Reviewer's report

Title: Evidence Planting by Police among a Community-Based Sample of Injection Drug Users in Bangkok, Thailand

Version: 1 Date: 9 April 2009

Reviewer: Mark Stoove

Reviewer's report:

This paper describes cross-sectional survey-based research investigating self-reported experience of drug planting by police among a community recruited sample of injecting drug users in Bangkok.

The paper is concise and well written. The introduction addresses the key background issues that underpin the investigation, the methods are well described and the analyses are appropriate to the data collected.

What follows are mostly minor points to improve the manuscript.

Major Compulsory Revisions

None

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Page 5, line 7: insert “…of drugs …” – “The primary outcome of interest in this analysis was self-reported evidence of planting [of drugs] by police.”
2. Page 5 line 18: The statistical notation for Chi (#) should be used rather than an X.
3. Page 6, lines 4-5: Final sentence of Statistical analysis section seems out of place (describing a survey question after the description of the analytical approach). I suggest moving this sentence to line 17, page 5 after the survey questions are described and before analysis approach.
4. Page 8, line 19: “clinics” is repeated after parentheses.
5. Page 9, lines 8-9: The assertion regarding fear of police detection, “hurried and opportunistic” injecting, and the connection between drug planting and overdose history in this study requires some recognition of the limitations of this survey in determining the temporal relationship between planting and overdose events. Both are reported as dichotomous lifetime events, and the connection described here would require drug planting events to have occurred prior to overdose events for a causal relationship to be suggested. Although this may well underpin the association, it is incumbent on the authors to acknowledge the limitations in the data.
6. Title of Table 1. Throughout the paper the authors refer to “drug planting” but this table is titled “evidence planting.” Consistency? Also is the “n” really necessary in the title (given that the “n” is also provided in the columns)? If so, then a capital “N” should be used to denote the whole sample (retain small “n” for column sub-samples).

7. Some inconsistent capitalisation in the row titles in both tables.

Discretionary Revisions

8. Page 9, lines 2-5: The interpretation of the link between midazolam use and drug planting may well help explain the association. However, it is hard to believe that the authors or their field researchers are not privy to any further anecdotal evidence from service providers, research collaborators (Mit Sampan HRC, TATAG) or users to support these claims. If such reports are known they should be included in the paper. Alternately, the authors might wish to seek verification of their assertion from users or services providers. Such validation would enhance the reliability of this finding.

9. Page 10, lines 3-8: I feel the limitations section is a bit “thin.” Sampling methods not only limit the generalisability of findings but potentially contribute to reporting bias. Was the data collection purposively designed to elicit information on drug planting or was it a part of a broader set of hypotheses? If the former, how was the study promoted and were participants aware of the purpose of the research? In addition to the provision of monetary compensation, this may have resulted in the over-reporting of drug planting by respondents. In this regard, the authors might wish to also elaborate on the nature of “socially desirable reporting” – more or less likely to report what? This point might also be addressed through the provision of more detail in the methods to clarify these points.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests