Reviewer's report

Title: Institutional context and VCT practitioner narratives: possibilities and limitations for HIV prevention in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Version: 0 Date: 19 Aug 2017

Reviewer: Daniel Fiaveh

Reviewer's report:
The paper holds promise but it is not well conceptualised. There is the need to indicate clearly how the study contributes to knowledge, strengthen aspects of the methodology (how coding reliability was ensured), provide limitation[s] to the study, and proofread the paper thoroughly for language/grammar. Also, there was no theory/framework provided to hold the arguments together. Some specific comments to improve the paper.

Title
The title is misleading and this should be revised. The title creates the impression as if the interviews were conducted with only VCT counsellors although this was not the case. What about the coordinators? You may want to consider revising it as: Narratives of STD/AIDS Voluntary Counseling and Testing Services among VCT Practitioners in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Background
There is need to proofread the paper for language clarity/grammar. For example, delete "to" in page 4 line 39. Reconstruct sentence on page 4 lines 48-50: delete "the teams". Lines 65-66 is not clear and incomplete: "Expanding access to anti-retroviral therapy pushed forward in the beginning of 2000." See also sentences on page 6 lines 70-73; 82-85, etc. There are several of such language sloppiness and it is expected that these would be properly addressed in a revised paper.
On Page 6 lines 78-79, the authors claim that there are some challenges regarding increasing VCT access among vulnerable groups but examples of such challenges are not mentioned in the paper. It will also be useful to state some of the vulnerable groups alluded to.

Page 6 line 80, delete "international". Same line, it is not clear whether the authors mean "testing services" instead of the "testing service" indicated.

Page 7 line 107: "However, there is little research regarding the consequences of these changes" What are these changes?

The introduction is not properly arranged to allow for meaning making. For example, page 7 lines 98-122 presents literature on Brazil. The subsequent paragraphs focused on South Africa (see page 8 lines 123-128), and then lines 134-138 presents the rationale for the study. This approach does not allow for coherence. I think a subsection be devoted on Brazil and page 8 lines 123-128 be part of the global discourse presented on page 5 lines 57-97.

The literature is not adequate. While the focus of the study is about the perceptions of practitioners, it should be interesting to have some perspectives from the community/clients. In that regard, please see whether the following would be useful:


Methods
The methodology is not clear. For instance what was the study design employed? This is not clearly stated.

Due to language problems it is difficult to appreciate how participates were sampled.
There are too many convoluted sentences: for instance, it is not clear what the authors mean on page 9 lines 142-144: "Our study aims to comprehend the intersubjective and objective dimensions of VCT counselors' practices through an analysis of their narratives in the state of Rio de Janeiro." What do these mean, i.e. intersubjective and objective dimension of VCT? Again, what does it mean to say: "our study aims to comprehend"? Comprehend what?

What does it mean to say: "VCT clients sought to be tested by spontaneous demand and referred from other health services" (See page 9 lines 151-152)?

Parts of the results and discussion (e.g., the demography) are interspersed with the methodology (see page 10 lines 156-158). As a matter of style this should be fine. However, the manner in which it is done makes it difficult to decipher what the authors did (prior to the fieldwork) and what they actually found (during and after fieldwork).

Sampling: it is not clear how the seven VCT coordinators were sampled (See page 10 lines 159-161). There is need to explain why and how you sampled seven VCT coordinators.

This reviewer wondered how useful the data presented on the interviewees' "undergraduate degrees" inform inclusion and exclusion criteria about VCT narratives (see page 10 line 165). You may want to revise this data to reflect what you presented (i.e. the participants' fields of study/discipline) on page 11 lines 179-183.

It is not clear whether the data analysis was a two coder or three coder although the paper did indicate how inter-rater reliability was ensured. It is important to indicate whether the coding was done by two or three to help the reader appreciate how decision trails were ensured in relation to discrepancies of variables as alluded to on page 12 lines 193-196.

Results
The results section is not properly organised. Based on the current structure, it looks more like a dissertation. The findings are interspersed with literature. Again, while this is a matter of style, it is difficult to appreciate what actually the findings are. The section also looks too descriptive and
in some cases (on page 12-17: Sociocultural context of the VCT services) no data is presented to support the claims made.

The style of stating the objective of the subsections (on page 17 lines 299-302) is good and this should be replicated for other subsections.

Because there was no table presented to summarise the demographics of the interviewees, it is difficult to identify who is saying what. There is need to present a summary of the demographics to help the readers to relate with the data/quotes and the pseudonyms, i.e. "nurse", "physical therapist", "work assistant", etc..

Discussion and Conclusion
The discussion is also not logically presented. It should state a) what gap was the study designed to fill? b) what do we know now? (short summary of results) c) how are these results similar to and different from what we knew from the literature d) given what we know now, what should researchers do next? What should they study next? Why? e) limitations of the paper f) end on a positive note.

There is no need for the paragraph on page 32 lines 606-614.

**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.
No

**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.

I recommend additional statistical review

Quality of written English

Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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