Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 1 February 2012

Reviewer: Andrew Vallely

Reviewer's report:

GENERAL COMMENTS
Many thanks for asking me to review this an important and interesting article of relevance to the field that I think warrants publication.

MINOR REVISIONS
• I was concerned that articles from a single newspaper were assessed, coded and analysed by one individual only, and that the lack of an independent assessment represents an important methodological weakness – could this be issue be addressed in more detail by the authors?
• Other limitations are well described and carefully considered on page 21 of the manuscript.

DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS
Background
• 2nd paragraph, page 6: I was very interested to read about the cost-effectiveness and impact of mass media for HIV prevention methods and that they are considered ‘the main source of information for the general population in African countries’ and ‘more influential than interpersonal communicative channels’. Given that only limited references are provide to support these statements, I wondered whether the authors are justified in making this case so strongly (e.g. what do the results from Ghana [ref 21] really mean for other countries in sub-Saharan Africa?). Could additional references please be included to support these important arguments?
• 3rd para, page 6: how was the study period (Mar 2007 – Jun 2008) decided? Why not 12 or 18 months? Is this in fact a typo since articles from 2009 are cited in the text?

Methods
• 1st para, page 7: would it be possible to indicate the size of the readership e.g. print copies / website access figures here?
• 1st para, page 8: how was it possible to decide that 60% of an article (as opposed to 70%?) was relevant to HIV prevention / VMMC?
• 1st para, last sentence, page 9: I suggest that online comments ‘can be a valuable and reliable source’ rather than ‘are a valuable and reliable source’.
• Page 10, top: could the authors provide an example to illustrate the statement that 'the framing of the article suggests an intention to camouflage VMMC’s limitations'?

• Page 12, bottom: unclear how denominator data in this context would have assisted message clarity – can the authors please explain?

• Page 13, Limitations of MC: more detail and depth here would have been interesting given that effectively communicating risk is so crucial.

Discussion

• First sentence, page 17: it the discussion refers to the print media’s ‘camouflaging limitations by portraying them as benefits or using a negative or aggressive tone to identify potential drawbacks of VMMC’. The current results section does not seem to provide robust examples to allow such assertions to be made. I think it would enhance the manuscript if more examples could be included in the results e.g. illustrative quotes

• Second para, second sentence, page 18: suggest re-word for clarity.

• Third para, third sentence, page 18: suggest re-word ‘VMMC with needed condom use’ to VMMC with the need for continued condom use’

• The authors advocate for more regular reporting about the limitations of VMMC in the Kenyan media in several places in the manuscript e.g. top of page 19 but is it realistic to suppose that the media will maintain such regular coverage about a single issue, giving competing items of public interest that they need to report?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.