Author's response to reviews

Title: Demographic, risk behaviour and personal network variables associated with prevalent hepatitis C, hepatitis B, and HIV infection in injection drug users in Winnipeg, Canada.

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Reviewer's report
Demographic, risk behaviour and personal network variables associated with prevalent
Title: hepatitis C,
hepatitis B, and HIV infection in injection drug users in Winnipeg, Canada.
Version: 2 Date: 12 July 2006
Reviewer: Devon Brewer
Reviewer's report:
General
The authors have revised the manuscript nicely. My remaining comments are just for the
authors to consider at their discretion.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on
publication can be reached)
None.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term,
which the author can be trusted to correct)
None.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
For symmetry, it probably makes good sense to include in the limitations section a note that
receiving injections from others also was not assessed.

We agree and have added this statement to the limitations section of the manuscript as follows: Third, only “injecting someone else as a service” was analyzed; “injecting someone else as a favor” or “receiving injections from others” can be considered distinct traits and could also be related to the common use of syringes and pathogen transmission.

The correlations between HIV, HBV, and HCV infection are informative (and surprisingly low/absent). By “correlation” in my original comments, I meant “association”, and it would be helpful to display the three 2 x 2 tables and report the associated ORs, as the OR is the authors’ primary measure of association in this article (correlations and other measures could be computed by readers themselves from the tables if they were interested). If the authors retain the correlation coefficients, the number of places to the right of the decimal point should be consistent with other results reported in the paper.

We’re finding the manuscript a bit “table heavy” already as it stands now, so we would prefer to leave the data as correlation coefficients in the text body. We have reduced the number of decimal places by one.

Although I think it would still be preferable to use the interval nature of the data on the number of IDUs in the network variables (truncation doesn’t eliminate the meaningfulness of the continuum), I wasn’t suggesting dichotomization as an alternative. I was recommending a common categorization across measures e.g., 0, 1,
2-5, or some other categorization that maximizes the number of non-null categories. As the codings are now, it is difficult to compare directly results for different network variables.

When we originally put together the data analysis approach we had started out with the process as you suggest, and had tried to come up with common categories. As we worked with the data and went through the analysis we felt the pigeon-holing effect of using a common category was catering more to our convenience and not fully capturing the nuances in the quantitative differences with respect to how people were responding to the questions. We eventually centred on the categories we present in the paper as something that may be a bit more difficult for the reader to work with, but in the end, we think better captures the real-life complexities of the network responses. As such we would prefer to leave the data as it stands now.

**What next?:** Accept after discretionary revisions

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests.