Author’s response to reviews

Title: Community perspectives on the extent to which transactional sex is viewed as sexual exploitation in Central Uganda

Authors:

Nambusi Kyegombe (nambus.kyegombe@lshtm.ac.uk)
Rebecca Meiksin (rebecca.meiksin@lshtm.ac.uk)
Sylvia Namakula (maku_la@yahoo.co.uk)
Josephine Mulindwa (mulindwajo@yahoo.co.uk)
Richard Muhumuza (Richard.Muhumuza@mrcuganda.org)
Joyce Wamoyi (jwamoyi@hotmail.com)
Lori Heise (lheise1@jhu.edu)
Ana Maria Buller (Anabuller@lshtm.ac.uk)

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editor

We are again grateful to the reviewers for their careful and considered review of our paper. We appreciate their comments and have responded to each in our response below and as tracked changes to the manuscript.

Editor Comments:

(1) Please move your 'Declarations' section entirely to before your 'References'

We have made this change

BMC International Health and Human Rights operates a policy of open peer review, which means that you will be able to see the names of the reviewers who provided the reports via the online peer review system. We encourage you to also view the reports there, via the action links on the left-hand side of the page, to see the names of the reviewers.
Reviewer reports:

Kalysha Closson (Reviewer 1): Thank you for your responses. Overall, the authors have done a great job at addressing the reviewer comments. Also, the results section is very well presented. There are a few changes which I would suggest prior to publication.

1. The authors have added information on where the ‘etic’ definitions they refer to throughout the manuscript are coming from, however this should be noted in the abstract.

   Thank you, we have noted in the abstract that these definitions come from multilaterals, bilaterals and NGOs

2. In the methods section, it is unclear how the translation process worked, did the study team conduct backtranslation processes for their study documents?

   Thank you for the opportunity to clarify this. The interviews were transcribed into Luganda and then translated into English. The transcripts were not back translated into Luganda. On page 13 we have added the following detail concerning the translation of the study tools:

   The tool “was jointly translated from English by the study team, all of whom were fluent in English and Luganda. Joint translation was conducted to ensure that all team members had a common understanding of the ambitions of, and nuances in, the language used in the questions and translations. This was also important to ensure that the team were jointly cognisant of any language that could be perceived as stigmatising, given the sensitive topic and potentially vulnerable participants”.

3. The authors do a great job at presenting the results. In order to reduce confusion, I wonder if the authors could distinguish when they are talking about participants, which age range they are referring to. They do this in some places, but it would be helpful to know when the quote is coming from a young woman herself or someone that is from the community but not directly a young women. These perceptions are important to distinguish

   Thank you, we have added text throughout the findings section to make clearer amongst whom/how widely the reported views were held. We have also ensured that we have included the ages of the participants for all the data we include.

4. In the results section, please be consistent with the presentation of the person who is quoted. For example, on pg. 28 line 48 you do not include an age range for the participant, whereas the quote above does.

   Thank you, we have made sure to consistently include the ages against all the quotes
5. I am still unsure about the framing of the paper. The authors discuss emic and etic definitions of sexual exploitation but then focus a lot of the paper on transactional sex. I understand that transactional sex according to the definitions can be considered sexual exploitation. However, I feel that there needs to be a bit of reframing around etic vs. emic definitions of transactional sex, or the authors need to discuss in more detail some of the findings that emerged around benefits of transactional sex.

Thank you for the opportunity to improve this. We have edited the text on pages 6-7 to better frame transactional sex in particular as a form of sexual exploitation. We have also reflected more on the perceived benefits of transactional sex in the discussion.

6. In text, the authors do discuss how there were some themes that emerged around some of the perceived benefits of engaging in transactional sex but these are not included in the table. Thank you, we have added a new row on ‘benefits’ and added the following text on etic definitions:

“Recognise that transactional sex may be perceived as beneficial whilst still being considered exploitative” and emic conceptualisations

“Recognise that transactional sex may be perceived and experienced as beneficial”

7. In the strengths and weaknesses section of the paper, the authors discuss a strength of the paper is that they included adult men who were engaged in sexual relationships with younger women. You don't discuss this in your results and conclusion as you mentioned that this would be included in another paper, as such I would remove it.

Thank you for the opportunity to clarify this. We do include the perspectives of adult men on sexual relationships with girls and younger women. To clarify this, we have changed the language in the limitations section as follows:

This study has both strengths and weaknesses. By including a broad range of participants from two different study sites, the study incorporated the views of an important cross-section of the population. These included sexually active adolescent girls and young women as well as adult men who are in the age group with whom adolescent girls and young women have transactional sex relationships.

8. There are a number of places in your corrections/revisions that have typos, please review the paper carefully.

Thank you, we have attended to these
Reviewer 2 (Reviewer 3): PEER REVIEWER ASSESSMENTS:

OBJECTIVE - Full research articles: is there a clear objective that addresses a testable research question(s) (brief or other article types: is there a clear objective)?

Yes - there is a clear objective

DESIGN - Is the current approach (including controls and analysis protocols) appropriate for the objective?

Yes - the approach is appropriate

EXECUTION - Are the experiments and analyses performed with technical rigor to allow confidence in the results?

Yes - experiments and analyses were performed appropriately

STATISTICS - Is the use of statistics in the manuscript appropriate?

N/A - there are no statistics in this study

INTERPRETATION - Is the current interpretation/discussion of the results reasonable and not overstated?

Yes - the author's interpretation is reasonable

OVERALL MANUSCRIPT POTENTIAL - Is the current version of this work technically sound? If not, can revisions be made to make the work technically sound?

Probably - with minor revisions

PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS:

GENERAL COMMENTS:

This is a very interesting manuscript that covers a novel topic and shows important differences between etic and emic perspectives on sexual exploitation. The outline of these differences makes a contribution to the literature and will be useful to others attempting to create educational interventions. The authors appear to have addressed the comments of past reviewers well.
In general, what remains to be addressed largely relates to issues of copyediting and ensuring proper grammar, comma usage and clarity of writing.

REQUESTED REVISIONS:

Abstract

* I assume this is for an anthropology journal? If not, then emic perspective should be defined at first use and likely not used in the title

Thank you. In the title and abstract we have changed ‘emic’ to ‘community’. We have also defined emic at first use

* I would avoid the use of AGYM as an acronym — it does not spell anything that can stand in for adolescent girls and young women meaningfully and therefore only adds to the cognitive load of the reader rather than reduce the cognitive load.

Thank you, we have removed this acronym

* Results section of abstract, AGYW is plural - so it should say were considered - the girls and women were considered vulnerable, were considered responsible. — this is another reason to avoid the use of the acronym as it is unclear when it is standing in for the singular vs. Plural (your definition is plural, but you then use it in the singular when you refer to "her situation" it also makes little sense to say "adolescent girl and young woman was considered responsible for her situation. - so even changing it to singular does not help to make the use appropriate.

We have removed the acronym from the whole paper

* They in the last sentence of the abstract is unclear and unspecified. I think it refers to "interventions"

Thank you for noting this. It does indeed refer to interventions. We have changed ‘they’ to ‘interventions must also be designed to’

Note: this paper has been previously reviewed, but I am not one of the previous reviewers.

Background

* Page 6, line 11/12, which should be that

Thank you, we have made this change

* Page 7, line 31/32, missing comma after "In Uganda"
Thank you, we have added commas to this sentence

* Page 7, bottom of page, you've already been using AGYW but now you define it and spell it out. It should only be spelled out at first use and from there on it should be the acronym, but please refer to my earlier comment suggesting that you drop the acronym entirely to facilitate ease of reading.

Thank you, we have done so.

* With the edits you've made, the last paragraph on page 7 appears to be a single sentence paragraph. Please incorporate this sentence into one of the other paragraphs.

Thank you, we have ensured that the last paragraph is not a single sentence paragraph

* Page 8, second line, you can say aged 15-24, or you can cut the word aged and say 15-25 years of age (aged and years of age are redundant and thus both do not need to be included).

We have made this change

* Page 8, last sentence of first paragraph, oddly worded list with too many "ands" - try to word more concisely.

We have edited this sentence as follows:

“Transactional sex has also been linked to sexually transmitted diseases, reproductive and sexual health risks (including unwanted pregnancy), sexual coercion, and violence.”

* Missing . After al in et al

Thank you, we have added it

* Page 9, comma between different reasons and is important is unnecessary

We have removed it

* Page 9, line 15, the last part of this sentence is unclear and should be re-written

We have changed this to:

but acknowledge that “boys and young men may also be involved in transactional sex relationships”

* Avoid the use of contractions (e.g., don't vs. Do not)

Thank you, we have ensured that there are no contractions in our writing and have only retained those that are in the data that we include in the paper.
* The previous reviewer seems to have suggested the use of a theoretical framework, and the response to the reviews mentions one insofar as describing the data analysis approach, however, a theoretical framework could still be added to the introduction itself as a formal guiding structure for the entire paper/study.

Thank you, we have added text to the introduction to indicate that the study has been framed from a feminist theoretical perspective.

Methods

* Page 9, line 40, comma after dominates is not needed

We have removed it

* Page 9, line 45/46, no comma needed between whether and the social and structural

We have removed it

* The first paragraph on page 10 is very long (longer than a page, and should be broken into more than one paragraph

We have divided this paragraph into two paragraphs the first discussing sampling of young people in Kampala and the second describing the sampling of other community members.

* Page 12, line 33, are should be is (as it's referring to the word content not to the word vignettes)

Thank you, we have made this change

* Page 13, line 30, no comma needed between literature and and

Thank you, we have made this change

* Page 13, line 47, try and should be try to

Thank you, we have made this change

* I would place the ethical consideration section earlier in the method section as obtaining ethics for a study is the first step prior to conducting the study.

It was suggested during the last round of reviews that the ethical considerations section be moved to come before the data analysis section
I would re-word the end to say "but was instead disapproved of for other reasons elaborated upon below.

Thank you, we have re-worded as you suggest

* Wherever using "however" or "therefore" ensure proper comma usage as well (applies throughout the paper) http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/tips/commas/

Thank you, we have made this change throughout the manuscript

Discussion

* Page 31, line 23, comma missing after definitions

Thank you, we have made this change

* Page 33, commas missing around "raining by men and boys"

Thank you, we have added commas

* Page 33, line 33, missing comma after ideology

Thank you, we have added a comma

* Include a heading before limitations section

Thank you, we have made this change

Conclusion

* Divide into more than one paragraph

Thank you, we have made this change

ADDITIONAL REQUESTS/SUGGESTIONS:

The key point that the previous reviewers brought up that I don't think was fully addressed in this revision was the suggestion of using a feminist theoretical framework to approach the topic. I understand that a social constructivist approach was used for data analysis, and that is appropriate, but a paper can also have an overall theoretical framework that helps to pull together perspectives from past literature and solidify the need for the study and then the overall discussion of the study's results.
Thank you for this suggestion. We have added text to the introduction to indicate that the study has been framed from a feminist theoretical perspective in which we note that in the context of the patriarchal society in which this study was conducted, we explore themes including gender, age and power inequalities, the sexual objectification of adolescent girls and young women and economic and structural inequalities that impact adolescent girls and young women’s ability to meet their needs. We also draw more explicitly on this framework in the discussion of our results.