Reviewer’s report

Title: Title Prison health situation and health rights of young people incarcerated in sub-Saharan African prisons and detention centres: A scoping review of extant literature.

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Reviewer: Stephanie Topp

Reviewer’s report:

Title: Prison health situation and health rights of young people incarcerated in sub-Saharan African prisons and detention centres.

Overall: This is an important contribution to the literature, first, summarizing and highlighting the extraordinarily poor conditions of young people in detention in SSA and second, drawing attention to what is still a clear lack of specific evidence and attention being paid to this issue. Notwithstanding the important issue a number of concerns need to be addressed to ensure the article's accuracy and impact.

Comments:

* While appreciating that much of data on which the authors necessarily rely is dated - imperative to ensuring accurate representation of the state of the evidence is drawing attention to this fact. For example, in cases where rates of incarceration, age-related proportions of the incarcerated population, or estimated rates of disease prevalence, the authors should mention the date of data collection or publication. In a number of cases data are presented and read as if they are current, when the publications are up to 15 years old.

* On page 4 and page 5 I wonder if the long list of UN instruments and conventions could be captured in a table - which would be easier for the reader to eyeball and refer to, and also help decongest the text.

* In the methods, pg 7, it would be helpful to have a more precise explanation of who exactly was involved in which stage of screening.

* Also in the methods, could the authors explain how articles were selected given that a number of included sources were were about general (adult) prisons that hold incarcerated youth. Given the authors' earlier explanation that only articles which included data on incarcerated young people were included, how were these identified? I note several of the included references are not youth-specific in nature.

* Results: a summary and characterization of the peer reviewed literature identified on this topic would be helpful addition to the early section of the literature. The authors note
they located 3 qualitative studies - a) what were the other types of studies - and b) where were the various peer reviewed pieces of work located.

* Results: pg 13 more cautious reporting of the data about rate of HIV infection and risk of HIV infection among prisoners in Zambia is required. Data presented is based on one study, with epidemiologic limitations, and quite dated.

* Similarly - in the quote on pg 13 - the authors of both the original study and the current study have chosen to include the boys' estimation that 'one quarter is consensual'. While I would not question that the boy’s description of the manipulation of young people for sexual activity, I think it is inappropriate to include this part of the quote as it suggests a valid estimate; I would posit that no informant in prison is accurately able to provide such an estimate of the proportion of sexual activity that is genuinely consensual

* Results: in addition to the information on page 13, note that many of the themes reported in relation to manipulation of youth are confirmed in a more recent paper on health in Zambian prisons (Topp et al, 2016, "Exploring the drivers of health and health care access..." Health Policy and Planning). The authors may wish to consider inclusion of this paper, which among a general discussion of male prisoners, also speaks to themes of youth vulnerability due to lack of family support and manipulation by older more powerful inmates to access food and other essentials.

* Throughout the results, it would be helpful for the authors to more clearly distinguish when they are reporting findings from youth-specific facilities, versus youth incarcerated in adult facilities. This is important since a key finding is that so many are in the latter situation.

* Results: I understand the need to report according to broad categories - but in the above mentioned Topp et al article, the authors map the interaction between the three themes of this review - namely the vulnerability of youth in prisons due to lack of personal or family support, which means they have lack of food and other basic necessities, leaving them vulnerable to manipulation by wealthier and more powerful adult inmates who may prey on them sexually. The linkages between these themes is touched on in the Discussion - but should be flagged in the results too.

* Discussion: Pg 19 the authors note 'review highlights that incarcerated or detained young people are a hidden population who continue to be ignored compared to the adult population' and 'whilst they endure the same inhuman overcrowded and unhygienic conditions…exposure to adult environments compounds their vulnerabilities'. These are important points - but I think the authors need to more clearly draw them out by structuring the Discussion to highlight the following (perhaps in stand alone paragraphs):

  o SSA prison systems are almost universally under resourced leading to deplorable environmental conditions, sanitation and supplies for youth inmates and all inmates.
Youth are particularly affected by under resourcing when it means that are co-housed with adults, because of the vulnerability to manipulation and so forth. This is referenced in several places in the Discussion and appropriately so.

Currently - dearth of attention to, and evidence about young peoples' conditions means that these vulnerabilities are hidden and that calls for improved conditions for young people are liable to be integrated into more general calls for improved prison resourcing rather than as stand alone needs.

* Discussion pg 20: The authors should remove the statement HIV in SSA prisons is generally driven by unprotected sex because of lack of condoms and by drug injection, tattooing etc. These behaviours in prison doubtless contribute to some incident infection but there is little, and very poor quality evidence to show that these practices in prison *drive* HIV; more likely the rate of HIV among those incoming is already high, and these practices/behaviours contribute to further spread.

**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.

Yes

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