Reviewer’s report

Title: A systematic review of post-migration acquisition of HIV among migrant groups living in Europe and implications for effective interventions

Version: 2

Date: 28 October 2014

Reviewer: Kathleen Deering

Reviewer’s report:

The study submitted by the authors is based on a potentially interesting idea (trying to identify HIV acquisition or risk post-migration) among people born in a country outside the EU, but unfortunately did not appear to be implemented up to the standard required for systematic reviews and there appears to be some major holes in the search process. If the authors were willing to carefully address the suggestions below, the paper could be re-reviewed.

- Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

- Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures or the wrong use of a term which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. Why do Tables 3 and 4 go before Tables 1 and 2 in the text? This should be modified.

2. Tables also were not provided, though this would not change my assessment of the paper given the description of tables.

- Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. In the Abstract, please provide some objectives in the Background section. Have these objectives match well with later in the introduction.

2. Throughout, please be sensitive about language related to people living with HIV.

a. i.e., line 2 – change to “A large proportion of people living with HIV in many European countries were born in another country “i.e., migrants” to the European country)

b. i.e., line 3 – change to “A large proportion of the people who contracted HIV through heterosexual transmission were born in countries with generalized HIV epidemics.” This website should be helpful: http://girllikeme.org/2014/10/14/language-and-hiv-people-first/

3. Please also be sensitive about language related to migrants throughout, i.e., line 2 is potentially stigmatizing. It is more sensitive to the people to which your refer to really clarify what you mean and to avoid grouping the entire population together and ascribing characteristics to the population, which may only apply to
certain people in the population.

4. The Introduction needs some work – it is very short. At the very least it would be helpful to know why this lit review is being conducted – is there a missing gap in the literature?

5. In the objectives (lines 16-21), it is not clear what this paper is doing, methodologically – systematic review, etc. Please rephrase this summary of the paper as objectives so that this is clear to readers. In general, the objectives of this review are quite unclear, and I am having some trouble following the aims after re-reading several times.

6. Methods – why limit to just EU countries? Please make this clear.

7. Methods – line 14: I am not convinced that your search list captured everything you wanted it to. Why did you use “assortative sexual mixing” as a term? This is usually used in mathematical modelling studies to describe partnering patterns, but do not have much to do with migration or HIV risk. The terms need to be re-examined and expanded on, or at least justified, and all the terms used need to be provided to readers so that anyone could re-do the search on their own (authors suggest that they did not include all of the terms in the text of the manuscript). Later, in the results, you have headings for ‘sexual behaviour’, which talks about different sub-types of the virus, which is confusing. Why is this sexual behavior? Later, you very briefly talk about sexual mixing/partnership patterns. A key problem here is that you did not adequately include search terms for sexual behavior, or describe them. You also have a heading for “Condom use and partner numbers”, but it is not clear if you used these search terms. To make any clear conclusions about condom use and sexual behavior you would need to do a much broader search.

8. Did the authors use PRISMA guidelines for their systematic review? Suggest that authors redo the review with these guidelines in mind. I would suggest Marshall and Werb 2010 “Health outcomes associated with methamphetamine use among young people: a systematic review” as a guide, including detailed supplementary files, which are necessary to allow readers to give a good assessment of the methods and results.

9. The search needs to be updated, as it was done in May 2012. This is now over two years later and the authors are certainly missing key papers.

10. In general, because of the limited data and the difficulties with the search process, I would recommend authors consider re-submitting this paper (elsewhere or to BMCPH) as a very brief article, or presenting only parts of it, but going into more detail about one section (i.e., just focusing on HIV prevalence acquired post-migration, or just on HIV risk among migrants post-migration).

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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

I declare that I have no competing interests