Author's response to reviews

Title: Community views about routine HIV testing and antiretroviral treatment in Botswana: signs of progress from a cross sectional study

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Version: 6 Date: 3 April 2007

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Dear Anita Makri

MS: 6057374911207164
Community views about routine HIV testing and antiretroviral treatment in Botswana: signs of progress from a cross sectional study

Thank you for sending the further comments of two of the original three reviewers about this paper. We are grateful to both of them for their further comments and we have revised the paper accordingly. Details of our responses to each comment follow below.

Regards
Anne Cockcroft

REVIEWER 2: Hilary Curtis

General

General point
1. A valuable report on high levels of awareness and support for RHT and ART in Botswana.

General point response
We thank the reviewer for this comment.

Minor essential revisions

Point 2
There appears to be a typo in the third sentence under "Perception of HIV risk and HIV testing" - says "in the last 21 months" but I believe this should be 12 months.

Point 6 response
It should indeed be 12 months and we have now corrected this typo.

REVIEWER 3: Sheri Weiser

General

General point
The authors have adequately responded to many of my original criticisms. Yet, there are still a few further
clarifications and changes that would strengthen the paper as outlined below.

Response to general point
We thank the reviewer for noting the importance of the paper. We have addressed the further points raised.

Minor essential revisions

Abstract:
Point 1
Page 6, line 7: the authors should add the word "only" in the sentence "the interviewers briefly explained routine testing only to those who had not heard about it." I think a footnote of the exact wording of the explanation of routine testing would also be beneficial in view of strong claims by the authors of support for the policy.

Point 1 response
We have revised the sentence in question to read: "The interviewers briefly explained the routine testing only to those few respondents who had not heard about it". As suggested by the reviewer, we have added a footnote with the exact wording of the explanation given to those few people who had not heard about routine HIV testing. We are not sure if the journal style allows for footnotes. If not, we could perhaps include the wording of the explanation within the text.

Point 2
Page 7, 1st paragraph: While the details added on focus groups are helpful, they could be presented in a way that is more clear to the reader. Perhaps, move the sentence beginning with "At the time of the household interviews." to the beginning of the paragraph to explain first how the focus groups were recruited before they provide the details of who was in the focus groups and how the data were used.

Point 2 response
We have re-ordered the paragraph as suggested by the reviewer.

Point 3
Page 8, second paragraph: The authors should indicate how they reduced their multivariate models (ie: whether they used a backwards or forwards stepwise approach...).

Point 3 response
We believe that the sentence "For the logistic regression analysis of these variables we undertook a step-down from an initial model including all the variables to produce the final model." already clearly explains how we reduced the multivariate models. To add the further explanation suggested by the reviewer would be duplication.

Point 4
Page 12, first paragraph: People who were not asked about testing at government clinics but responded in the affirmative that they have been tested may have gone to the clinic specifically to request VCT as the authors point out. Consequently, it is not at all clear that they were tested without consent. Similarly, among people who were both offered an HIV test, and who responded that they had tested, it seems unclear to me that they tested with consent. For example, it is possible that they were offered a test and declined, but were still tested against their will, or that they were tested with consent one time and without consent another time. Based on the information provided, and the way that the questions were phrased, I don't believe that the authors can comment on being tested with consent one way or the other. They should clarify this in their discussion.

Point 4 response
We believe it is unlikely that people were asked about being tested (this was the actual wording of the question, rather than enquiring about being "offered a test"), said they did not wish to be tested, and were nevertheless tested against their will. We had no indication that this was the case from any respondent. The issue of being tested with consent one time and without consent another time does not arise, since we were only asking about one specific visit: the most recent visit. We beg to differ with the reviewer on this point and we believe we can reasonably comment on being tested with consent, based on the questions we asked. We think readers should be allowed to judge for themselves as to the possibility of people being asked for to have a test, refusing to have a test, but still being tested against their will. We have added some words in the discussion about this possibility, but indicated we consider it unlikely to be the case.

Point 5
The fact that there was a low response rate is a significant limitation and should be noted as such in the limitation section.

Point 5 response
The response rate among households that were occupied and had someone over the age of 18 years present was high: among those 1372 households with someone over 18 years present, only 87 (6%) declined to participate. The main concern about low response rate is that it can lead to bias because those who refuse are different from those who agree to participate. In the case of the empty households, this was mostly because the occupants were away at their "lands" on that day and there is no particular reason to believe they would respond differently to those households where someone was present; in particular there is no reason to believe they would respond less positively. However, we cannot be sure of this and we have added a note in the discussion to say that the households with no one present may have responded differently from those occupied at the time of the survey visit.

Point 6
Page 19, second paragraph: The authors should better clarify what they mean in the first few sentences. If I understand correctly, the authors are saying that the minority of people who had not heard of RHT were told about a "routine-offer approach", and the rest were not given an explanation. Consequently, among those who had previously heard of routine testing, it was not clear whether they were in favor of a "routine-offer" or "opt-out testing" approach. This point requires further clarification as written.

Point 6 response
The reviewer has understood our meaning correctly. We have now expanded the sentences in question to make the meaning even clearer.

Point 7
Page 19, the same paragraph. I recommend rephrasing the sentence "Respondents were also comfortable with the confidentiality of the information about them in government clinics" to "The majority of respondents (90%) were also comfortable ...." In addition, a potential breach of confidentiality for 10% of the population is not trivial, especially in view of widespread stigma and discrimination associated with HIV. The authors should consider further elaborating on this point as this represents an important target for intervention.

Point 7 response
We have no evidence of any actual breach of confidentiality in the 10% who were not comfortable the information about them was kept private and confidential, or that their concern about confidentiality was related to HIV or AIDS information. But we have added a note that any breach of confidentiality would be serious, especially in view of the continuing stigma around HIV and AIDS.

Point 8
The paper still needs some significant editing. For example, the authors should replace "open questions" with "open-ended questions" throughout, and "closed questions" with "closed-ended questions" throughout. They should also combine the 1st two paragraphs on page 16 into 1 paragraph. There are other minor grammatical errors throughout that will be improved with further editing.

Point 8 response
We have replaced "open questions" with "open-ended questions" and "closed questions" with "closed-ended questions" although we believe the terms "open questions" and "closed questions" are widely used and understood. We have combined the two paragraphs in question. We have gone through the entire paper again to check for and correct any grammatical errors.