Reviewer's report

Title: Correlates of HIV testing among men who have sex with men in Cameroon: a cross-sectional analysis

Version: 1 Date: 11 July 2014

Reviewer: Jesse Clark

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review, “Correlates of HIV testing among men who have sex with men in Cameroon: a cross-sectional analysis.” The manuscript presents important information on HIV testing history and associated factors among MSM in two cities in Cameroon. Given the high prevalence of HIV in this population, deeper understanding of factors associated with prior HIV testing is essential to developing future strategies to control the HIV epidemic in the area. There are a few points that should be addressed prior to publication:

Major Essential Revisions:
None

Minor Essential Revisions:
None

Discretionary Revisions:

Introduction
1) Throughout the Introduction, but especially in Paragraph 4, information from previous studies on factors associated with prior HIV testing are collapsed without sufficient attention to how differences in context may influence the findings (i.e., MSM populations in Douala, Lesotho, and San Francisco are not directly comparable and factors associated with prior testing in one setting may not be related in another).

Methods
2) Although details of the study methods have been previously published, it would help to have more information about the RDS sampling, in order for the reader to evaluate the potential representativeness of the data presented. Given that the samples recruited were fairly small for RDS recruitment, it would help to have more information to see whether the sample was derived from a few specific social networks or if there was a diverse range of participants recruited. Specifically, was there an ethnographic mapping process used to help identify seed recruits? How many seed recruits were selected and how were they recruited? How many waves of recruitment were achieved? What was the median length of the recruitment chains? In the previous publication by Park et al, the authors state that seeds were recruited, “through existing community
contacts,” and that, “The CBOs worked with the research team to identify the initial seeds,” which seems to indicate that seeds were recruited through contacts with the CBOs. If so, then the finding that a large percentage of participants had been tested at the CBO sites would be less remarkable. Obviously, these questions do not significantly undermine the author’s findings, but answering them would help to provide greater transparency to the data reported.

3) Final paragraph of Section 2.2 refers to participants being offered, “outreach and linkage to HIV care.” Given the fact that participants had already been recruited to the study (through RDS outreach), were there additional outreach efforts involved?

Results

4) The authors refer to Table 1 for data on participants’ sexual identity, but this information is not included in Table 1. In addition, how were sexual identity categories determined? From pre-specified categories (if so, what options were provided), by participants’ self-described terms, or both?

Discussion

5) The finding that lifetime history of HIV testing increased in association with participant age is not surprising (with greater age comes a greater number of time in which one could have been tested). What would be more helpful to address here would be how prevalence of recent testing differed between age groups.

6) The authors acknowledge the potential limitations/bias of RDS recruitment in characterizing their sample, but some more discussion would be helpful, specifically addressing how recruitment characteristics in this sample may have influenced some of the key findings (e.g., could the high prevalence of prior HIV testing be related to use of CBOs as the basis for seed recruitment? Is it possible that a sample of MSM without links to local CBOs would have a lower frequency of prior testing and present an important group unreached by current VCT efforts?)

Tables

7) Similar to above, 74.0% of participants who reported prior HIV testing said they were advised to do so by a Peer Educator. Could this fact be explained by involvement of Peer Educators in seed/participant recruitment for the study?

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