Author’s response to reviews

Title: Competition is not necessarily a barrier to community mobilisation among sex workers: A mixed method intervention planning assessment from Zimbabwe

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The Editor

BMC Public Health

Dear Editor

**Submission: Competition is not necessarily a barrier to community mobilisation among sex workers: A mixed method intervention planning assessment from Zimbabwe**

We are pleased to submit a revised version of our paper, and are extremely grateful to all three reviewers for having provided feedback to strengthen our manuscript. We have attempted to address the majority of comments provided, as detailed below. We hope our revisions will satisfy the concerns raised, and look forward to moving forward toward publication.

**Major Revisions**

**Literature & Background**

All reviewers highlighted that our literature review was inadequate and lacked recent references, particularly from the Avahan programme in India, for which community mobilisation interventions have been well documented. As a result we have re-written our Background section, updating it with key literature, including the recommended references by Argento et al (2011), Reza-Paul et al (2012), Dixon et al (2012), Erausquin et al (2012 & 2014) and Galavatti and Wheeler et al (2012) among other studies.

**Quantitative Findings**

Reviewers were also in agreement about the lack of clarity regarding the inclusion of qualitative findings from the RDS survey. We have now made clearer that this paper is focused on our qualitative investigation of SWs social networks, and that the survey results are presented as background data on our three study sites, and to illustrate what data were available to us prior to conducting the the in-depth interviews. As Reviewer 3 suggested, we have moved all the quantitative data together in a new section that describes the study sites (as recommended by Reviewer 2). We have also explained that the RDS survey is undergoing additional analysis that will be included in future papers, and inserted references to justify the use of RDS for our study populations.
We also provided additional detail in *Methods* for both the survey and interview methods, including how sampling was conducted, the incentives provided, and length of time for in-depth interviews.

**Discussion**
Reviewers felt that our findings related to the relationship between competition and cooperation had not been adequately discussed vis-a-vis the existing body of knowledge regarding community mobilization strategies. We believe we have remedied this (within the confines of the word limit!) by demonstrating how our results support similar findings from India and discuss how our findings fit with concepts of social cohesion and social capital, which are often used as markers for successful community mobilisation. In particular, we draw on a systematic review conducted in Africa that highlights the dearth of information on community mobilisation within the region to reflect on how best to proceed within our intervention to maximise its chances of success.

**Study Limitations**
This section has now been added at the end of the Discussion, as requested.

**Specific & Minor Revisions**

- We have added a sentence to the abstract to clarify the paper’s aim.
- All edits/corrections suggested by Reviewer 1 have been incorporated.
- We have included references from programmes that are more recent.
- We have provided more detail on the use of RDS in the survey, but also downplayed the quantitative results as this paper aims to highlight the qualitative findings.
- We have removed the Confidence Intervals where prevalence rates are given in the text, but have retained them in the table, in keeping with similar studies.

Thank you very much for your comments.

Sincerely,

Sibongile Mtetwa (on behalf of all authors)

Corresponding Author