Reviewer's report

Title: BURDEN AND CORRELATES OF MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES AMONG SEX WORKERS IN AN URBAN SETTING

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Reviewer: Suzanne Wenzel

Reviewer's report:

This interesting study points out the limited evidence describing the mental health of women who engage in sex work, and seeks to evaluate the burden and correlates of mental health problems among a probability sample of such women in Vancouver, Canada. The authors point in particular to structural factors as uninvestigated correlates of mental health in this population and state that this evidence is needed to develop and implement effective intervention approaches.

The authors present a model they had previously used to understand HIV related risk but it is not clear why this model is applicable to understanding mental health status. The variables hypothesized to be independent variables predicting mental illness do not seem to be sufficiently substantiated.

In the Methods, the authors refer readers to what they had "previously described" in another study. While providing a reference to previous research for additional details is fine, it is wise to ensure that all necessary details for understanding the current study are provided in the paper at hand.

It is particularly problematic that mental health is measured as any self-reported mental health problem during the lifetime, for the obvious reasons of unclear temporal ordering (thus complicating speculation about cause and effect associations) and lack of specificity in intervention approaches for various mental health disorders which range from depression, PTSD, schizophrenia, ADHD, and personality disorder. Authors cannot "examine the effects of these determinants on mental health," as they had proposed, nor can they confidently suggest intervention approaches with any satisfactory level of specificity.

All this said, I applaud the authors for their focus on this important population of women but see flaws as described above. It may be helpful to try to frame the paper somewhat differently or to craft the analyses (data permitting) and paper to permit greater specificity in framing the analyses and in making recommendations.
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.
Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.
No

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
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No

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