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: 5 May 2013

Reviewer: Gillian Abel

Reviewer's report:

The paper was interesting and analysed appropriately could cover a very relevant issue. Aside from a few typos it is well written. There is little research carried out with sex workers in Africa and for this reason it may be relevant for BMC Public Health to publish. I feel, however, that there are a number of limitations in the research design and the write-up of this paper.

I imagine that the authors have little experience with qualitative research. Qualitative research does not aim to achieve a representative sample and sampling is most often done using non-probability or purposeful methods. This enables a sample of participants who are information-rich, in other words they have the depth of information needed to address the research questions posed. To randomly sample 101 participants but only find 58 with the information the authors’ desire is both wasteful and arguably unethical. It is also disappointing that the interviews were not recorded and transcribed in full as a lot of depth is lost by not doing this. Most qualitative studies of sex workers have been able to record interviews and so I find the argument made for not doing this to be weak. These comments are my reflections and there is nothing that the authors can do at this stage to address these issues.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

The analysis was purely descriptive which is fine for the purposes of this paper but the discussion was merely a summary of the findings and did not advance current state of knowledge in any way. I would have preferred a more robust discussion against relevant literature. I would suggest that this section of the paper be rewritten accordingly. The authors stated that the research could potentially inform interventions and I would like them to address this in the discussion as well. What possible interventions do they see?

The authors also state that they are interested in describing where the different sex work venues are and the interaction with clients. The analysis was a detailed description of the location and the amount of money changing hands, but the actual description of interaction with clients was thin. I suggest that this would be the most important part of the analysis if risky interaction is the focus and therefore this needs to be attended to.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
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