Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 1 Date: 07 May 2019

Reviewer: Kalysha Closson

Reviewer's report:

Overall there are some really great data here and I think the paper has great potential to tell an important story about the complicated nature of transactional sex. Moreover, the authors have included a very important population of men who are engaged in transactional sex with young women, however there was no specific reporting of findings from this group. The framing of emic and etic definitions is confusing and takes away from the overall story. I think it would be beneficial to have the paper framed in a way that the aim is to capture multiple perspectives on transactional sex.

Introduction:

The introduction could be restructured to be more clear. Specifically the framing around emic vs. etic definitions is unclear. Where are you getting your etic definitions?

Also, the link between child exploitation and what your research actually is looking at is a bit unrelated. A number of the conversations that you studied in your FGDs and interviews also included adult women. I wonder if the introduction could be re-framed around definitions of sexual exploitation and/or transactional sex more broadly?

You could also bring in a broader conversation around gender equality and health and mention international targets around gender equality.

I think the data from your paper can allow for a unique framing around the need for AGYW's perspective when conducting research and implementing interventions and programming around engaging in transactional sex. This can also be discussed in the implications section of the discussion where when aiming to reduce HIV incidence through improved gender equity we need to move beyond a risk-centric lens, understanding that not all forms of transactional sex may be considered exploitative for those involved.

Methods:

There are a number of places within the paper that switch back and forth between female and women. I would stick with one. And given that this paper is focused on gender norms I would use the later.
For the description of your study context are there any references for statements made around self-employment in agriculture and informal sector self-employment.

You sampled adolescents under 18 however it was unclear how the informed consent processed worked within your study.

How were the topic guides used developed? Who was involved in this process and how did the final themes decided?

Did more than one person do the coding of the data?

How many men who identified

Results:

There are some places in the results (e.g. pg 21 line 55) where you mention results from the discussion and don't provide any quotes. I would ensure that quotes are provided where you discuss results.

In discussion

You start the discussion saying that based on etic definitions of child exploitation that transactional sex would be considered child exploitation. This, however is not entirely true as there are many different forms of transactional sex, some of which would be considered sexual exploitation

I think the discussion and introduction need some reframing and I would remove the framing of etic vs. emic as it is confusing and I think the paper would draw upon how the data collected during this study highlight important differences in the conceptualization of transactional sex that has been previously discussed in the literature of sexual health and HIV among young people in sub-Saharan Africa.

Comparing perspectives between the different groups interviewed would be interesting to know about in the discussion.

You have a section on the implications of your study but you do not specifically include a concluding statement which would be helpful for readers to understand the main conclusions of this study.

Minor:
There are a few places where the reference bracket comes before the period (5). And others where it comes before. (5) Please check the Journal guidelines and go through the manuscript and check for consistency.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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