Reviewer’s report

Title: Social representations of male circumcision as prophylaxis against HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe

Version: 2 Date: 11 March 2015

Reviewer: Daniel Murdock

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions:

None

Minor Essential Revisions:

(1) The authors’ use of focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews is appropriate to answer the research question they have identified. The authors also justify the age range of participants and the decision to include both male and female participants in the FGDs. However, the authors do not identify the range of participants in the FGDs or the number of FGD participants in total.

(2) Similarly, the authors do not identify whether male and female participants were included in the same FGDs. The authors should identify the gender makeup of the FGDs and the total number of male and female participants included in the study.

(3) On the whole, the data do appear to be sound, with two notable exceptions. First, individual quote sources are only identified as “Male FGD Participant” or “Female FGD Participant.” Thus, without the use of pseudonyms, participant age, or other identifiers, it is unclear how often the authors are drawing on data from any one source or how well the findings reflect a broad theme. And further to this point, most of the themes identified in the paper are only supported with a single quote. More data documenting these themes would strengthen the manuscript.

(4) The authors’ suggestion that more rigorous methods should be used to monitor knowledge of VMMC is well supported by the data. However, the conclusion that uptake of male circumcision is likely to be disrupted by myths linking the procedure to evil forces should be better supported with data in the results section. It should specifically be made clear whether the supporting quotes provided to make this conclusion came from a single participant or multiple participants.

(5) The sensitive nature of the authors’ conclusion that discussion of male circumcision in intimate relationships may be fraught with suspicions of infidelity underscores the need to identify whether male and female participants were included the same FGDs or separate FGDs were held for men and women.
Discretionary Revisions:

(6) There are two statements in the background section that appear to aggregate figures from different studies. These figures may be better presented as ranges from across studies.

The first statement begins on line 2: “This follows evidence from randomised controlled trials in South Africa, Uganda and Kenya which showed that circumcision has a 60 percent protective effect on men.”

The second statement begins on line 27: “Only three studies reported a 4.8 percent prevalence of adverse events after circumcision…”

(7) The authors do not address the limited generalizability of their findings beyond urban Zimbabwean populations.

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:

I declare that I have no competing interests.