Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 0 Date: 23 Mar 2017

Reviewer: Ashley Hagaman

Reviewer’s report:

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. 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


2007. Volume 19, Number 6: pp. 349 - 357

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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