Reviewer's report

Title: Ten years of lesbian health survey research in the UK West Midlands

Version: 3 Date: 4 April 2007

Reviewer: Judith Bradford

Reviewer's report:

General

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

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

1. In the discussion section, 4th paragraph, 2nd sentence, the phrase "surveys of 1000 women" (compiling 4 independent samples taken at different time periods) is inappropriately referred to as 1% of "120,000 lesbians and bisexual women", a number arrived at by multiplying an estimated % of sexual minority women among the general population against the total # women in West Midlands, using an annual population count "of approximately 2 million adult females" (uncited). There are two substantial problems with this approach: (1) the 4 samples were taken at various time points, while the population number appears to be a point-in-time, so the time periods are not comparable (1000 from adding 4 numbers over time is not the same as 1000 from annual population data; and (2) the language is imprecise, such as "adult females" without specifying ages - this should be specifically noted and for both the population data and the surveys.

2. The authors refer to a variety of health status indicators that have been associated with sexual minority women in previous research and compare their results to these earlier findings. I recommend that they create a table to accompany the text, for example to include 4 columns (Col. 1 relevant health indicators (smoking, alcohol, etc.), (Col. 2 summary of available data on heterosexual women) (Col. 3 summary of previous data on lesbian/bisexual women) (Col. 4 summary of data from the 4 reviewed data sets). The purpose of this table will be to present the numbers/percentages that are referred to throughout the "discussion" section of the paper. Reference to such a table will assist readers to keep track of points made in the discussion.

3. There are several instances in the paper where the authors call attention to changes in certain indicators from one time point to another and speculate on the reason(s) for this change. The methodological limitations of each of their four studies, and the challenges inherent in thinking across them are considerable. Thus the authors cannot rule out the possibility that observed differences in indicators are due to sampling bias and contamination rather than to any real change that may have occurred. The paper will be stronger if these speculations are deleted.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential 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, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.