Reviewer's report

Title: Condom availability in high risk places and condom use: A study at district level in Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia.

Version: 1 Date: 31 July 2012

Reviewer: Kavita Singh

Reviewer's report:

Abstract

Major Compulsory Revisions
1) Methods- The first sentence is confusing. This paper is not about the "overall study" so the focus should be on the methods for this particular study on condom availability and use.
2) Conclusion: Again take out reference to the main study. Also focus a little more on how results from this study will aid the three countries in their HIV prevention efforts.

Minor Essential Revisions:
1) Take out words such as "worrying" and "disturbing".

Introduction

Major Essential Revisions:
1) The referenced study on reasons for not using condoms doesn't fit well in the first paragraph. The paper is focused on condom accessibility as a means to improve utilization. Perhaps reference to this study could be included in the conclusion as a short discussion on reasons other than access for non-use of condoms.
2) Second paragraph: Explain more about the studies that indicate that easy access to condoms improves their utilization. These are key studies for the introduction.
3) Close the introduction with objectives of your study and how the information will fill in gaps, be helpful to the countries etc.

Methods

Major Compulsory Revisions:
1) The second sentence in the first paragraph is unclear. Please revise for clarity.
2) What are the reasons the districts were chosen? I am assuming that higher than average HIV prevalence rates were one of the reasons.
3) What is the source for the HIV prevalence rate for pregnant urban women in Kapirir Mposhi?
4) The supplementary tables are not really needed. You already have five main tables. If you want to discuss anything in the supplementary tables you can state, "Data not shown."

5) p.10 last paragraph: I don’t think perceptions of availability is the same as actual availability. Just state that you asked about perceptions.

6) p.11: Explain why recruitment of participants was done at health facilities.

Minor Essential Revisions:
1) Take out the word "disturbing" at the end of the first paragraph.
2) Spell out PLACE, the first time it is used.
3) p.9 second paragraph: explain that the data is from the PLACE studies

Results

Major Compulsory Revision
1) first paragraph: explain how the number of community informants were chosen. Did the interviewers keep talking to new people until no more new venues were mentioned? If not this might be a limitation related to what was mentioned in the conclusion about not capturing all or most venues.

2) first paragraph: change "agreed" to "indicated"

Discussion/Conclusion

Major Compulsory Revision
1) General comment: The conclusion should be a little more focused on programatic and policy recommendations and how this study filled in gaps in knowledge.

2) What about programmatic suggestions for condom availability/distribution at informal drinking places? Has this been considered by the three countries.

3) How widely available are female condoms in the three countries? Is there any research indicating women in these countries would use them if they were available?

4) Support some of the statements in the conclusion with literature. For example cite the literature indicating that condom use will increase in rural areas if condoms are made more easily available.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.