Author’s response to reviews

Title: "When they know that you are a sex worker, you will be the last person to be treated": Perceptions and experiences of female sex workers in accessing HIV services in Uganda

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Author’s response to reviews:

Editorial Office
International Health and Human Rights

Dear Editor,

We thank you for giving us an opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript “IHHR-D-17-00002 "When they know that you are a sex worker, you will be the last person to be treated": Perceptions and experiences of female sex workers in accessing HIV services in Uganda”. We found the comments very useful and thank the reviewers for their invaluable feedback, which we believe has strengthened our paper. We have provided responses to all the comments that we received. We have also further checked the Guidelines for Authors to ensure that the manuscript and references are formatted according to the requirements for BMC International Health and Human Rights. Additionally, we have reviewed and used the COREQ guidelines in the revision of the paper. The revised manuscript is attached with the changes highlighted using track changes as well as a clean copy.
Sincerely,

Rhoda Wanyenze
On behalf of the authors

Response to Reviewers’ Comments

Comments from Reviewer #1: Els Leye

Comment 1: Thank you for a clear, well written paper which is highly informative and relevant.

I do not have any substantial comments to make.

Some typo's:

line 228: inconvenient (not inconveniencing)

line 330: to deal with the risks of

line 322: replace "usually" by "frequently" (if this is what is meant)

line 386: quote should have indent

line 388: hard return for title

line 415: to me it was not clear what is meant with 'save them the hassle of sleepless nights'?

line 432: and even abuse you

Response: We have made revisions to all the sentences listed above. Please refer to the revised manuscript with track changes—the relevant lines have however shifted since we have reorganised the analysis, findings and discussion based on the socio-ecological model.

Comments from Reviewer #2: Ashley Hagaman

Comment 1: This manuscript summarizes 24 focus group discussions with Female Sex Workers outlining common barriers to HIV services. As it stands, the manuscript does not clearly contribute novel findings to the existing literature (the authors state this in their discussion section). In order for this study to be considered by this reviewer for publication, it must demonstrate how it either (a) pushes theory forward regarding stigma, barriers, or service delivery perspectives or (b) offers substantial novel findings regarding FSWs and HIV services. In its current edition, neither of these are yet achieved. Another major limitation is the simplistic analytic approach the authors take - it is clear that there is a rich amount of data, but, as the
results are currently framed and shared, the findings are quite thin and fragmented and no unifying model or conceptual framework pulls them together. As the study captured a lot of variation in its population regarding geographic region and, I suspect, experience and time engaged with the sex-work industry, there may be important distinct differences that can be identified through analysis. There is perhaps a lot of potential, but a more substantial analysis and framing of the results is required. Finally, particularly in the direct quotes from informants, sentence structure and grammar greatly limit the comprehensibility of the statements. The English translations will need to be redone for these exemplar quotes in order for the reader to have adequately understood the examples being used and the value they add to the authors' arguments.

This reviewer suggests a substantial revision to the manuscript. This should include a detailed revision of the analytic strategy, interpretation, and subsequent presentation of the results.

Response: We have revised the data analysis section of the manuscript based on the additional analysis, driven by the socio-ecological and modified socio-ecological models. The revised analysis highlights the interactions between individuals and the environment at the intrapersonal, interpersonal; society, structural and policy levels. The results have been reorganised around these constructs in the abstract and main manuscript. We have further revised the methods section to reflect the revised theory-based analysis (line 136, 136, 160-166).

Comment 2: In addition to these substantial components, minor revisions are outlined below:

- The introduction lacks an inclusion of other in depth, qualitative investigations of HIV service barriers and FSWs. Among many others, the authors can consider including articles from authors such as Shannon et al, 2009 and 2015 and Kumarasamy et al, 2005.

- The qualitative methods and analytic approach are not substantial enough for the reviewer to determine the rigor in both the methodological implementation and analytic strategy. I suggest following the COREQ guidelines so that the aforementioned can be adequately assessed (see citation below).

- As suggested earlier, the discussion must go beyond highlighting previous literature that agrees with the current results. It is clear that there is enough data to inform specific policy recommendation at multiple levels (police, policy, health service, etc). I suggest the authors create a list for each of these to outline specific recommendations for each institution that go beyond the policy reports that are currently highlighted.

Qualitative reporting guidelines

Response: We have revised the introduction to include relevant qualitative studies including studies by Shannon and others as well as the modified socio-ecological model suggested by Baral and others. We have read and used the COREQ guidelines to improve the presentation of the entire manuscript. We have reorganised the discussion to emphasize the contribution of this manuscript to the advancement of science and interventions for HIV care and prevention among female sex workers. We now present the summary of findings and recommendations within the abstract, results, and the discussion sections based on the multi-level barriers identified in this study. We have also done a careful proof reading of the entire manuscript to improve the language particularly in the verbatim quotes. Finally, we have further reviewed the editorial requirements to ensure that the formatting adheres to the journal editorial policy.