Reviewer's report

Title: Comparing databases: determinants of sexually transmitted infections and HIV diagnosis and lack of HIV testing among men who have sex with men

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Reviewer: Fengyi Jin

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The manuscript by den Daas et al. compares participants characteristics among MSM recruited using different strategies, mainly internet-based against clinic-based. While I have reservation on whether this is comparing the obvious as these two sampling methods can draw distinctively different participants due to the nature of the venues, the manuscript has its merits as a methodology paper aiming to estimate the direction of and quantify the differences arising from different sampling strategies. Ultimately, the research question should determine the recruitment method as both have their inherit strengths and weakness, and these should be clearly acknowledged in the discussion.

On this note, I believe there is room for increased clarity on how the three studies were conducted in terms of the method, which is currently a bit vague.

1) What the three studies were designed to answer? What were the selection and exclusion criteria? How were the participants approached? For the EMIS study, what constitutes a Dutch responder, reporting living in the Netherlands? For the SOAP study, how to ascertain a participant to be a MSM?

2) What were the time frames referring to STI and HIV diagnoses and HIV testing?

Other comments:

3) There is a need to stress that the researchers should acknowledge the strengths and limitation of the research method chosen and the limitation of the generalisability of the results arising.

4) The wording in the discussion (Page 13, paragraph 3) “Using drugs made it more likely that MSM were diagnosed with STI...” suggesting causality, which is not supported by the results. These are just associations.

Overall, for a methodology paper, I would suggest the authors shorten the manuscript substantially to make the point more concise.

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.