Reviewer's report

Title: Prevalence of HIV, HSV-2, and Syphilis in Male Sex Partners of Pregnant Women in Peru

Version: 1 Date: 17 November 2007

Reviewer: Catherine Enel

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General
The title suggests epidemiological results rather than the actual question posed by the paper, i.e. could the male sex partners of pregnant women serve as a bridge between core risk groups (female sex workers and men who have sex with men) and the general population for HIV transmission?

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
If the aim of the survey was to answer this question, then recruitment of interviewees raises a real problem. First of all pregnant women are never representative of the general population, nor are their male partners. Furthermore, pregnancy is a very special time for a couple and has an effect on sexual behavior which undergoes some changes during that period. In this paper, however, the male partners’ sexual behavior during the last 12 months is investigated without taking into account the special situation of pregnancy. I am therefore not certain that the classic epidemiological question about sexual behavior during the 12 months prior to enrolment in the study is operational in this case.

Enrolment of 1,835 male sex partners of pregnant women in approximately 5 weeks shows a good acceptance of the survey. I do share, however, the authors’ concern about the limitations in having the questionnaires administered by the female partner’s obstetrician instead of by skilled interviewers. This methodological error may have led to underdeclaration of outside partners during the previous 12 months as it is to be feared that future fathers, who are expected to behave in a responsible way, may have adjusted their answers accordingly. I would recommend that the authors concentrate on the epidemiological results, as the investigation methodology does not allow them to conclude that the risk of a bridge between core risk groups and the general population for HIV transmission is low.

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)

The fact that 37.1% of male partners declaring sex with female sex workers and 11% with other men in lifetime drop down to 8.9% and 1.7% respectively during the 12 months prior to interview could mean that these types of sex are part of youth’s experiences that exit with age. Although the low rate of outside unprotected sex is very encouraging, the sanitary risks should not be minimized, all the more so as the HSV-2 prevalence, long known to be a risk factor for HIV transmission, is high among the male sex partners.

It would be worthwhile to investigate the possible consequences of sexual behavior of bisexual men and of men who have sex with female sex workers on the spreading of STIs and HIV in the Peruvian population.

**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 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 declare that I have no competing interests below.