Reviewer’s report

Title: Magnitude of sexual abuse among male high school students in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Reviewer: Gisela Priebe

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This study investigates the prevalence of sexual abuse in a sample of 884 male high school students in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Also, characteristics related to the incident (such as type of abuse or disclosure) are reported and socio-demographic variables are provided for those who experienced completed rape or sexual coercion. Studies like this are important in order to increase our knowledge about sexual abuse of youth in the general population in different countries. Especially research about the sexual abuse of male youth is of interest.

My main concerns are related to the sample and the sampling procedure as well as to the description of the measures.

Sample and sampling procedure: it is not clear whether students who are registered in regular programs in senior secondary schools are representative for all male youth in Ethiopia or Addis Ababa at this age. How many percent of male 18 year old youth attend senior secondary school?

Also, unwillingness to participate in the study is not an exclusion criteria but the number of those who did not want to participate or who did not attend school at the day when the survey was conducted should be used when the response rate is calculated. The authors claim that the response rate was 95.2% (all who participated in the study minus those who gave incomplete or inconsistent responses). Instead, the response rate should be calculated starting with the number of all eligible male students at the selected schools. Specify then how many students chose not to participate, did not attend school at the day of the study or were excluded because of incomplete/inconsistent response (this last number is already given).

The schools were stratified by type of ownership and three schools were selected from each stratum. Explain why the number of selected schools in each stratum was not related to the total number of schools in each stratum and the size of the schools. In the final sample, 84% of the participants were from government school. Does this mean that students from government schools are overrepresented? Did all selected schools agree to participate? This would be quite unusual according to my own experience. If some of the originally selected schools declined to participate, give the numbers and explain if and how they were replaced.

What means “cluster of class rooms”?
How did you manage to get almost exactly the required sample size of n=884 given that schools have different sizes and some students may have been unwilling to participate? In other words, was there some type of after-sampling to increase the sample?

The description of the measures should be much more extensive and complete. All variables used in the analysis should be described in the Method section. As it is now, a variable like “watching pornography” is mentioned for the first time in the Discussion section. Provide a reference for the WHO questionnaire that was used in the study. How many questions were included in the questionnaire? At least for the main variables (completed rape, attempted rape, sexual harassment and sexual coercion) the exact wording of the questions and response alternatives should be provided so that it is clear what actually has been measured and other researchers would be able to repeat the study.

Background and research question

The objective of the study should be explained more specifically and the contribution of the study to the existing body of research should be made clearer. It is not clear why some of the variables (like family size or monthly HH income) are included in the study. The use of the variables under investigation should be related to previous research or it should be motivated why it is important to investigate these variables although there is no previous research.

Discussion

Some of the conclusions in the discussion section are quite speculative and not really related to the previously presented results. For example,

p.10 “It might also be due to negative social responses towards men having sex with men.” The sex of the perpetrator was not reported in the results, so it is not clear whether all perpetrators were men.

p.11: family structure. It is not clear whether the abuse occurred before or after the youth moved from their parents. It is possible that some left their family because of intra-familiar abuse.

p.11 results concerning watching pornography should be reported in the result section.

p.11 Were the students asked whether they had experienced hopelessness or sleep disturbance as a consequence of sexual abuse? Otherwise, as this is a cross-section study, it is not sure that hopelessness or sleep disturbance are consequences of sexual abuse – it could also be that these symptoms make the youth more vulnerable for being sexually abused.

Language: please check the language in general and the use of scientific terms in special. For example, consider to change “magnitude” to the established term “prevalence”. “Sexual abuse among male high school students” in the title gives the impression that both predators and offenders are male high school students – maybe “sexual abuse of high school students” is better.

Reference list: please review the reference list and follow the reference style
required by the journal carefully.

Minor questions/comments:

p.3 underreporting can be expected among females as well as among males, although we know from previous research that girls are more likely to disclose than males. This issue could be elaborated a bit more, also including some references.

p.3 “in most Ethiopian cultures” – many readers may not be familiar with the Ethiopian cultures, so it would be helpful to provide some more information at this point.

p.4 increasing numbers of reported male victims of rape: provide the numbers.

p.4 information about the year when the study was conducted is provided somewhere else in the paper, but it should be added in the first section of the Methods

p.5 “Probability to population size was calculated for each selected school to obtain the total sample size.” I do not understand this sentence.

p.5 specify what “others” means with regard to different school types. This information is given in the tables, but should be provided already here.

p.7 provide a reference for the WHO ethical and safety guidelines for researches on sexuality.

The authors state that “No names or identifiers were included on the questionnaire” (p.6), but they also say that “Names and identifiers were removed from the questionnaire” (p.7). Does that mean that some students wrote their names on the questionnaire although this was not required and that these names were removed? Please clarify.

p.8 + Figure1: does “sleep together” mean “to sleep in the same room or bed” or “to have sex”?

p.8 If there is more information available about the perpetrators (age, sex, type of relation to the victim other than known/unknown) it would be interesting if this was included in the paper.

p.11 “nearly two-third of all male sexual abuses were due to the involvement of pornography” – what does that mean?

Table 4: The heading is misleading – completed rape and sexual coercion are not compared with each other

Table 5: the heading is not very clear, try to make it more specific

Typos: p. 3 “or having the view of any type of sex act committed by an adult or under” – something is missing.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
No competing interests