Author's response to reviews

Title: Gender difference in the characteristics of and high-risk behaviours among non-injecting heterosexual methamphetamine users in Qingdao, Shandong Province, China

Authors:

Zhenhong Wang (wzh58ok@163.com)
Tongsheng Chu (tongshengchu@163.com)
Dianchang Liu (Liudianchang@yahoo.com.cn)

Version: 4 Date: 9 December 2012

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear editor,

Many thanks for your advises. We have revised the covering letter and given response to the concerns of referee point-by-point in this letter.

Yours sincerely
Dianchang Liu

Reviewer's report

Title: Gender difference in the characteristics of and high-risk behaviours among non-injecting heterosexual methamphetamine users in Qingdao, Shandong Province, China
Version: 2 Date: 16 November 2012
Reviewer: Robert Heimer

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript is much improved and makes a significant contribution to the literature on methamphetamine abuse and sexual risk among heterosexual populations. Several clarifications are needed, however, before the manuscript accurately presents the data. Many of these are merely editorial, but two issues do need to be addressed with more than changes in grammar or syntax. I will list these first and then enumerate (with page numbers) the minor grammatical and syntactical points.

First, all but four of the 110 women recruited into the study report behaviors that would lead them to be classified as sex workers. Therefore, the sample tells us little or nothing about methamphetamine use and related knowledge, attitudes, and risk behaviors in the broader population of women who use methamphetamine without injection. This is a limitation to the study that needs to be added to the Discussion.

We agree to the reviewer, and have added the following sentence to the discussion in page 10:

Third, most female MA users recruited into the study report behaviors that would lead them to be classified as sex workers. Therefore, the sample tells us little about MA use and related knowledge, attitudes, and risk behaviors in the broader population of women who use MA without injection.
Second, since almost all of women could be classified as sex workers, almost all the men (277 of 288) reporting obtaining the services of sex workers, and since almost all of them report multiple partners while using methamphetamine whereas only 85 of the 110 women engaging in such activity, it suggests that many sex episodes involve one man and more than one woman. This needs to be explained in the Discussion and might even lead the authors to suggest some form of intervention specific to these kinds of sex encounters.

It is true that many male MA users have sex with more than one woman who are MA user or not MA user. We added the following sentence to the discussion in page 9:

It indicates the truth that many sex episodes involved one man and more than one woman including those women who are not MA users during MA use, suggesting that some form of intervention specific to these kinds of sex encounters should be conducted.

As for specific editorial changes:

1. In the Abstract, the numbers for age and duration and frequency of methamphetamine use could be reduced to one significant digit after the decimal point.

   We have changed two significant digit after the decimal point to one significant digit after the decimal point in abstract as well as in the results, and tables.

2. In the Background (line 2 page 2), I am not sure why the parenthetical “(amphetamine and methcathinone)” follows methamphetamine since the two compounds/drugs mentioned in parentheses are not methamphetamine. The parenthetical should be deleted.

   We have deleted the parenthetical.

3. Background, page 3: It should be noted that the study that found that methamphetamine enhances HIV infectivity in macrophages was conduct in vitro; thus its relevance to in vivo infectivity is speculative. This should be noted in the text.

   We added “in vitro” in the sentence. We have revised the sentence as:

   Besides increasing high-risk sexual behaviours, MA use can enhance HIV-1 infections in human macrophages in vitro [12]

4. Background, page 3: In the phrase, “…non-injecting heterosexual MA users feature significantly higher numbers of sex partners…”, the word “feature” should be replaced by “report”.

   We have replaced “feature” by “report” in the sentence.
5. Background, page 3: In the sentence, “MA users were more likely to be inconsistent with condom usage and have syphilis.”, “inconsistent with” should be changed to “inconsistent in”. The former phrase suggest dissonance between MA use and condom use whereas the authors clearly mean the MA were more likely to use condoms inconsistently.
We have revised the sentence into:

“MA users were more likely to be inconsistent in condom usage and have syphilis.”

6. Background, page 4: In the phrase, “…drug trafficking and abuse have become increasingly popular in the city over the last ten years.”, “popular” should be changed to “common”.
We have replaced “popular” by “common” in the phrase as the reviewer indicates:

“Howeover, accompanied by booms in economic development and the entertainment industry, drug trafficking and abuse have become increasingly common in the city over the last ten years.”

7. Background, page 4: More information needs to be given about what “Iceland” means.
We have added the following in parentheses to explain what “Iceland” means:

(Qingdao is on the eastern end of Shandong Peninsula, and MA looks like ice in appearance)

8. Background, page 4, last sentence of section 2.1: Authors need to explain what KTVs are.
We have added the following in parentheses to explain what KTVs are:

(one kind of entertainment venues with many private rooms where customers can sing and dance by themselves)

9. Methods, page 4: Regarding the sentence, “Community outreach workers visited these venues, approached potential study subjects, and made friends with them in person.” I am not sure that the outreach made friends with the study subjects. The sentence should probably read, “Community outreach workers visited these venues and made the acquaintance of potential study subjects.”
We have changed the sentence as the reviewer indicates.

10. Methods, page 5: In the phrase, “the remaining female participants were
girlfriends or sex partners of male participants.”, I think it would be clearer if the sex partners were referred to as “casual sex partners” to distinguish them from girlfriends who are regular partners.

It is true. We have added the word “casual”. The phrase read as the following:

“the remaining female participants were girlfriends or casual sex partners of male participants.”

11. Methods, page 5: The last two sentences of section 2.3 should be revised to read, “Each topic area was covered by several variables, each in the form of a question. Those diagnosed with STDs were given free and appropriate treatments.”

We have revised it as the reviewer indicates.

12. Results, page 6, last sentence of Section 3.2: The authors use the phrase “were willing to abstain from MA” here, but in the appendix that lists the translations of the relevant question, the text reads. “Did it occur to you to abstain from MA?” The meaning of the two phrases is different and the authors should use as the wording in the Results the wording as it appears in the questionnaire.

We have changed the word in the results into the same as in the questionnaire.

We have revised the sentence as the following:

Among those who admitted MA addiction, 30.1% of the males responded that it had occurred to them to abstain from MA and wanted to try it. In comparison, 33.3% of the females responded that it had occurred to them to abstain from MA but only 8.3% of them wanted to try it (p<0.05).

13. Results, page 7, Section 3.4: A phrase in the first sentence reads, “…most of the male and female respondents used MA only…” This is too non-specific. It should read. “…most of the male and female respondents reported MA as the only drug they used…”

We have revised it as the reviewer indicates.

14. Table 5: Some p-values are reported as “0”. They may be vanishingly small, but they are not zero. It would be acceptable for the p-values to be reported a p<0.001.

We have changed “0” to “p<0.001” in Table 5 as the reviewer indicates.