Reviewer's report

Title: Using GRADE methodology for the development of public health guidelines.

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Reviewer: Ademola Ajuwon

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Using the GRADE methodology for the development of public health guidelines

This manuscript describes the process and outcome of the development of guidelines for delivering interventions for the prevention and treatment of HIV and other STI among Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and transgender persons. The manuscript is relevant in that it describes the challenges encountered in the process of development of the guidelines which could serve as source of reference for individuals and groups who may plan to develop similar guidelines for other groups in the future. However, the manuscript currently has several flaws which must be addressed before it may be considered suitable for publication in BMC.

Major compulsory revisions

1. The title of the manuscript is incomplete in that it did not specify the group for which the guideline was developed; I suggest the title should be revised to read ‘using GRADE methodology for the development of public health guidelines for interventions for prevention and treatment of HIV and other STI among MSM & transgender people’

2. The background information is inadequate because it is scanty. There is need to justify the need for the development of a guideline for interventions targeting MSM and transgender people; although authors have provided citations on GRADE, it will be helpful to provide some brief information about this approach and why it considered an appropriate approach to use for the process of developing the guidelines.

3. The major flaw in the Methods section is the lack of specificity and clarity in the description of the process of development of the guidelines. Yet a full description of the process is one of the most important messages that the paper seeks to convey to readers who want to develop similar guidelines and benefit from the lessons the authors learnt from the process. The authors mentioned on page 4 a ‘core working’ without mentioning who these persons are and from which background were they drawn from. In addition, the authors stated on page 5 that a ‘consensus panel’ but information was not provided about number of those involved, the settings from which they come from and where the meetings were held. There is need to describe fully what the authors mean by ‘we then described and finalized through interactive process of in-person and electronic communication…page 5’ The guidelines are expected to serve the needs of
MSM and transgender people in low and middle income countries but are representatives of these groups from these settings involved in the process? Please clarify

4. Many of the information presented in the Results are not clear. Eight major challenges were identified in the process of development of the guidelines but the minor ones were not listed; frequency at which each of the challenge identified was not described. For example, is the first challenge the most serious and the last one the least?; how have the authors ranked these challenges? The authors should give readers some indication of the importance of the challenges.

5. Several issues were covered under each of the eight challenges identified (see for example under ‘Nature of public health interventions’ issues such as ‘heterogeneous interventions’, ‘interventions with long causal pathway’ etc’ are these also challenges? Not clear. The authors need to state clearly how these issues constituted challenges during the process.

6. The authors mentioned on page 13 that the WHO Secretariat conducted civil society consultations to peer review initial document…; please describe this process in full to enable the reader understand how widely the WHO consulted in developing the guidelines.

7. I suggest that the authors summarize the challenges and how each was addressed them on a table to further simplify the process and make the findings more reader-friendly.

8. The authors may want to refer readers to the webpage (if available) where the final product i.e. the guidelines can be downloaded if it has been finalized.

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.