Reviewer's report

Title: HIV prevalence and factors associated with HIV infection among male injection drug users under 30: a cross-sectional study in Long An, Vietnam

Version: Date: 5 September 2006

Reviewer: Michael Clatts

Reviewer's report:

General
This manuscript has had a somewhat difficult history. However, the current revision has been very significantly improved. It is clear, reads well, and provides a nice balance between description of the data and a reasonable level of interpretive license. The presentation succeeds in bringing the data forward. The data are important, both in illuminating the emerging HIV epidemic in Vietnam but potentially also other countries in the region whose IDU epidemics are poised on the brink of generalized epidemics. I strongly and enthusiastically recommend publication.

A few minor points to address in the final editing:

There is no introduction, although the Background section seems to at least partially serve this function. Perhaps this is an artifact of the journal format?

The first sentence in Background section needs to be slightly revised. Presumably, what the authors intend to say is that "HIV has reached epidemic proportions among IDU's," not in the country as a whole, as is presently stated.

There is a similar problem with the last sentence in the first paragraph of the discussion section.

Two comments on the Discussion and Conclusion section:

First, I wonder if the authors might have something specific in mind about how to advance sexual risk reduction among IDU's. Some reflection based on their experience with this population might be useful here.

Second, I generally agree that longitudinal research is needed. However, I would also point out that there are several as yet unanswered questions posed by this data that could have been at least partially resolved with the use of better cross-sectional instrumentation. Some of the limitations in this data set are a function of the fact that the measures were developed for the purposes of multi-site sentinel surveillance and designed to support standardized assessments across multiple sites, contexts, and populations. The development of some instrumentation based on local questions, perhaps as adjunct to sentinel surveillance activities, would be a useful alternative to costly longitudinal studies. The development of some instrumentation based on local questions, perhaps as adjunct to sentinel surveillance activities, would be a useful alternative to costly longitudinal studies. For example, while it is not clear to me that this population can really be characterized as "migrant," as that terms has generally been used in the existing literature, there is certainly substantial geographic movement operating. This has potentially important implications for understanding both sources of behavioral risk amongst the injectors themselves as well as for understanding how injection and sexual risk among IDU's contribute to the larger epidemic. Some creative thinking about how to better model the impact of geographic movement, even within cross-sectional design, is clearly needed. And again, this need is not limited to Vietnam. It is a critical question for the region as a whole.

I emphasize that these are minor points and in general I think the material is worthy of publication and just about ready to go. As noted above, I think the material is important and I recommend publication.

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

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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)