Reviewer’s report

Title: 'It is like a tomato stall where someone can pick what he likes': Structure and practices of female sex work in Kampala, Uganda.

Version: 1 Date: 24 April 2013

Reviewer: Lyle McKinnon

Reviewer’s report:

The authors present qualitative research to describe the settings where sex work takes place, and surrounding structural elements, in a semi-urban setting in Uganda. In-depth interviews were conducted to gain insight into the daily lives of sex workers in this context. The paper is generally well-written (although a few instances of colloquial and/or awkward wording can be found) and is well-carried out. A few concerns should be considered before this paper can be accepted for publication.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1) Although every 3rd woman was sampled, this study relied on self-identification of women as SW. Another 43 of the selected women did not self-identify as SW: were any of these women engaged in activities that could be on the fringe of SW, but were shy to admit this to the interviewer for fear of consequences? More details on the cohort and excluded sample would be useful to judge representativeness of not including 43/101 women, which could in turn be a source of bias.

2) The paper in general has very little quantitative data, even the proportion of women for whom a given story represents. Based on the data analysis tool used, it should be possible to assemble tables of how frequent a given theme was brought up? This could add an important dimension to this work.

Minor Essential Revisions

1) The self-reported HIV prevalence was approximately 50% - does this mirror what was observed in the overall cohort?

2) Outdoor venues were generally riskier for sex workers in terms of violence and possibly HIV acquisition, but little was offered in terms of how to deliver services to sex workers in this setting. Were any opportunities revealed in the interviews?

3) Determinants of condom use were mentioned in the abstract, but little offered in the manuscript with respect to location, aside from fishing villages being associated with less frequent sex work.

4) The stories of senga – the informal peer leader – were very interesting, including the requirement of a buy-in. This seems to be more prevalent the more informal the setting. Was there any evidence of something similar in the bar-based SW?
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.