Reviewer’s report

Title: Transgender Women in Malaysia, in the context of HIV and Islam: A qualitative study of stakeholders’ perceptions

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Reviewer: Annette Verster

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting paper that provides a qualitative description of issues transgender people face in Malaysia which are relevant for HIV prevention and treatment.

I do have some general comments:

- the language is not always clear, including when speaking of identity or behavioural factors (for example 'transgender female sex work' would be better described as transgender women engaging in sex work)

- the study method is not very clearly described; was this analysis part of a broader study about HIV or specific to transgender women; were the interviews conducted following a semi structured guide; how many transgender women were interviewed and were transgender men included, why were people who inject drugs excluded, etc

- general issues around studying this population could be enhanced, ie the fact that surveillance systems generally only include male vs female boxes and not a third gender which leads to the general lack of information across health and other issues; the fact that in order to reach transgender people for HIV prevention and care you need to address the structural barriers and provide primary care that have a higher priority for them.

- the paper would gain by including a more international perspective; there is only reference to Iran as an other Islamic country and this could also be analysed in a more structured way. Currently the differences are not clearly described whether these are potentially linked to the differences between Shia and Sunni, or between the national law versus Syariah

- it would be good also to make reference to relevant international and regional documents such as the Asia Pacific Trans Blueprint 'Blueprint for the provision of comprehensive care for trans people and trans communities in Asia and the Pacific', nor to the Policy Brief on HIV and Transgender people (WHO, 2015) or the Consolidated Guidelines on HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care for key populations (WHO,2016)
- in general the analysis around culture versus religion is discussed but could be more clearly presented; i.e. does the Qur'an really criminalise transgenderism or is it actually more culturally defined especially given the historical more acceptable phase in the country. Finally, it would be good to describe options to open up the barriers such as 'necessity overrides prohibition', seeking medical care which is always lawful, etc

**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.

Unable to assess

**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:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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