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: 1 Date: 21 May 2018

Reviewer: Joseph De Santis

Reviewer's report:

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This manuscript reports the qualitative findings on violence among FSW, MSM, and transgender women. Although this is a very interesting article, there are a number of areas that need to be addressed before the manuscript is ready for publication. I have detailed these suggestions by section of the manuscript:

1) General comments: I am very concerned about both the inclusion of three vastly different groups in one research study. I am also concerned about the various sites that were used to collect data. Qualitative research is all about context. Given that the various populations in different countries have very different contexts, I do not believe that the authors have provided a strong enough rationale for inclusion of FSW, MSM, and trans women all in one study, with participants from various countries in the same study. Remember: qualitative research does not have to be generalizable. It appears to me that the author are trying too hard to make the results of this study generalizable to the various populations in different countries. At this point, I believe that this may be a fatal flaw in the manuscript.

2) Method: a) Please provide some background on a qualitative, participatory approach for the reader who may not be familiar with this method. b) on p. 6, line 7, the authors mention "developing data collection instruments." What specific data collection instruments were included? This does not make sense in light of the qualitative nature of the study. c) on p. 6, line 20, the authors mention that "sample are not...statistically representative of the study populations..." Again, this statement does not make sense in a qualitative study. d) What specific questions were used on the interview guide? I think it would be helpful for readers if the authors could develop a table that details the interview questions. e) Although the authors mention saturation on p. 6, how can the reader (and this reviewer) be sure that saturation actually occurred? From what is written, I am not convinced. f) I did not see in
the manuscript any description of how rigor or data verification was addressed in this qualitative study. This is very important to address so that the readers (and reviewers) can be sure that rigor was maintained. If the authors can't address how rigor was maintained throughout the data verification process, then a fatal flaw has occurred.

3) Results:  a) This is a very large sample for a qualitative study. Please address. b) Table 1: were statistical differences found between the three groups? Please address. b) On p. 19, the authors report that "emotional trauma" occurred that was manifested in a number of subthemes. I am not sure that the subthemes really describe emotional trauma. It seems that it is more of an appropriate emotional response (sad, fearful, angry) that trauma, which tends to be an overused word without really understanding what constitutes true emotional trauma.

I believe that this is an important study, and it is evident that a lot of work has been done to revise the manuscript.

However, there are a number of areas, in my opinion, that must be addressed before the manuscript is ready for publication.

I hope that these comments will be useful in helping the authors revise this manuscript.

**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.

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
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Acceptable

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