Author's response to reviews

Title: Comparing risk factors of HIV among Hijra Sex Workers in Larkana and other cities of Pakistan: An analytical cross sectional study

Authors:

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Author's response to reviews:

Reviewer 1/Referee 1: Saifur Rahman

Reviewer's report:

Query 1: The objective/research question needs further clarification. The authors mentioned about investigating factors associated with HIV infection among Hijra sex workers (HSWs) in Larkana as an objective in the abstract. However, in the introduction section, they have mentioned about comparing the factors in cities and also, the result section shows the comparative analyses by cities.

The query has been addressed by making necessary changes in the title and the abstract of the manuscript. (Highlighted with yellow). This study is comparing factors associated with high prevalence of HIV infection among Hijra sex workers (HSW) in Larkana as compare to risk factors among HSW in all other cities of the country (showing low prevalence of HIV among HSWs)

Query 2: The method of the study has been well described. But it is too much descriptive for a journal article. The sample size calculation doesn't need to be described. Only a briefing on sampling including target population by cities, sampling technique and criteria for inclusion and exclusion; data collection, testing techniques for HIV would be enough. It should not be more than two or three short paragraphs.

Changes have been incorporated in Methods section subtitle Sample size. We have reduced the section on sample size as suggested by reviewer 1.

Query 3: The data seems to be very sound. However, the method used for analysis has not been clearly mentioned. In fact, the authors stated about uni and multi variable analyses. However, the logistic regression modeling has not been clearly stated. In addition, the authors compared factors within a group (HSW in Larkana) and also, among the groups (HSW in Larkana and other cities).

However, the method used to compare characteristics by HIV infection and also HIV infection by cities is not clear and also, confusing. The tables showing uni and multi variable analyses are not clear or self-explanatory. In presenting the independent and dependent variables in the tables need to be revised. In
addition, comparison of characteristics by HIV in different cities should be shown in a separate table. Tables to show association between factors and HIV should include HIV prevalence to make the tables self-explanatory.

Query addressed in statistical analysis part as well as in reorganized tables. Refer to Tables 2, 3, 4.

Query 4: In the result section, there are repetitions of information presented in the tables. In fact, table 1, 3 and 4 can be excluded. Instead, information in those tables can be included as text in the result section.

We have deleted table 1 however we believe that deleting table 3 and 4 will not be useful as these tables are a ready reference for the readers. For example in table 4 there is significant difference among clients of HSWs in Larkana as compared to other cities. After deleting table 1 the new sequence of table 3 and 4 is “2 & 3” respectively.

Query 5: Comparison of HIV risk factors among different cities has appeared to be an important objective of the study. But it does not reflect properly in the title and the abstract.

Addressed with query 1.

Query 6: The authors have acknowledged others’ work. However, referencing needs to be revised. For an example, referencing was not done properly in the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs of the introduction and discussion respectively.

Paragraphs are rearranged; however above query is addressed by putting reference 17(highlighted with violet) in discussion section.

Query 7: The conclusion need to be shorten and putting a reference in the conclusion is not a good idea.

Addressed, refer to conclusion section.

Query 8: The term “Hijra” needs to be defined.

Addressed in Introduction, (highlighted with yellow) paragraph 2.

Reviewer 2/Referee 2: John Scott

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

Query 9: Given the very stark results emerging from Larkana, I think it is important that further context for this city is provided. Not being overly familiar with the region, I find myself asking how distinct is it compared to the other sites? Without this information there is a danger that the issues described appear to occur in a social vacuum and a reduced to behavioral problem, when they could well be related to broader structural factors. For example, what are health and welfare services like in Larkana compared to other sites? What is the economy of this site and how does this compare to the other sites? What are the community factors: is there a transient population, for example? I think lack of attention to these details weakens the concluding comments, which tend to focus on
individual forms of prevention, such as education and training, rather than structural forms of support, such as service provision. Indeed, the authors quote the UNAIDS frameworks three pillars, but these are not adequately addressed, especially two and three which focus on ‘partnerships’ and ‘structural frameworks’.

Addressed in Introduction paragraph 2 and Discussion paragraph 3.

Query 10: Some more information on the status of transsexual and transgender workers in Pakistan would have been helpful in providing a better context for the findings.

Introduction paragraph 2, initial lines.

Query 11: It is not clear why sex workers at this site engage in the activity at an early age: explanation(s)?

Discussion paragraph 4.

Query 12: I think the authors need to add information regarding how they recruited respondents. For example, were incentives offered? Did they approach respondents or did they advertise asking that respondents contact them?

Please refer to Methods section subtitle “Sampling Technique and recruitment of study participant”

Minor Essential Revisions

Query 13: Why is it ‘surprising’ that they answered ‘no’ when asked if prevention is possible through refraining from sex. If IDUs (and engaging in unsafe practices), this actually makes sense.

Rephrasing has been done in Discussion paragraph 4.

Query 14: The paper requires a good edit for spelling and grammatical errors.

Manuscript has been revised for language errors

Query 15: Not sure what is meant by ‘dope sickness’.

Term replaced by “drug withdrawal” in Exclusion criteria section

Formatting Changes advised:

1. Copyediting: Done
2. Abstract: Revised
3. Please change the title "Introduction" to "Background". Done
4. Competing interests: Described
5. Authors’ information: Described
6. Acknowledgment: Done
7. Tables: Reorganized
8. Tables as figure files: Done