Reviewer’s report

Title: HIV/AIDS in Trinidad: A Dilemma for Religious Groups

Version: Date: 24 February 2005

Reviewer: Lisa Norman

Reviewer’s report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Is the question posed by the authors new and well-defined?
Ø The research question is appropriate, timely and well-defined.

Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
Ø The methods section is extremely weak and inadequate. There is not enough information presented such that a researcher could replicate the study. Some examples of inadequacies:
o How were the representatives identified? How were they approached?
o What about issues related to informed consent? How was informed consent obtained (or was it)?
o What was the time frame used for data collection?
o How were the 10 respective religions chosen?
o How was the interview instrument developed? What information/research informed the development of this instrument?
o Was the interview instrument approved by IRB?
o How were the data gathered? For example, were the interviews taped and then transcribed?
o Was any compensation/incentives offered for participation?

Ø Reviewer suggests that authors significantly expand the methods section to include the necessary information such that the study could be replicated from the information provided.

Are the data sound and well controlled?
Ø Reviewer is unable to assess the soundness of the data since information regarding the mechanisms for gathering and protecting data is severely lacking.

Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Ø Manuscript appears to adhere to relevant standards for reporting qualitative data, especially verbatim responses.

Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
Ø Authors combine the discussion and conclusions into one section. The points made in this section are adequately supported by the data (as presented).
Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Ø The title is an accurate reflection of the content of the manuscript.

Ø Abstract is wordy (see last set of comments). However, content seems to present an accurate reflection of the content of the manuscript.

Is the writing acceptable?
Ø Long, wordy sentences were used, which can make reading tedious. For example, in the background section, third paragraph, the 2nd sentence has 58 words; in the conclusion section, first paragraph, one sentence has 42 words; in the third paragraph, another sentence has 41 words; and, in the eighth paragraph, one sentence has 53 words. Too many long sentences may make for a ponderous difficult style. The average length of a sentence is between 17 and 21 words.

Ø It seems that a significant proportion of the writing uses unnecessarily convoluted phrases as well as stuffy and lofty words. Reviewer would suggest that authors express ideas as simply and as straight-forwardly as possible, using common or expected words. If the purpose is to inform those in the field, make the document reader-friendly.

Ø Inappropriate punctuation is used throughout the document. This may be a reflection of the long sentences, for example, the use of semicolons in a number of sentences. Also, commas are used in a number of sentences that do not require such punctuation.

Ø Inconsistent formatting in the body of the manuscript (bolding of titles, spacing between paragraphs, etc.) is a common theme. Sometimes, statements in parenthesis only have the first parenthesis [ ( ]. Also, at times, the headers will have some words capitalized but not others (that should be if maintaining consistency). For example, “Introduction to the groups” should be “Groups”. Authors need to be consistent with formatting.

Ø There needs to be a line space between each paragraph or the first line of each paragraph should be indented.

Additional Specific Points to be Addressed:
Ø Background Section, first paragraph, fifth sentence (The Hindu tradition): the wording and punctuation need to be edited.

Ø Background Section, second paragraph: Do the author mean to use the term “incidence” or “prevalence”? As of 2005, does the Caribbean, or specifically does Trinidad, host the 2nd highest incidence rates (I know they host the 2nd highest prevalence rates). No reference is given for this statement. Little information is presented on the specific of the epidemic in Trinidad, such as actual prevalence rates, reported cases, etc. Also, are more recent surveillance data not available (authors cite a 2001 source which is dated).

Ø Background Section, second paragraph, second sentence: Why is the term “however” in the sentence?

Ø Page 5, second paragraph (The Roman Catholic (RC)): RC II should be RCII.

Ø Page 6, third paragraph (The Nation of Islam): The authors may want to clarify the term “alpha-interferon” for the reader who is not versed in bio-medical terminology (as are many who work in the field in the Caribbean).

Ø Page 7, first paragraph, second sentence: “individuals and family that”: The term that is used to refer to objects, who is used to refer to persons.

Ø Page 7, second paragraph: this sentence needs rewording “it is unclear “ appears grammatically incorrect.

Ø Page 11, fifth paragraph, first sentence (As to how): This sentence needs rewording.

Ø Page 11, fifth paragraph, second sentence (For the Hindu): This sentence ends with a
semi-colon as though a relevant, verbatim comment would be provided. However, it is followed by a comment from RCII (not Hindu). Is there something missing (i.e., a comment from the Hindu representative)?

Page 16-18 conclusion section. This section needs editing, addressing the comments provided above. It is very tedious to read.

MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS ARE REQUIRED. Edits to the Methods Section and the overall quality of writing are needed before reviewer can/will make a decision (or recommend) for publication. See above points for necessary edits and revisions.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.