Reviewer's report

Title: Study of knowledge, perception and attitude of adolescent girls towards STIs/HIV, safer sex and sex education: (A cross sectional survey of urban adolescent schoolgirls in South Delhi, India)

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Reviewer: Ann O'Leary

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The present manuscript reports data from a survey on HIV and STI administered to adolescent girls in secondary schools in South Delhi. Although only nine percent of participants reported having engaged in sexual activity, upper-class girls are at significant sexual risk in India. The society is in the process of relaxing standards for sexual behavior, and in fact sexual experimentation is very popular now. Thus, the abysmally low levels of knowledge exhibited by adolescents in the present study is of great concern. However, data that appear to demonstrate poor understanding of HIV and other STIs can in fact merely demonstrate poor understanding of the questions themselves. The English-language survey was developed in Australia, where English is the first language of non-indigenous peoples. In the present context there is no assurance that students understood the items fully. The survey was not piloted in cognitive testing, there are no scales whose psychometric properties could be evaluated, and no correlations among constructs are provided to demonstrate the orderliness of data that might confirm student comprehension. The items themselves are not presented in the manuscript. Other lesser concerns include:

Demographic information should include income. Female students receiving secondary education are not from lower castes where survival sex might be a risk factor, but income and distribution of income within the schools could be telling in other ways.

Some schoolgirls are involved in sex exchange (an aspect of the sexual experimentation mentioned above). This should be assessed.

What percentage of students declined to complete the survey? Specific items on the survey (such as sexual behavior)?

How was sex defined for the students? Could sexual experience be based only on oral sex or other non-vaginal sex? Was condom use reported?