Author’s response to reviews

Title: ‘Mankind owes to the child the best that it has to give’: Prison conditions and the health situation and rights of children incarcerated with their mothers in sub-Saharan African prisons.

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Dear Editor,

We sincerely thank you for the extensive reviews and proof review undertaken by yourself. Please find below a detailed response to reviewer comments. The paper has been overhauled and improved throughout with regard to updating of material, revision with additional detail in the results, a reframed discussion and included new tables.

Editor Comments:
Although the reviewers all characterized the revisions they suggest as "minor", I think their suggestions and the extensive rewriting needed of the text add up to a major revision, but we hope that you will revise and resubmit the manuscript. Please note the following comments:

--As noted by Reviewer 1, it would be helpful to put the deficiencies catalogued in your review into context in the sense that most of these same problems exist in men's prisons in the relevant countries. Although women and children have certain vulnerabilities that make for some specific health concerns, problems with health service delivery and living conditions are not unique to their situations. AUTHOR RESPONSE: Thank you agreed and this is referred to in the introduction, and the discussion.

--Again for context and perspective, it might be useful to note if there is a sub-Saharan country where children in women's prisons are well cared for. AUTHOR RESPONSE: Thank you, yes we have highlighted positive examples such as South Africa where relevant.

--Again as noted by Reviewer 1, there are many quite dated sources in the reference list, but the statements summarizing the results tend to be sweeping present-tense assertions. It would be helpful to introduce some nuance where all or most of the sources behind a statement are very old. AUTHOR RESPONSE: Thank you, yes the range was 18 years, where possible we have indicated where there is no apparent change in documented conditions, or where there has been investment and improvement in standards of care for children incarcerated with their mothers in SSA.

--There is a passing reference at the end of the discussion section to recommendations, but there do not seem to be recommendations in the article. It might be helped by recommendations. AUTHOR RESPONSE: The conclusion is now revised accordingly.

--The authors cite as a great advantage of the scoping review method that many sources of information were searched, but we are not told how many of each type of source ended up in the body of articles that inform the summaries in the text. AUTHOR RESPONSE: We now include a Table Two which shows the type of information, and this is supported by additional detail in the Supplemental Table.

--As noted by Reviewer 3, there are key documents that should inform this article but are not referred to. AUTHOR RESPONSE: Thank you., we have included several of these, one suggested document was not deemed relevant to the scoping review question, and one we already had included.

--Please find attached a file that makes suggestions about the many writing problems in the manuscript. Parts of it look as though they were not proofread. There are many unconventional uses of punctuation, many sentences where the structure is awkward and makes the sentence difficult to understand, lists and quotations that are introduced by a semicolon rather than a colon, lists that use commas and semicolons alternately without any apparent logic, many compound adjectives missing hyphens, and many other concerns noted in the file. If you have trouble reading the attached comment notes, please let us know. AUTHOR RESPONSE: Thank
you for taking the time to do this, we mapped all of these revisions into the Word document and applied them.

Reviewer reports:

Lukas Muntingh, PhD (Reviewer 1): Comments on: Mankind owes to the child the best that it has to give': Prison conditions and the health situation and rights of children incarcerated with their mothers in Sub Saharan African prisons.

The article is an ambitious project and will make a valuable contribution, but there are a number of concerns that need to be raised.

1. Context is all important. Regardless of age and gender, the overwhelming majority of prisoners in Africa are detained under conditions that do not meet or only partially meet accepted standards such as the 2015 UNSMR. Overcrowding is pervasive for the simple reason that nearly all African states have failed to invest in prison infrastructure (South Africa being the obvious exception). It is therefore not only imprisoned mothers with their children that are suffering poor conditions, but the entire prison population. It is also the case that women are targeted for law enforcement in some instances and thus ending up in prison often on petty offences (e.g. female street traders are frequent targets of the police in many African countries). In many African states, pre-trial detainees can remain awaiting trial for lengthy periods and this will exacerbate the impact of poor conditions of detention. This particular point is not sufficiently explored. AUTHOR RESPONSE: Thank you, we refer to this in the introduction.

2. On a methodological level further concerns must be raised. As noted, this is an ambitious project covering a time span of 18 years and potentially 54 countries where it is widely accepted that reliable data on criminal justice systems is lacking in a material sense. In this environment it becomes increasingly difficult to make statements on particular trends or given the time scale, to state that something is so-and-so or it is not. This is especially the case if data from several years ago are used, or a particular sample was small, or very focused. In short, generalisations are made at significant risk and it would be safer to be more specific when describing something, for example: "In 2005 it was found at Langata Female Prison in Nairobi, Kenya, that infants received nutritional supplements through donations from the Catholic church." In a number of instances, the authors list several countries and problems in one sentence creating the impression that all these problems are prevalent in all these countries all the time and it remains the situation. AUTHOR RESPONSE: Thank you, we reviewed the data sources again, and where possible we give additional detail with regard to study type, location, and/or if an improvement has been documented over time.

3. The authors clearly set out their methodology and there is no problem there. However, in checking some of the statements it became clear that a study of this nature relying on data bases accessible to the academic and research community have their limitations, as in-
country data sources (e.g. parliamentary minutes) and reliable media reports (e.g. investigative journalism and news reports on YouTube) can render further information, and even contradict earlier research findings. In-country knowledge is therefore important to verify if a particular statement still holds, especially if there has been a significant time lapse. AUTHOR RESPONSE: Thank you, yes we agree, and we have included all African Union, UN evaluations, Special Rapporteur, country situation assessments, news reporting and academic thesis, in support of empirical literature.

Helen Ayles (Reviewer 2): This is an important contribution to the literature, as the authors state, little is written or known about this situation.

The methodology of a scoping review is entirely appropriate for this reason. The paper is generally well written and compelling but there are a few revisions which I feel would be warranted to improve the quality of the paper:

1. Figure 1 flow chart is really not clear. It is usual to have more clarity about which papers are excluded and which are included and added. The flow could be improved by arrows only showing those papers that continue in the process and how others were added. For example To show the 181 excluded in the main flow is unhelpful as only 16 continued through the process.

AUTHOR RESPONSE: We have updated the Figure chart, and also include a new Table Two with additional detail on type of information source per country.

2. Tables. Table 2 needs a better legend to explain that countries in bold had studies included. Whilst this is eluded to in the text it is not clear when looking at the table. Furthermore it would be useful to include the number of studies/reports per county in brackets after each country.

AUTHOR RESPONSE: We include a new Table Two with additional detail on type of information source per country.

3. The supplemental table is very useful and so, whilst I understand this entire table may not fit into the main paper, it would be very helpful to have it as part of the main paper. If the editors consider it too long a summary of this table should be included which lists the 41 references included, the type of document ( peer reviewed paper, report, news report etc) and the country and year. I think this information is vital in the main paper.

AUTHOR RESPONSE: We have a new Table Two with additional detail on type of information source per country, and we have decided to keep the Supplemental Table for interested readers.

4. The conclusions and recommendations could be strengthened a little. I feel that the recommendation could be that documentation of children in prisons should be mandated for all
countries so that their presence is recorded and therefore the conditions of their incarceration could be reviewed. It may be that the authors feel that they cannot state this but should maybe recommend that some UN agency or African body could mandate this? I do not feel that the last sentence of the conclusions is warranted as the paper is not about the conditions of children who are being cared for outside of prisons whilst their mothers are incarcerated.

AUTHOR RESPONSE: We agree and have reframed the conclusion.

5. Minor typographical issues. there are a few minor issues where a methodology is referred to by the reference e.g p8 line 184 and line 191 but because of the numbered references this is not readable. Please insert the name of the author or the name of the methodology before the reference. Similarly please proof read p 4 line 78 - I am not sure why "in particular" is relevant here. p4 line 90 "in SSA" is unnecessary, p 16 line 371 missing "such", p18 line 423 "anti-retroviral", p 20 line 471 insert "unwell".

AUTHOR RESPONSE: Thank you, we have proofed the paper and amended where required.

Juliane Kippenberg (Reviewer 3): Dear Prof. Van Hout, dear Ms Mhlanga-Gunda, this is an interesting article and I am grateful for the opportunity to review it.

Unfortunately the tables and the figure with the flowchart are not included in the draft I received, making it hard for me to judge the methodology. I am assuming that they are sound and continuing the review based on that assumption.

The structure is clear and convincing, and the findings are clearly described.

However, I am missing reference to more NGO reports, such as the one by PRI on the imprisonment of children with their mothers (https://hes32-ctp.trendmicro.com:443/wis/clicktime/v1/query?url=https%3a%2f%2fcdn.penalreform.org%2fwpp%2dcontent%2fuploads%2f2015%2f11%2fPRI%5fFHRI%2dReport%5f%2dImplementation%2dof%2dGC%2dNo1%2dWEB.pdf%29.&umid=f046720c-1229-4314-880d-0651b60129ce&auth=768f192bba830b801fed4f40fb360f4d1374fa7c-f42eb0ff47e2f6618210f9e015afc8c89f45b310 It would have been desirable to include this and potentially other NGO reports even if they are not listed in the databases you searched.

I am also missing reference to a central legal document, the General Comment by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child on Children of incarcerated and imprisoned parents and primary caregivers (Article 30 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child).

AUTHOR RESPONSE: Thank you, included.
The quality of written in English is poor in some sentences; the articles relies too heavily on nominal style. The text needs and edit. For example, the underpinning research question should be reworked to something like this: "What is known in the literature about THE health situation and unique rights VIOLATIONS of children incarcerated ..."

The article sometimes refers to authors as numbers in brackets and this is hard to read.

There is mention of a Rapporteur but his full title and function is not given and explained.

The sentence "In Namibia and Kenya, a nutritionist designed dietary requirements for children and their mothers" is unclear and needs explanation.

The subsection on health consequences relating to nutrition contains testimony that belongs in the previous section.

A quote is given without introduction on page 16 (bottom).

Some of the findings lack an overall these sentence and come over as "bitty".

AUTHOR RESPONSE: Thank you, we have proofed the paper and amended where required.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Marie Claire Van Hout , corresponding author