Author’s response to reviews

Title: Adapting ethical guidelines for adolescent health research to street-connected children and youth in low- and middle-income countries: A case study from western Kenya

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

We are writing this letter to address the reviewer comments concerning the submitted manuscript: ‘Adapting ethical guidelines for adolescent health research with street-connected children and youth in low- and middle-income countries: A case study from western Kenya’. We would like to thank the Reviewers for their valuable comments. This letter addresses the comments numerically point by point to accompany the attached revised manuscript. The comments of the reviewers are italicized followed by the corresponding response from the authors.

Reviewer 3:

Minor Essential Revisions

1.) I would recommend adding a limitation section within the discussion. This section could include the following ideas: “Major limitations of this article are that we situate our approaches within the socioeconomic and cultural context of Kenya. However, we believe that our ethical considerations and approaches provide an important starting point for any researcher to use as a framework for ethical research with street-connected children and youth within low- and middle-income settings. While our exact approaches may not the applicable in other countries, our new Key Recommendations setting provides suggestions that can be adapted and applied in any setting.” In addition, the authors might mention further considerations such as potential issues (payments etc.) in the “bases/barracks” between leaders, older youths and younger children on the streets including their approach to prevent these issues from interfering with research.

We have now added a limitations section within the discussion with the following text:

“We recognize that this article has strengths and limitations. Strengths include that all of the strategies that were implemented ensured the principles of beneficence, justice, and respect for persons were upheld during the research process with this vulnerable population. Secondly, our adaptation of ethical guidelines and innovative strategies to safeguard street-connected children and youth participating in research were successful in all three studies, demonstrating their effectiveness across different types of research. However, a limitation of this article is external validity given that our approaches are situated within the socioeconomic and cultural context of Kenya. Yet, we believe that our ethical considerations and approaches provide an important starting point for any researcher to use as a framework for ethical research with street-connected children and youth in low- and middle-income settings. While our exact approaches may not the
applicable in other countries, our key recommendations provide suggestions that can be adapted and applied in any setting.”

2.) The authors mention on page 8, line 230, that mabaraza are a traditional form of community assembly in East Africa. However, I am not sure if that expression and the form of traditional assembly is common in all countries of Eastern Africa. Hence a more conservative description might be more accurate.

We have now edited this to read in Kenya.

3.) The authors described the community members with whom they conducted the mabaraza as “living in these locations”. Adding information about their status within the community might be helpful.

We have added the word ‘residents’ living in the community. These are general community meetings and anyone living in the community is invited to discuss issues in these forums. We cannot characterize all of the different people who are residents living in these communities who attended these traditional assemblies hosted by Chiefs and sub-Chiefs.

**Discretionary Revisions**

1.) Explaining the informal consent procedure in the response letter helped me better understanding the process. I would like to suggest to the authors to include their definition in the manuscript.

We have now added text in relation to our reply on informal consent into the consent section for clarification with the following text:

> “Through extensive outreach activities we sought general permission from street youth leaders to have SCCY who are members of their “bases/barracks” (specific gang that SCCY belong to) participate. In this situation we sought informal community consent to gain entry and conduct research within this tight-knit community. The youth leaders provided their overarching informal consent to the researchers entering into their bases, to interact with the children and youth who are part of their group, and that they are agreeable and working with us in a participatory manner to ensure that the children are understanding the process of engaging in research and that we work together.”

2.) page 6, line 172 and line 181: I suggest rephrasing the last sentence of the respective paragraph. I would suggest “Additional details on study methods are available in the respective publications.” instead of “can be found elsewhere”.

We have made your suggested revision.

3.) Page 7, line 195: I would suggest indicating to the reader how the key categories and the guiding principles are interrelated. Maybe, writing “The here-with associated guiding principles...” instead of “The guiding principles...” would highlight this interrelation.

We have edited this with the following text:
“The overarching principles of ethical research, justice, respect for persons, and beneficence, provided a core framework to identify the main challenges and vulnerabilities of street-connected children and youth's participation in research. We situated the associated ethical considerations and approaches our team identified, adapted and utilized within this framework, as demonstrated in in Table 1.”

We hope we have adequately addressed your comments regarding this manuscript. We welcome additional comments and criticism that will assist us in disseminating this important information.

Sincerely,

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