Reviewer's report

Title: Relationship between exposure to the Avahan intervention and levels of reported condom use among men who have sex with men in southern India.

Version: 1 Date: 5 July 2014

Reviewer: Bea Vuylsteke

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Major compulsory revisions:

P. 5, Exposure variables:
The authors describe various exposure variables: contact with project, reception of condoms, assistance to condom demonstration, duration since first contact with project, number of contacts during last month, number of condoms received at last contact, number of condom demonstrations seen.

These variables are not independent from each other, in fact they are probably overlapping and intertwined to a great extent. Examples: Receiving condoms by the project includes a contact, condom demonstration goes hand in hand with condom distribution, etc…

Is there any reason to keep the analysis of the different exposure variables separate? Was it not possible to create a general exposure variable taking into account all these variables, eg in a “exposure score”? 

P. 7, intervention exposure

Line 151: “positive correlation between duration since first contact with Sangama and number of contacts in the last months”.

This is a potential interesting finding which may need some more discussion. Do the authors have any hypothesis why the older contacts would also be the most active participants of the project?

P. 8. Associations with socio-demographic and behavioural variables.

Because of the separation of the different exposure variable, this paragraph is a bit confusing. See also previous comments. I guess the main question should be: what is the profile of MSM who are reached by the project? Or: what is the profile of those MSM who are most exposed to the project?

P.12 Limitations, line 269.

The social desirability bias is the main limitation of the study, potentially resulting in a huge overestimation of the true impact of the intervention. This should be extensively discussed here.

P.12, before conclusions
The paper describes mainly program evaluation results and its public health importance should be more extensively discussed.
Could the authors add some recommendations to the Avahan programme?
P. 19-20, table 1 and table 2
See also previous comments. Would it be possible to examine a "summary exposure variable"

Minor essential revisions
P. 6, line 105: “double deckers”.
This term could be stigmatising. Is this an official name/category or translated from a local language? Is this term accepted by the community as name?
P.9, line 205: who had ever been married
Please specify married “to a woman” or “to a man”
P. 19-20, table 1 and table 2
Please include the number of MSM in each category (with all partners, with main partners, with casual partners)

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I have no competing interests