Reviewer's report

Title: HIV prevalence among high school learners - Opportunities for schools-based HIV testing programmes and sexual reproductive health services

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Reviewer: Sten Vermund

Reviewer's report:

The authors have a clear, concise paper describing a HIV serosurvey among students in 2 of 24 secondary schools in Vulindlela (KZN, S.A.) with 71 and 93% participation rates. Seroprevalence is alarming, but much lower than rural surveys conducted by the same team.

Strengths of the paper include the findings of rarely done school HIV serosurveys, a clear and straightforward methodology, and results/discussion that are logical.

However, there are three major limitations that limit the utility of the work.

Major compulsory revisions are suggested:

1. A sample of just 2 of 24 schools suggests the possibility of misleading findings, based on geography and socioeconomic differences. While the sample was random, the tiny 8% sample of schools reduces generalizability and may reduce representativeness. No survey methodologist would suggest such a modest sample size to be ideal. This must be discussed as a major limitation of the work.

2. There is no attempt at age standardization in order to compare the school with prior published community findings. Since this is an expressed purpose of the work, this should have been done to compare like-with-like. Age standardization should be performed on these data as well as the key data with which they are being compared.

3. Are there male-to-male sexual contact data? If so they should be presented and if not, why not?

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.