Author’s response to reviews

Title: Sex work stigma and non-disclosure to health care providers: data from a large RDS study among FSW in Brazil

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Sex work stigma and its effects on health care: data from a large RDS study among FSW in Brazil.

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To the Editors of BMC International Health and Human Rights

Dear Academic Editor – IHHR

We genuinely thank the journal for the second review of our manuscript. Further, below are the specific comments from the reviewers with responses to each of their queries. Thanks for the opportunity to revise our manuscript.
EDITORS’ COMMENTS:

1. I'm afraid the quality of the English used throughout your manuscript does not currently meet our requirements. We recommend that you ask a native English speaking colleague to help you copyedit the paper. If this is not possible, you may need to use a professional language editing service. Use of an editing service is neither a requirement nor a guarantee of acceptance for publication.

Author’s Response: We have revised the entire manuscript and have incorporated most corrections and suggestions made by reviewer 3. We also had a native English speaker revise the manuscript.

2. Please amend your currently statement in the ‘Consent for publication’ to ‘Not Applicable’.

Author’s Response: We have adjusted the statement accordingly

REVIEWER 2 COMMENTS (K Biello):

Comments: Thank you for your response to the initial reviewer comments. You were very responsive and the manuscript is substantially approved with much more clarity and focus. My only remaining comment (and it is minor) is that you use the term "univariate" when I believe you mean "bivariate" and you use the term "multivariate" when I believe you mean "multivariable."

Author’s Response: According to the BMC International Health and Human Rights publication guidelines we should use univariable and multivariable. We have adjusted the statement accordingly.

REVIEWER 3 COMMENTS (Joanne Csete):

Comments:

1. The manuscript, both abstract and text, remains full of language suggesting that the study can determine impact, effect or causality. These statements need to be corrected.

Author’s Response:
We thank the Reviewer 3 for the careful reading of our manuscript. We agree with most comments and insights and have revised our text accordingly. Specifically, we indicated more clearly that assessing potential associations was the focus of the analysis.

Comments:

2 There seem to be logical inconsistencies in the interpretation of results, as well as continued tendency to state the results in causal ways. The paragraph in lines 306-310 is very hard to follow and may be fundamentally incorrect. It says that those who perceived they would be discriminated against in health services were "less likely to not reveal" their status as sex workers. The logical conclusion would be that anyone who anticipates stigma would be less likely to reveal their status, not less likely to NOT reveal their status. This statement of the results is exactly the opposite of the statement on lines 319-320. There is really a need for clearer and more straightforward statements of the results.

Author’s Response:

We agree. We changed all interpretations to associations. We should also clarify the association with anticipated stigma. The reason was that we assessed non-disclosure (coded as one) compared to disclosure (coded as zero). Thus, the negative association and the consequent “double negative”. In fact, the results indicate exactly this (those who perceived/anticipated discrimination were less likely to NOT reveal). Yes, this is not easy, and it is the same as saying that those who perceived/anticipated were more likely to reveal their FSW status, contrary to what the reviewer indicated. As explained the study design does not allow for causality or direction inferences. It could also be that once FSW reveal their status, discrimination is perceived. We cannot be certain and therefore editions were made in order to clarify. More studies and data are needed.

Comments:

3. The discussion section is filled with statements that do not seem in any way to flow from the results here. See comments in attached file.

Author’s Response

We have reviewed and adjusted all comments. See PDF with selected answers to queries.

Comments:

4. Elements that are characterized as human rights violations may require more explanation. "Presenting HIV results" is not inherently a violation -- is it compulsory testing on pain of losing one's livelihood that is the violation? Paying any amount of money to a third party, while it may be technically against the law, may not be a human rights violation in reality if it means being able to work in a brothel rather than more unsafely on the street. But at least explain to the
reader why these are considered human rights violations, which is not the same as saying that they are against Brazilian law.

Author’s Response

The proposed Act by Leite (PL 4211) and resubmitted by Congressman Willy is still pending. This new Act intends to increase the “allowed” percentage to be retained by property owners to 50%. Currently, any percentage is illegal. Although, we tend to agree that, in theory, by rendering a percentage of their gains to property owners may add protection, this seems to be controversial even among FSW. We understand that owners target a lucrative business by charging FSW, and do not, in the same direction, award this theoretical protection. In addition, many "places" which are used as "brothels" but are actually registered as hotels in the municipalities for tax purposes, charge "per diem" and require FSW to provide their own linens and personal hygiene supplies. Isn’t this exploitation? Since we do not have enough data to assure that retaining a percentage in fact guarantees added protection and that so far any percentage is illegal, we understand this to be a human violation in this analysis.

Comments:

5. Girls under 18 may engage in sexual transactions, but they should not be referred to as sex workers

Author’s Response

Corrected

Comments:

6. The references need to be revised without bold-faced titles

Author’s Response

Corrected