Reviewer's report

Title: The success of an integrated approach at increasing safer sexual behavior among transgendered men in Laos: findings from a multi-round survey

Version: 1 Date: 9 May 2011

Reviewer: Jeff Hudson

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

The question is unclear, sometimes simplistic explanations work best to answer a question and would be clearer in the Introduction section, then answered in the discussion with additional references to literature and findings.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

I am unclear with the methodology. Quantitative surveys were ‘said’ to be administered but it appears from the description, these surveys were not anonymous, nor independently completed by the participant. The method used was a more structured interview, conducted by a ‘peer’ and in some cases in the presence of others (11.3%). There appears no means of assuring that a subject was not approached twice at different venues by different field workers.

The survey was pre-tested by 24 respondents; however the outcome was not reported. Why were pre test sites not included?? I do not see the rationale behind this?

There was no explanation for an increase in sites in 2006?

3. Are the data sound?

Was the research study approved by a structured Ethics committee?

The method in which the data was collected needs to be considered, especially entry criteria.

I am concern that nearly half of both cohorts were aged 15-20 years. I would be interested to know how many subjects actually fell into the 15 year old age group and the ages of their male sexual partners as this touches on ephebophilia issues. The sexual preference of older men for pubescent and adolescent boys who look like girls could indeed effect sexual behavior?

The age of consent in Laos is 15 y/o, however does this warrant inclusion in research studies? In most Western countries the age most Ethics committees agree upon is 18 y/o, an age whereby there is some understanding of the research process being undertaken as well as informed consent.
As such this study could not be compared to studies with an older age entry criteria.

It would be interesting to see if exclusion of 15y/o would yield different results as these ‘youngsters’ could have been ‘influenced’ and even coerced by an authoritative figure, even though seen as a ‘peer’ as mentioned in the limitations.

There was not one report of sex work in the occupation data which is unexpected in this cohort.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

The analysis section is not clear to me, however I am not adequately qualified to assess the statistics. I will make general comments.

The section “Measures and Data Collection” 3rd paragraph makes reference to both surveys and questionnaires, this should be standardized throughout the paper.

The tables used for results were confusing. In Table 2, rather than use asterisks to show significance it would have been more appropriate to show a p value in the Sig. column for all variables. Were the Chi-square (#2), degrees of freedom (df) performed? Authors should consider reporting these and p-values in all tables for consistency.

In the exposure category, how was n.s identified when there was no comparative data in 2004?

A simplified analysis may have been more appropriate, the data should speak for itself in the text with reference to the tables and not be a major effort to read and understand. The results section is confusing. A focus on only significant variables may be warranted.

Table 3 was to complicated with to many comparisons which when reading the footnotes did not make sense.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The discussion would benefit with additional references to literature and actual research findings. As is, there appears to be omissions of supporting data for some of the general statements made.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

Limitations are mentioned but should be highlighted by a subheading as it is an important issue.

Age of subjects should be highlighted especially if many are 15 year olds.
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

Literature review could have included a broader search to include Western countries where transgender issues have been widely researched. There appeared to be limited peer reviewed citations.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

Not sure if findings accurately reflected the title and abstract. The conclusion could be more cohesive with reference to past literature and results from the research.

9. Is the writing acceptable?

The writing is complex in parts for a simple study and not an easy read, there appears an attempt to over report to make justifications.

- Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

Based on your assessment of the validity of the manuscript, what do you advise should be the next step?

- Accept after minor essential revisions (which the authors can be trusted to make)

*Please rely on more experienced reviewers

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

- Is it essential that this manuscript be seen by an expert statistician?

- Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.
Suggest contacting Associate Professor Garrett Prestage
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I declare that I have no competing interests

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

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests