Reviewer's report

Title: Male circumcision for HIV prevention: research incorporating science, faith and culture in Papua New Guinea.

Version: 1 Date: 22 May 2013

Reviewer: Jan E Ritchie

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These responses suggest MAJOR compulsory revisions:

Is the question posed original, important and well-defined?

The research question is well defined and addresses an important aspect of cross-cultural research in exploring the acceptability of undertaking sensitive studies with young adults. Although only covering a pilot study set up prior to a full investigation, the paper constructively attempts to reveal the pitfalls, barriers and enablers that allow this difficult yet essential type of research to be completed successfully. Since HIV prevention to be effective must deal with sexual issues and therefore confront cultural practices in this low resourced country that people may be uncomfortable discussing, a paper revealing the detailed process of doing so has potential to provide a lot of learning for other researchers in similar localities and health concerns.

Are the data sound and well controlled?

Here the authors have trouble in deciding the extent to which they are addressing the results of the pilot study or describing the responses from key informants regarding the acceptability of the approaches used, in other words, the authors must decide whether to report on the process and its constraints or the findings from all three data sources and adjust the paper accordingly. The questionnaire responses are reported but there is no reporting of the personal beliefs and opinions of the interviewees or the group discussion participants – and these would be likely to throw more light on the research question posed at the beginning of the paper, as well as the sub-questions listed on page 7. The table is useful but should be referred to in the text as well if it is to contribute well to the results.

Is the interpretation well balanced and supported by the data?

The Discussion section begins with quite a few paragraphs informing the reader of ‘the Melanesian Way’ which seems to be compiled from the relevant literature and personal experience rather than an interpretation arising from the results.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?

The authors do this very well, making clear the challenges they faced and responded to in this cross-cultural setting.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the methods?

The strengths are the way the authors describe in detail the different needs of
this kind of research. The weaknesses are those alluded to under the data question above.

Can the writing, organisation, tables and figures be improved?

There are some definite improvements needed in the organisation of material, as follows:

• The Background first paragraph reads like the abstract which is inappropriate. This information usually comes at the end of the Background section immediately before the method.

• The last sentence in the Background section belongs in the Discussion.

• The last sentence of the Method section mentions a ‘demand’ but what this is is very unclear.

• The sentence towards the end of the Results telling us that detailed results are reported elsewhere is totally confusing in clarifying the purpose of the paper – either this paper should be a published report of the results following the unpublished reports elsewhere or this paper should focus on the process learnings rather than the direct pilot findings.

recommendations for corrections are not included as these major ones need fixing forat

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

No competing interests