Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 2 Date: 21 March 2015

Reviewer: Rebecca Fielding-Miller

Reviewer’s report:

This paper is interesting, but can use some overall streamlining and editing for conciseness and clarity.

Major compulsory revisions

• The introduction is a wonderfully comprehensive literature review, and the author is to be commended for thoroughness. However, for the purposes of a manuscript, please try to condense this overview into the few salient points the reader needs to understand the context of your study and gaps in the literature that your study would fill. For example, while the social history of representations of circumcision is fascinating, no more than a sentence or two highlighting its importance may be necessary, given that the population under study is relevant in large part because they do NOT have a history of ritual circumcision. Similarly, VMMC is now an accepted prevention intervention in the wider public health community. Given this, only a single sentence or two is necessary to explain its value and relative success as an intervention (i.e., reduces transmission for insertive partner by 60%, has been successful in Uganda or Kenya, but less so in Swaziland). The historical overview, while interesting, is not necessary.

• In the introduction the author suggests that female IDI participants were included based on their possible influences as mothers. However a growing literature also suggests the importance of women’s opinions on their husbands or sexual partners circumcision status.

• On page 10, lines 198 – 200, the author appears to suggest that hearsay ethnography, or participant observation, was also used as a data source. If this is the case, please explicitly discuss this as a method.

• The analysis and methods section requires more depth. Did you make use of a specific tradition, approach, or technique? What steps were taken to ensure the results were trustworthy, transferrable, credible, etc… (see Lincoln and Guba).

• Please provide more detail on the sampling and methodology of the FGDs. How were FGD participants recruited? Were FGDs mixed by gender or age?

• Results: Please select only 1-2 quotes to support each point, rather than including multiple quotes slightly out of context at the end. Quotes which you have already used in a narrative discussion do not need to be restated.
• Typically citations of other researchers work should be restricted to the introduction or discussion sections. Results and data should be able to stand on their own based on contextualization provided in the introduction.

• The section on beliefs associated with circumcision is interesting and novel. However the discussion of associations between circumcision, HIV, and health systems does not seem to align with discussions of religion, disability, and witchcraft.

• The discussion needs to make a stronger case for why these results are novel and useful. How do they confirm or deny previous findings? What specific implications do they have for interventions in cultures that do not have a history of circumcision?

• Did the authors have an overarching theory or conceptual framework? The use of theory is an important method for strengthening qualitative methods and suggesting the transferability of findings.

Minor essential revisions

• Were results shared with participants? If so, how?

• In the methods section, the overall sample size for the larger quantitative project (n=681) is not necessary, and is initially confusing.

• If possible, please provide age or age ranges for participant quotes in the results section.

• On page 13, line 267, the inclusion of Shona is ethnographically interesting, however unless it has a specific idiomatic meaning that can also be translated and highlighted, the English translation can be used alone. Similar comment for page 14.

• Page 14, line 293, “its” should be “it’s”

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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