Reviewer's report

Title: Barriers faced by Ugandan university students in seeking medical care and sexual health counselling: A cross-sectional study

Version: 2 Date: 16 September 2012

Reviewer: Sally Hunter

Reviewer's report:

Review of article

This is an article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests and is worth publishing. It describes a worthwhile Ugandan study that gives the reader important information about public health. The research question is reasonably well formulated, the methods are appropriate and well described, and the data is sound and well reported. There is some confusion over the definition of acceptably versus accessibility and availability (see comments below). The article is well written, with a clear title and good literature review section and the conclusions are supported by the data. The article needs some major revision and some minor editing changes before it is ready for publication.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1) the article reads as if it relates to young people accessing medical care and sexual health counselling in their own areas of residence, rather than through the university medical services. This may be because of the three-month period asked about. However, depending on the actual timing of the administration of the questionnaire the survey may or may not relate to accessing services at the university. If so, this needs to be made clear in the abstract and throughout the article. If not, this also needs to be clarified. In other words, are the barriers for (originally) rural students lack of acceptability of services in rural areas or lack of acceptability of university services for rural students?

2) the difference between acceptability, accessibility and availability were blurred. The definitions used on page 4 were unclear and were subtly different from those used on page 7. These need to be clearly separated and, if necessary, the results may need to be re-analysed if the data has been coded incorrectly. The confusion arises because on page 4, 'being resigned to not getting help' could relate to acceptability or availability or accessibility (I can't afford it). Similarly, 'postponing the search for professional intervention' could be related to acceptability, or availability or access ability. 'Not knowing where to find a good doctor' sounds more like availability than acceptability. 'Not having time to seek counselling or treatment' sounds more like accessibility than acceptability etc. The confusion continues on page 7, with 'the health problem disappeared' which could mean anything, as could 'did not have time' and 'wanted to wait for a while'.
None of these statements are obviously only about acceptability of services, and 'did not know about any good doctor' could relate to availability not acceptability.

3) The abstract must refer to university students, not to Ugandan youth.

4) The study design should describe whether or not the instrument has been validated.

5) I did not receive the tables so am unable to comment on the findings in details.

Minor essential revisions:

Abstract, Background, line 4, ‘university students’ not ‘youth’
Abstract, Method, line 5, add ‘of services’
Abstract, Results, line 6, change rural to students originally from rural and change residents to areas
Page 1, para 1, line 7, ‘governments’ not ‘government’
Page 1, para 2, line 3, change ‘they require higher medical’ to ‘they are more likely to require medical’
Page 1, para 2, line 11, change ‘colloquial relegated’ to ‘combined with’
Page 1, para 2, line 12, add ‘the’ before health care
Page 2, para 1, line 2, ‘for young people’ not ‘among youth’
Page 2, para 1, line 5 ‘they face’ not ‘youth faces’
Page 2, para 2, line 2, ‘health services’ not ‘health service’
Page 2, para 2, line 6, ‘by’ not ‘from’
Page 2, para 2, line 7, ‘waiting times’ not ‘waits’
Page 3, para 1, line 1, clarify meaning of ‘suppressed sexuality’
Page 3, para 2, line 2, insert ‘African’ before ‘nations’
Page 3, para 3, line 3, insert ‘attitudes towards’ before ‘sexuality’
Page 3, para 3, line 5, change ‘house leader’s to ‘the head of the household’s’
Page 4, para 1, line 6, change ‘head of household’ to ‘the head of the household’
Page 4, para 1, line 8, remove bracket in reference
Page 4, para 2, needs to change considerably (see comments above)
Page 6, para 1, line 7, insert ‘very’ before the first ‘good’
Page 6, para 2, line 4, insert inverted commas around “yes, several times” and “yes”
Page 7, para 4, needs considerable rewriting (see comments above)
Page 9, para 3, line 1, omit ‘to’ before sexual health
Page 9, para 3, line 1, spell counseling with double l throughout
Page 10, para 1, line 1, ‘barrier’ not ‘barriers’ and spelling of ‘counselling’
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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.