Author's response to reviews

Title: Community stigma endorsement and voluntary counseling and testing behavior and attitudes among female heads of households in Zambezia Province, Mozambique

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BMC Public Health: Response to Reviewers

Reviewer #1: Valerie Earnshaw

Reviewer’s Comment: This revised manuscript represents a nice improvement from the original. The authors were generally responsive to reviewer suggestions, including those to clarify stigma theory and focus more on stigma. I believe that this manuscript will make a nice contribution to the literature. Well done!

My one suggested “major revision” again concerns the coding of the stigma measures. I remain confused about what the authors are reporting in Tables 2 and 3. Based on the authors’ response it seems that the p-value corresponds to the continuous variables but the odds ratio reported corresponds to the dichotomized cut-points in Tables 2 and 3. Is this correct? If so, my impression is that this is unorthodox – that the p-value should correspond to statistic reported in the table. Therefore, it seems that the authors should report the continuous variable + corresponding p-value OR the dichotomous variable + corresponding p-value in the tables. Given that there’s no known meaningful differences based on these cut-offs, I would think that the continuous variables would be more appropriate. The authors could explain in the text any points of potential confusion. OR, if I’ve misinterpreted the authors’ response and the p-value corresponds to the dichotomous cut-points, then I recommend that authors: (1) describe how they arrived at the cut-points in the statistical methods section, (2) note the results of the continuous variables in the text of the results section (i.e., run the models with the continuous variables and simply note the adjusted statistic and p-value in the text – perhaps the regression coefficient (B + SE) if that is most appropriate), and (3) discuss the implications of the use of cut-points in the discussion (e.g., the importance in differences between 75 and 50 pts on
NLD as opposed to smaller changes on the scale).

Response: Thank you for your comments on the stigma measures. Our lack of clarity on how stigma is included in the Table 1 model led us to include figure 1. This figure demonstrates the curvilinear relationship between stigma scales and the outcomes. The odds ratio we present in the table is OR=\exp(\text{log-odds value 1 minus log-odds value 2}) from the line. By having this graphic, the reader should be able to judge the relationship for the whole range of values that our stigma scales may take on. Note that the actual value of the log-odds is not that meaningful; it may change in magnitude as adjustment values change. The difference between the log-odds is meaningful for the full range of the stigma scales. We have referenced Figure 1 in the methods sections pp.10-11.

Reviewer’s Comment: In my original review, I recommended that the authors avoid making references to analyses that are not presented (Minor Revision #1). Although the authors said that this was “done as per reviewer’s advice”, there remains a reference to an analysis that is not presented on page 16. Again, I recommend that the authors remove this or present relevant statistics in the text.

Response: We apologize for the error identified by the reviewer. We have removed the reference from the text and double checked to ensure no other similar references are in the text.

Reviewer #2: Alison Wringe

Reviewer Comments: The proposed revisions have been made to the manuscript. The methods section is still lengthy (and could be reduced further if required by the editors), but is acceptable in terms of content if there is no word limit. The manuscript can be accepted for publication. The quality of the English may still need to be checked.

Response: Thank you for your review and suggestions. We have edited the text to make shorten the methods section as much as possible. First language US-English speakers among co-authors have reviewed the manuscript for grammatical errors. We hope the quality of the English is now acceptable.