Author’s response to reviews

Title: The Limitations of Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision and the Importance of Sustained Condom Use: A Kenyan Newspaper Analysis

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
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Dear Ms Reyes,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to revise our manuscript. We have made the following changes:

**Referee 1:**

No changes were made as they reviewer recommended our article be accepted for publication.

**Referee 2:**

Limitations
Q1) *There is a need for a comma sign between "September 2011" and "Kenya" and I think you should add a reference to support the statement.*

A citation has been included and a comma was added (page 21).

Figure 1

Q2) *There is a need for a comma sign between "September 2011" and "Kenya" and I think you should add a reference to support the statement.*

A more substantive description for figure 1 has been included. The figure description now reads as: “Types of articles collected from the Daily Nation online newspaper and included in the final analysis. All articles types, except Op/Ed articles (red), were categorized as a type of news story (blue). The sections “Living,” “Africa,” “Provincial,” “Business,” and “News” are how the Daily Nation organizes its news articles on their website using headings accessed on the homepage.”

**Referee 3:**

Thank you for your comments.

Q1) *I sense, however, that the paper focuses a lot on condoms and not nearly as much on the other proven HIV prevention measures such as abstinence and reduction of sexual partners. It is because it is easier to search for the term condom? The paper reads with a tone of anti-circumcision, pro-condom and ignoring the other prevention methods. Furthermore, in the same way that the paper states the Daily Nation is providing biased information, I would say this paper is also (condoms > other HIV prevention modalities).*
This paper does have a greater focus on condom use compared to other HIV prevention methods (i.e. abstinence and reduction of sexual partners) because one of our objectives was to investigate whether condom use is still being promoted. We realize it is important to include information about other HIV prevention methods. We have done this by including ABC in some of our examples from the news articles (page 16), and including abstinence in figure 2.

The authors chose to highlight condom use because of the discussion about condoms in the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC) Communication Guide for Nyanza Province (Communication Guide). Though reduction of sexual partners and abstinence was also recommended, there was a greater discussion focused on condoms. One study in the Communication Guide said that “while Kenya is seeing a decline in higher risk sex, condom use is still much too low”. Condom use was also included as a part of an indicator for the summative evaluation goals for the project: “% of women who support their partner getting circumcised and who feel able to insist on condom use with their circumcised partner”.

The authors do not state or refute support for VMMC, abstinence, or the reduction of sexual partners at any point in the article. Although, these are all important factors to be considered in an HIV prevention campaign/program, further discussion of abstinence and sexual partner reduction is simply beyond the scope of this paper, given our stated objectives.

The wordings of several sentences that the reviewer perceived to be biased have been changed to mitigate any perceived bias. The following sentences have been changed to:

- “The limitations, when explicitly identified, were communicated in a way which people were being remonstrated or warned. An example of such statements is provided below:” (page 11)

- “It was not clear if the statements were referring to bacterial or HIV infection.” (page 13)

- “The few times that the limitations and potential consequences of VMMC were explicitly communicated, newspaper articles seemed to present information about the limitations of VMMC by camouflaging limitations by portraying them as benefits to identify potential drawbacks of VMMC.” (page 16)

- “Other articles blamed the general population for not understanding the limitations of VMMC, using statements such as “it should be understood that” and “residents have been warned.” (page 17)

- “While the news articles did not include the limitations of VMMC or promote sustained condom use, the Op/Ed articles often emphasized these points.” (page 18)

Q2) One sentence is repeated

The repeated sentence on page 12 has been deleted.
Q3) Also on page 12 this sentence "While there were not any direct risks of complications from the procedure itself..." I think should read "While there were not any direct complications LISTED or MENTIONED TO BE associated with the procedure itself..." or something to that effect.

The wording has been changed as per the reviewer’s suggestion on page 12: “While no direct complications were listed or mentioned to be associated with the procedure itself, a few statements were made indicating that engaging in premature sexual intercourse after having the procedure would increase individuals’ chances of infection due to tearing of unhealed skin.”

Q4) On page 13 there is a fragment "Though only two articles used the words 'partial protection' when referring to limitations of VMMC.”

The fragment that the reviewer identified has been fixed. “Though only two articles used the words “partial protection” when referring to limitations of VMMC, they often expressed views that media should do more to communicate the limitations of VMMC to the general public as illustrated by the following:” (page 13)

Q4) In general I think this paper is still too lengthy. I still believe it makes an important point but I don't think many readers will take the time to read it in its entirety and I think the same valid points could be made more concisely. This would make it more readable and accessible to a wider audience.

Thank you for expressing your concerns about the length of the article. Given that the editor has given the authors leeway with regard to the length of the article and the other reviewers have not expressed concern over its length, the authors believe that the article strikes an effective balance between being concise and providing enough contextual information and examples for the audience to understand the findings.