Reviewer’s report

Title: Experiences of gender-based violence among female sex workers, men who have sex with men, and transgender women in Latin America and the Caribbean: a qualitative study to inform HIV programming

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Reviewer: Ana María del Río-González

Reviewer's report:

General comment: This study focuses on describing the nature and consequences of experiences of gender-based violence (GBV) among female sex workers, men who have sex with men and transgender women in El Salvador, Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados and Haiti. The mixed-methods data used are very rich and complex, assessing 12 different types of GBV experiences, among three populations on four different countries. The authors do a good job at describing the experiences of GBV both quantitatively and qualitatively, trying to incorporate the complexities of the data into the analysis at least to some extent. The ultimate aim of the authors, beyond describing GBV experiences in these key populations (KP), was "to inform HIV service delivery policies and programming in Latin America and the Caribbean, by making it more responsive to the needs of KP victims of GBV" (p. 5). Unfortunately, I feel the data itself, while very appropriate for descriptive purposes, is not sufficient to really talk about the GBV-HIV link, which then gets lost in the paper. As a result, I do not think the manuscript fits well with the aims and scope of "BMC Infectious Diseases". I would suggest the authors to submit the manuscript to other journals that focus on the main topic of this paper, for example: "Journal of Gender Based Violence" or "Culture, Health and Sexuality".

In case the authors are interested in submitting the manuscript to a different journal, I am outlining some suggestions for improvement.

General:

1. My main concern is that the data is probably way too complex to really fit into a single paper. Try to find ways of partitioning the data into smaller manuscripts that can better honor the richness of the mixed-methods data collected.

2. Use of acronyms: Avoid using acronyms in the title. Use acronyms consistently throughout the paper. You might want to use TGW (transgender women) so that all your key populations are presented as acronyms. Spell out key populations, rather than using KP.
3. There are several places over the manuscript with omitted or repeated words, or unclear wording.

Methods:

4. Give a more detailed description of the measures (both qualitative and quantitative) used and, if possible, include the interview guide as supplemental material. Although some of the contexts for which you assessed GBV experiences are self-explanatory (e.g., before the age of 18), some are more complex and should be explained better. Personally, it wasn't clear for me what "economic settings" were. It might help to include some sample questions using verbatim wording.

5. Who were the coders? Include some information on reflexivity (see: Finlay, 2002).

6. As new inductive codes were developed, were previously coded transcripts revisited to assess the new codes?

7. To keep order consistent between methods and results, present information on quantitative data analysis (p. 9) before describing qualitative analysis. Also, considering the large number of participants, why are authors not assessing the statistical significance of the differences across contexts, key populations or countries?

Results

8. Present the cross-tab distribution of each key population by country in Table 1. Also, why are results for Trinidad & Tobago and Barbados merged for Tables 2 and 4?

9. Because the vast amount of information presented in the results, the use of subtitles facilitates reading the material. Considering adding some subtitles for the quantitative part of the results.

10. It is unclear how frequent each topic was and how many different participant discussed a particular topic. Sometimes the authors use vague quantifiers (e.g., Some, many), which readers might interpret differently. In other cases, not even these descriptors are available. It would be helpful to include a themes table with the following information: (a) each named theme (and, if applicable, subtheme), (b) its description used to code it, (c) a prototypical example (or several, if particular trends differed by key population or country), and (d) the frequency of its occurrence across participants/materials. This table becomes a handy
reference for readers, demonstrates the methodological rigor of your coding scheme, and organizes your Results section (which should parallel the flow of this table).

11. The inclusion of exemplary quotes in the text, as you have done, is a good idea. Adding some context about the quote will also be helpful. For example, regarding the first quote in page 14, what type of GBV is the participant describing and in which context did it occur?

Discussion

12. Link back findings to those of previous research in the area that were described in the introduction.

13. The implications (for research, theory and practice) should be better explained.

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

Yes

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:

Acceptable


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3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

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