there is guidance on HBV vaccination in prison settings in other WHO reports, especially concerning drug users (Health in prisons – A WHO guide to the essentials in prison health, 2007). Nevertheless, as our objective was to create a simple and clear comparison between national and international guidelines, we decided to choose the most comprehensive WHO recommendation. To clarify this point, the sentence has been modified as follows (page 10):

HBV vaccination in prison settings is not mentioned in the WHO guidelines used as reference. It is however recommended, especially for injecting drug users, in different WHO reports including “Health in prisons – a WHO guide to the essentials in prison health”, 2007.

Editor’s comment:
- Please add 95% confidence intervals to the proportions in Table 2

Table 2 has been modified as requested. The titles of Tables 2 and 3 have also been slightly modified.

- Details of the statistical analyses should be added to the methods section, including information about the univariate analyses

The following sentence was added to the methods section:

For each subscore, we computed the proportion of prisons adherent to national and WHO guidelines as well as their 95% confidence intervals.

- Only 66% of prisons responded - this should be discussed in the limitations section (it is possible that those who are adherent are more likely to have responded?). If possible, please compare the characteristics of responders and non-responders.

The editor is right. It is possible that those who responded felt more concerned with prevention or harm reduction strategies and consequently were more likely to be adherent. Considering the low level of adherence found in our analysis, correction for this potential selection bias would not modify greatly our results and could even strengthen our conclusions. Comparison of the characteristics of respondents and non-respondents was limited, due to the lack of information for many prisons. In any case, no significant difference was found between included and excluded prisons. We added the following sentence at the beginning of the
result section:

No significant difference was found between the structural characteristics of prisons included in the study and those excluded.

The following sentence was also included in page 15:

Although no significant difference was found between the structural characteristics of prisons included in the study and those excluded, it is possible that the former could be more concerned by prevention/harm reduction issues. Accordingly, we can presume that we selected those more likely to be adherent to national or international guidelines. This means that the level of adherence to national and WHO guidelines is likely to have been overestimated, which in turn strengthens our conclusions.

- There is reference to WHO guidelines. The authors only have considered a comprehensive review of the evidence of interventions to address HIV in prisons which was published in 2007 while there are more tools and guidelines developed by WHO before and after that date that are relevant to this same issue.

This observation is correct and to justify our choice we added the following sentence on page 6:

This WHO document was chosen from among several other tools and reports as it is the most comprehensive document on HIV prevention in prison settings.

- The conclusion that there is a need for global drug policy reform in order to improve access to harm reduction services in French prisons is helpful but at the same time also undermines the argument they make and the importance of reforming prison health within France.

This is absolutely true. We have modified the sentence accordingly as follows:

A policy reform for HIV prevention and HR in prison settings is a priority but needs to be incorporated into a wider national health policy reform to improve the general health and quality of life of French prisoners as well as equalizing access to care and prevention in prisons and the general community. A drug policy reform decriminalizing drug use seems to be the sine-qua-non condition for replacing incarcerations for the use of drugs with improved access to prevention and care for drug dependence.

Other comments

Page 6: the following sentence “A structured phone interview allowed detailing additional issues about access to HIV prevention” was replaced with the following one: “Additional detailed information about issues regarding access to HIV prevention was gathered through a structured phone interview.”

The following sentence: ‘Of the global population of inmates receiving OST, 68% and 32% receive buprenorphine and methadone respectively (Table 2).’ was deleted in the results section (page 9) as it is irrelevant, considering that the
same results are presented in the first sentence of that section.

Table 1: Column “WHO Guidelines”, row “Condoms – Lubricants”: the last criterion “Female prisoners also have access to female condoms” was replaced with the following correction: “Male condoms and lubricants accessible and female condoms accessible for prisons with female prisoners”.