Author's response to reviews

Title: Prevalence and predictors of Pap smear cervical epithelial cell abnormality among HIV-positive and negative women attending gynecological examination in cervical cancer screening unit at Debre Markos referral hospital, East Gojjam, Northwest Ethiopia

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Author's response to reviews:

Dear Editors

We are so pleased to have seen such careful observation of our manuscript to further enrich its quality. As per the reviewer comment the document is corrected.

Major compulsory revisions

Comment 1. The manuscript is not completely in concurrence with the authors’ responses to the second review regarding HIV prevalence in the population. Methods paragraph 'Study setting and design' states "However, during the study period there were a total of 1600 HIV- and 2000 HIV+ women attending gynecological examination in cervical cancer screening unit. The study subjects were selected by systematic random sampling. Therefore, every 8th HIV- and every 10th HIV+ women were systematically recruited during the study period." This statement implies that the population being screened included 55% (2000/3600) HIV women, but in the response to review, authors state that prevalence of HIV is not this high in the hospital population. If the manuscript is incorrect, the sampling fractions should be corrected. If it is accurate, the authors should add a sentence to the discussion or limitations regarding why HIV prevalence is so high in this population relative to the national prevalence among women.

Response: Authors share the reviewer’s concerns and sorry for the discrepancy. The higher prevalence of HIV infection in this study is normally contributed by the types of patients attending the cervical cancer screening unit. The screening service is provided for all HIV+ women. Since all HIV+ women with advanced stage of the disease are linked to screening of cervical cancer, most of the women attending this center are HIV+. Hence, in addition to the deliberate enrolment of equal proportion of HIV+ and HIV- women, in this center majority of attendants are HIV+. This is indicated in the main document too.
Comment 2. The authors justify the study as representative within strata of HIV positivity.

While that is reasonable, their analysis includes unweighted bivariate and multivariate analysis of the pooled sample, combining HIV+ and HIV-women. These results are featured prominently in the abstract and discussion, yet they should not be interpreted as representative of the hospital catchment population or any broader population given the sampling strategy and lack of analytic correction (weighting). A comment to this effect should be added to the limitations.

Response: the limitation is modified as per the suggestion.

Discretionary revisions

The abbreviation for STI is incorrect in the table legends - it should read sexually transmitted infection, as it does elsewhere in the document.

Response: The comment is totally acceptable and it is corrected accordingly.