Reviewer's report

Title: Drug injecting and HIV risk among injecting drug users in Hai Phong, Vietnam: A qualitative analysis

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Reviewer: Munir Ahmed

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The rationale presented is "the lack of qualitative understanding of behavioral risks which would have the potential to generate crucial insights for HIV prevention in IDUs" Based on this the authors followed a qualitative approach to "study drug use and sharing practices to better understand the potential factors that contribute to the high level of HIV prevalence". The research question could have been more specified in terms of "why sharing is common" and "which set of factors including personal, behavioral or structural factors play a key role in sharing"

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
Methods need description, particularly how was sampling done? Apparently there is a convenience sampling method employed (snow balling) which dilutes the internal validity of the study. Moreover recruitment was done through a local service provider organization which introduces social desirability bias in the study. The authors do mention that Inclusion criteria highlighting features such as age, sex, risk characteristics/profile, were followed, which needs to be described clearly in the method section. The sample size is also too small to add power to the results of the study

3. Are the data sound?
The methodological issues mentioned above lead to a lower internal validity of the results.

4. Do the figures appear to be genuine, i.e. without evidence of manipulation?
YES

5. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
YES

6. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
There are inherent methodological issues in this study. Issues like convenience sampling approach, lack of clear case definitions, recruitment through service
delivery programs etc., all introduce various biases in the study (selection bias, information bias, social desirability bias) which reduce the internal validity of the results. Another important issue is the fact that most of the results are derived from the last injecting episode, while many of the IDU participants had their last injecting episode in their own home. All these issues lead to serious design issues which should be kept in mind when results of this study are considered.

Although the results and conclusions of the study are optimally described, however, how does the result expand and add to our understanding of IDU situation and sharing practices is unclear. Moreover the translation of these results into public health policies is unclear and specific suggestions for using the results of this study to improve service delivery in the local context are absolutely missing.

7. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
A few limitations are given, but some of the weaknesses highlighted by this review are not mentioned at all

8. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

9. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Please see response to question 1.

10. Is the writing acceptable?
With revision this could be acceptable