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

Version: 0 Date: 13 Mar 2018

Reviewer: Parinita Bhattacharjee

Reviewer's report:

This is an important manuscript as it provides evidence on GBV experienced by a very vulnerable population. This builds to the body of knowledge on violence and key populations and is an important piece of work for advocating inclusion of violence prevention and response in key population programmes.

However the manuscript needs to be organised better to make it easy to read and understand. The discussion section needs to be strengthened to provide a bit more analysis and the recommendations should be aligned to the findings. So the results section and the discussion section should be rewritten.

Specific comments:

1. The authors have not done a good job of explaining why their manuscript is important. What is new in their manuscript? There have been many published articles on violence and KPs, so what new information does this manuscript add. This will be important to specify in the beginning. If there is nothing new and this study confirms what other studies have found (which is also important) then the discussion section should add the other studies which also show similar findings possibly from a different region.

2. The 12 contexts are quite confusing and can be reorganized much better. Some of them are context like street and public places, sex work, while some are type of violence like economic and others are perpetrators like police, intimate partners. Some like state institutions are not clear what are they or other workplace settings, again not clear what they are and need to be explained. I think instead of saying 12 context, if they can be organised into 1. Where (a different name cane be used if needed) violence is experienced 2. Who perpetrates 3. What type of violence: it would be easy to understand. Otherwise I got lost a bit later as its a long manuscript.
3. The tables are also bit confusing like Table 1, talks about participant demographics (all combined) but the narrative explains the break up between sub-population. It would be good to show a demographic table split by the sub population. Out of 119 FSW, how many were from which country, what was the age, what was the education level, what was employment rate. Similarly for the other two groups. It would be good to show in the demographics, what % of the three sub population do sex work as in Table 3 it looks like only 119 FSW (100%), 42 TGW and 29 MSM did sex work. Table 3 is not clear. What is total n and what is n under each column (number of respondents for the question?). The presentation is not clear. As the sample is not random, I think we should not focus too much on the prevalence in this manuscript. It is important to show that lots of respondents experienced violence but there trying to explain it using quantitative methods can lead to questions related to method as the method was largely qualitative. The first part of the results need a sub title and can be shortened to describe the prevalence of violence without too many tables and %. It can explain about where violence takes place, type of violence and perpetrators of violence as three clear sub headings. This can be followed by Consequences, disclosure, service seeking, service wanted and perceptions of HIV risk.

4. Limitation should include the fact that the study asked only about 'ever' experienced violence. They should have also asked about recent episodes like violence in last 6 months or one year to get a sense of recent violence as FSW respondents may have experienced violence even before they became FSWs.

5. The discussion section needs to be re written. Currently it is repetition of the results. There is no analysis. Are any of the findings new which is not there in the literature. If it is not new does it confirm some of the other findings (reference those findings). Is there any difference between the three sub population? Is there any difference if a respondent is sex worker or not? The recommendations do not necessarily refer to the findings. While implementation of policy guidelines is important, programmes do not know how to integrate GBV services with HIV. Some guidance designed to address the specific findings would be useful rather than generic guidance. Like violence in the street is highest.... so what would be the recommendation to address that? Economic violence is very high... how can that be addressed and so on. Currently they are very generic but not specific to the findings from this region.

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.

Yes

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

No

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

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

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

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests
I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal.