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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‘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.

Marie Claire Van Hout; Rosemary Mhlanga-Gunda, PhD

BMC International Health and Human Rights

January 10th 2019

Dear Dr Csete,
Thank you for the opportunity to resubmit. Here follows a detailed response to your review comments. I am also uploading the document with all revisions clearly marked in yellow throughout.

Technical Comments:

Rename 'Introduction' heading to 'Background'.

Author Response: Amended

Please include Figure Legends section.

Author Response: Included after the references section

Editor Comments:

It is disappointing that so many basic writing errors that were previously flagged, which took a great deal of time, remain as problems in this manuscript. The arbitrary use of commas and other grammatical problems make some sentences hard to interpret. Some of the references are not correctly noted. There are some apparent interpretation problems or just confusing statements of interpretations of the review data. Please note the comments in the attached file, which will be the last to suggest copy-editing comments. If you do not agree with them, please be in touch with us about that.

Author Response: Once again, we thank you for your thorough review of the paper, and wish to apologise for the syntax and grammar inconsistencies in the new document submitted on January 2nd 2019. Given the extent of the previous revision, these inconsistencies were our error and certainly not that we ignored your previous syntax and grammar requested changes. We greatly appreciated your assistance to improve the paper. Following our work on the paper, my university has organised for a professional copy editing to proof the paper and check all references are correctly formatted.

Please note the following:

--The paper does not explain equivalence of services, and many readers are likely to assume it means equivalence between men and women or between children and adults. This point needs to be clarified, preferably with a reference to the fundamental human rights principle of equivalence to services in the community.

Author Response: this has been clarified in the background and discussion sections.
--There are a number of very sweeping statements, most of them having been flagged in the previous revision, that require some nuance because they cannot be supported as is with data from this review.

Author Response: As per your detailed comments these sweeping statements have been addressed throughout.

--There is still not a clear and straightforward statement that this review focuses on children under the age of 8.

Author Response: This is now presented in the background and methods section.

--There are sentences with apparently missing words or awkward locutions -- see attached file.

Author Response: See our detailed response hereafter.

--Abbreviation lists are meant to help people find the meaning of abbreviations, so they should start with the abbreviation, not with the full name of the item.

Author Response: Amended

--"Et al." is an abbreviation for "et alia" and thus should always have a period.

Author Response: Amended

--Ampersands should be avoided in the text unless they are part of an official name.

Author Response: Amended

--Clauses in apposition -- using words such as "however", "particularly", etc. -- normally are set off by commas on both sides of the clause, not just one.

Author Response: Amended

--UNAIDS is not a "political declaration". The Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS referred to here is a document of the UN General Assembly.

Author Response: Amended, an error in interpretation as UNAIDS also issued a framework document around the fastrack approach to 2030.
Please refer to the attached file for other comments.

Author Response below:

Page 1, line 2. Changed to sub-Saharan African

Page 2, line 19. Changed to sub-Saharan African

Page 2, line 27-29 Changed to numbered themes. 1) the prison physical environment; 2) food availability, adequacy and quality; 3) provision of basic necessities and 4) availability and accessibility of health services for incarcerated children.

Page 3 line 45 to 46. Changed to ‘all regions of the world where statistics are available’.

Page 3, line 46 to 48. Revised sentence to ‘Such data is generated on date counts which quantify the prison population on a certain date, and do not reflect the levels of turnover within the global prison population’.

Page 3, line 52. Changed to ‘gender-specific’

Page 3, line 54 Changed to ‘gender-based’

Page 3, line 57, Changed to ‘are evident’

Page 3, line 59 changed to ‘Humane treatment’

Page 4, line 66 changed to ‘stipulate’

Page 4, line 66 changed to ‘healthcare programming equivalent to that in the community’

Page 4, line 79-80 changed to ‘according to a recent evaluation by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)’

Page 4, line 84 deleted hyphen.

Page 4, line 84 Changed to Investment in prison infrastructure is generally low across the SSA region [18].

Page 4, line 89-90 Deleted ‘Poor disease control, and’

Page 5, line 92 Deleted ‘and’

Page 5, line 93-95 Changed sentence to ‘The children of particular concern to policy-makers and researchers are those born in prison and those under the age of eight years.’
Page 5, line 98-100. Changed sentence to ‘the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) [27] affirms the principle of the best interests of the child.’

Page 5, line 109 Changed to ‘remains largely restricted’

Page 5, line 112. Changed to ‘2018 review’

Page 5, line 113 to 115. Changed sentence to ‘To date, there has not been an extensive review of published material on the conditions of children incarcerated with their mothers in SSA. The present review seeks to fill that gap.

Page 6, line 123 to 124, Changed to ‘What is known in the literature about the health situation and rights violations specific to children incarcerated with their mothers in contemporary SSA prisons?’

Page 6, line 128to 129. Changed to ‘those below the age of eight years permitted by prison services in SSA to be housed with their mothers.’

Page 6, line 133 Deleted ‘No limitations on language were applied’. And changed to ‘Search terms were generated in English, and combined with SSA country names’.

Page 7, line 147. Changed to ‘infants’ and childrens’.’

Page 7, Line 149. Deleted empirical published data, and replaced with ‘articles in scholarly peer reviewed journals’.

Page 7, line 150 to 152. Clarified and changed sentence to ‘Special Rapporteur on Prisons and Conditions of Detention in Africa, and Special Rapporteur on Prisons, Conditions of Detention and Policing in Africa (hereinafter Special Rapporteur)’

Page 7, line 155 to 157. Changed to ‘prison staff members’ experiences and perspectives on the conditions’

Page 7, line 157 Included hyphen. ‘cross-checked’

Page 8, line 166 line Deleted hyphen and changed to ‘full text’.

Page 8, line 174. Insert full stop after ‘et al’, and amended throughout.

Page 8, line 183. Changed to ‘by the two reviewers in consultation’

Page 9, line 196. Insert comma before etc.

Page 9, line 197. Deleted ‘The ages of incarcerated children referred to in these records ranged from birth to eight years old (identified in prisons in Ethiopia)’. 
Page 9, line 206. Lower case, tuberculosis.

Page 9, line 207. Revised sentence. ‘outdated physical infrastructure of prisons and severe overcrowding with associated severe health harms’

Page 9, line 209. Inserted comma after emphasised.

Page 9, line 201. Deleted ‘, and that it was not advisable to separate babies and young children from their mothers’ for clarity of the sentence. Meaning, because it is unsafe, mothers and their children are kept together with other inmates.

Page 10, line 224. Revised sentence, ‘overcrowding was less of an issue for’

Page 10, line 228 to 230. Clarified the sentence. ‘The provision of separate accommodation for women with their children where they are housed separately from the main prison population has generally not improved in SSA prisons’. Note for the Editor, we certainly do not infer that children should be separated from, and housed separately from their mothers.


Page 10, line 237. Inserted ‘AU’.

Page 11, line 242. Inserted ‘(DIGNITY)’

Page 11, line 249. We did not amend this quote. However, the point is clarified earlier in terms of the housing of women with their infants and children in cells with other inmates, and not separate to the main prison population. See author response, Page 10, line 228 to 230.

Page 11, line 263. Missing word inserted. ‘in prisons’.

Page 12, line 266. Deleted this quote.

Page 12, line 267. Revised sentence to ‘the accommodation of women with their children’

Page 12, line 281. Insert comma after overflowing.

Page 13, line 292. Inserted comma after South Africa.

Page 13, line 293. Changed to ‘were available.’

Page 13, line 304. Deleted ‘In more recent years, and’. Changed sentence to start Since 2008…

Page 14, line 321. Yes. Changed to ‘prisons within a given country’.
Page 14, line 325. Replaced all ‘&’ with ‘and’ throughout the document.

Page 14, line 329. Changed sentence to ‘women awaiting trial and those already sentenced.’

Page 14, line 332. Deleted ‘during their mission’, and changed sentence ‘The Special Rapporteur in 2004 reported on the provision of a mother and baby unit in Durban [72], with the first model Mother and Child Unit attached to the Pollsmoor prison opening in 2011 [73].’

Page 14, line 333 to 334. Amended sentence ‘The provision of a greater number of mother and baby units in South Africa has been observed and particularly in the Gauteng province’.

Page 15, line 342. Changed sentence to ‘Generally, this involves the provision of one primarily vegetarian meal per day [18].’

Page 16, line 362. Inserted [sardine]

Page 16, line 369. Deleted and inmates on ART. And inserted ‘and children’.

Page 16, line 375. Inserted space. World Health Organisation (WHO)

Page 16, line 376. Removed hyphen in breastfeeding.

Page 16, line 377. Inserted hyphen. non-breast

Page 16, line 379. Changed to ‘A 2013 newspaper account in Uganda’

Page 17, line 400 Changed to ‘out of all 35 female prisons in Kenya, eight prisons provided children with three meals and at least two snacks per day.’

Page 17, line 405. Changed ‘were’ to ‘was’.

Page 17, line 409. Changed ‘were’ to ‘was’.

Page 18, line 410. Changed ‘who’ to ‘which’

Page 18, line 410. Changed ‘between’ to ‘among’

Page 18, line 419. Inserted comma.

Page 18, line Inserted hyphen in faith-based.

Page 18, line 425 to 426. Changed sentence to ‘although NGOs and faith-based organisations provided basins, soap, baby clothes and milk powder, there was no policy…’

Page 19, line 441. Inserted hyphen into ‘doctor-to-prisoner ratio or nurse-to-prisoner ratio’ and corrected thereafter.
Page 19, line 444. Changed ‘was’ to ‘were’

Page 19, line 446. Inserted comma after ‘for example’.

Page 19, line 447 to 448. Amended sentence, ‘pregnant prisoners commenting on the lack of medical examination on entry to prison.’

Page 19, line 455. Inserted commas, (for example, South Africa and Kenya), however.

Page 19, line 456. Deleted, ‘in the years 2006, 2010 and 2016’

Page 20, line 461. Inserted comma after South Africa.

Page 20, line 462. Clarified, ‘with community health care providers’.

Page 20, line 468 to 469. Amended to ‘not taking advantage of key under-five services such as immunizations.’

Page 20, line 473 to 474. Amended to clarify, ‘overwhelmingly affected by barriers for women to access if available’.

Page 20, line 474 to 477. Spacing is amended.

Page 20, line 482. Hypen inserted into medicines stock out.

Page 21, line 485. Replaced ‘were;’ with ‘was’.

Page 21, line 486. Deleted punctuation, ‘controlled access’

Page 21, line 497 Amended to ‘access to medical care’.


Page 21, line 507. Clarified sentence. ‘In June 2016, the United Nations General Assembly agreed that ending AIDS by 2030 requires a Fast–Track response (Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: On the Fast Track to Accelerating the Fight against HIV and to Ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030) . Despite this,’

Page 22, line 511. Removed spaces in ‘mother-to-child’. Included ‘with limited or no provision of services for’

Page 22, line 515 to 516. Clarified sentence. ‘within prisons located in SSA countries.’

Page 22, line 516. Inserted hyphen. ‘HIV-affected’
Page 22, line 528. Deleted ‘unique and’.

Page 22, line 528. Note to Editor. Scoping reviews map extant literature. It is the usual term to describe such a review. Hence no change, as we did not conduct a narrative review.

Page 22, line 530. Inserted ‘a’ paucity.

Page 22, line 531. Deleted extant. And amended sentence ‘found in this scoping review.’

Page 22, line 532. Inserted ‘young’.

Page 23, line 535. Deleted ‘Their rights and needs are equal to all others’.

Page 23, line 537. Amended sentence, ‘international mandates in treaties ratified in nearly all SSA countries.’

Page 23, line 539. Deleted ‘and hence are of grave concern for the welfare of incarcerated children’

Page 23, line 542. Deleted ‘diapers.’

Page 23, line 545. Changed sentence, ‘This review, which focused on the past 18 years, underscores little improvement over time, with exception of South Africa’. Note to Editor, there were some records over time in some SSA countries, with a notable improvement in investment and conditions for women and their children in South Africa. So we leave the sentence as is.

Page 23, line 548. Inserted ‘perhaps.’

Page 23, line 550 to 552. Amended sentence, ‘International decrees as previously mentioned mandate equivalence of care in prison, to that provided in the community, and access to equitable health services for people in prisons free of charge (the Mandela Rules, Rule 24.1 [11].’

Page 23, line 552. Amended commas, ‘encouraging however,’

Page 23, line 553 to 554. Amended sentence, ‘its prison conditions for women and their children, alongside upscaling maternal and child health (MCH)’

Page 23, line 557 to 559. Inserted ‘those’, and ‘There is a reported lack of pediatric health care services in prisons, and if services are available, barriers to access exist and result in low uptake.’

Page 24, line 560 to 561. Clarified, ‘prison officers who are not health professionals’ and replaced ‘access’ with ‘uptake’.

Page 24, line 564 to 565. Amended to clarify, ‘prison officials, not medically trained.’
Incarcerated women are at higher risk of acquiring HIV, TB and other infections in prisons, than men, and also have a higher prevalence of HIV, and an even higher prevalence than women living in the community.

The inadequacy of PMTCT services in prisons contributes.

Restricted access of infants to their mothers for feeding.

heightens risk of transmission

The rights of the child.

strategic information through surveillance, country situational assessments and routine monitoring and evaluation.

While all prisoners in the region suffer from poor prison conditions, children are particularly vulnerable to the health impact of these conditions.

This is underpinned by the lack of basic necessities for incarcerated infants and children, inadequate hygiene, sanitation and safe drinking water, exposure to disease in overcrowded cells, inadequate and no food, insufficient provision of clean and warm clothing and bedding, and difficulties accessing paediatric care, including HIV/PMTCT services.

Amended abbreviations list as per Editor instruction. All changes marked in yellow.

Amended reference formatting as per Editor instruction. All changes marked in yellow.
Yours sincerely,

Prof Marie Claire Van Hout, corresponding author