Author’s response to reviews

Title: Predictors of primary and secondary sexual abstinence among never-married youth in urban poor Accra, Ghana

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Author’s response to reviews:

Reviewer # 3:

1. In the Abstract (page 2, line 35), Reviewer # 3 asked us to add “female and male” before “youth”. Response: Accordingly, we have made this addition as suggested by the reviewer.

2. In the Plain English Summary section (page 3, line 55); the reviewer suggested that we add “more” before the word “difficult”. Response: We have added it as suggested.

3. Still in the Plain English Summary (page 3, line 57), the reviewer suggested that we change the word “few” to “Few”, using the capital F. Response: We appreciate the reviewer’s suggestion. To address this comment, we revised the sentence by replacing “But few studies have been conducted ...” with “Unfortunately, studies designed to understand the factors that influence sexual abstinence among these youth are sparse” (page 3, line 57-58).

4. In the Discussion section (page 18, line 395), the reviewer noted a mistake we made in indicating that the number of factors that predicted primary and secondary sexual abstinence were five instead of six. The reviewer therefore asked us to make this correction by changing the word five to six. Response: We are grateful to the reviewer for noting this error, and have appropriately changed “five” to “six”.

5. Still in the Discussion section (page 18, line 399), the reviewer asked to change the word “four” to “five” in line with the previous correction in line 395. Response: We have made this change accordingly.

6. In line 424 of the Discussion section (page 19), the reviewer asked to change the word “productive” to “reproductive” and also include “fertility awareness” before “sexual intercourse”. Response: We appreciate the reviewer’s observation of the error in the word “reproductive” and the
suggestion to include “fertility awareness” in the sentence. We have therefore changed the word “productive” to “reproductive” and also included “fertility awareness” after sexual intercourse as suggested.

7. In line 458 (page 21), the reviewer suggested that we change the word “probably” to “may” and also include “s” to the word “mechanism”.
Response: Accordingly, we have made these changes as suggested.

8. In line 462 (page 21), the reviewer asked us to add “health services” after “housing”.
Response: We appreciate the reviewer’s suggestion and have included it accordingly.

9. In line 474 (page 21), the reviewer suggested that we add “parents also need accurate information about fertility, reproduction, contraception and STIs/HIV, to be able to have meaningful discussions with their children”.
Response: We appreciate this suggestion from the reviewer, and have proceeded to include it (line 475-476, page 22).

10. In line 482-483 (page 22), the reviewer indicated that the reference was from the Latin America Region and may not apply to the situation in Ghana.
Response: We agree with the reviewer’s observation and have therefore removed this sentence and the associated reference from the paragraph.

11. In line 485 (page 22), the reviewer suggested that “gender dynamics between fathers and their male and female children may differ greatly. Perhaps the gender dynamics of fathers who have power over their own sexual encounters has influence on perpetuating norms for boys to initiate sex at an early age and girls to submit to sex, even when unwanted”.
Response: While we acknowledge that the reviewer’s argument could be a possible explanation of our finding, we did not include this explanation in the discussion as suggested by the reviewer. This is because we did not test for parents own sexual experiences and its effects on parents communication with their children in the study.

12. In line 677 (page 28), the reviewer noted that the title of the paper we referenced was omitted from the reference list.
Response: We are grateful to the reviewer for noting this mistake. We have therefore corrected this mistake by including the title accordingly.

13. Finally, the reviewer noted that some of our references seemed quite old and suggested that we include relevant recent publications.
Response: We appreciate the reviewers comment and suggestion, and have therefore included evidence from some relevant recent publications. Please see reference numbers 8, 9, 25, 26, 43 and 46 in the reference list (page 27-28).
Reviewer # 4:

1. In the Abstract (page 2, line 25), the reviewer suggested that we include “infections”.
Response: We appreciate the reviewer’s suggestion. However, it is important to note that we have already used “sexually transmitted infections” in that sentence to capture all “infections” transmitted through sex such as syphilis, gonorrhea etc. Therefore, the reviewer’s suggestion has already been addressed.

2. Still in the Abstract (page 2, line 28), the reviewer asked us to back the statement “Few studies in the sub-region have examined sexual abstinence among urban poor youth” with evidence.
Response: We appreciate the reviewer’s comment. We already provided evidence in the background section of the manuscript to back this claim (page 5, line 101-108). The Journal Submission Guidelines advises against citing references in the abstract, that is why we refrained from providing such evidence in the abstract.

3. In line 39 (page 2) the reviewer suggested that we change the word “residence” to “resident”.
Response: We appreciate the reviewer’s suggestion. But we noted that the word “residence” was appropriate as the aim was to describe the place and not the people.

4. In the Plain English Summary (page 3, line 54-55), the reviewer asked us to provide evidence to support our assertion that “youth in urban poor area of the sub-region find it more difficult to abstain from sex than their peers in rural and non-urban poor urban areas”.
Response: We appreciate the reviewer’s comment. It is important to note that we have already provided evidence in the background section (line 81-89) to support this assertion. We therefore do not deem it appropriate to repeat such evidence in the Plain English Summary section. As much as possible, we want to keep the Plain English Summary Section simple and devoid of scientific jargon and references as suggested in the Submission Guidelines.

5. Still in the Plain English Summary (page 3, line 63-64), the reviewer asked us to explain in detail the following: “Youth in school”, “importance of religion” and “social support”
Response: We appreciate the reviewer’s comment. However, detailed descriptions of these three variables and all other predictor variables used in the study have been explained in the measurements section (Page 11-12, line 240-273). As indicated in our previous response, we want to keep this section as simple as possible as required by the Journal.

6. In the background section (page 4, line 74) the reviewer asked us to change the word “has” to “have”
Response: Accordingly, we have made the change.

7. Still in the background section (page 4, line 81), the reviewer suggested that we provide the research evidence that shows that “youth in urban poor settings are more vulnerable to unprotected sex and its associated negative outcomes”. The reviewer also asked us to state the names of the authors rather than using the generic phrase “studies show that…”
Response: To respond to this comment, we provided research evidence from Nairobi, Kenya and Accra, Ghana to support our argument (page 4, line 81-88). We also provided the names of some of the authors of those studies we cited (page 4, line 84-87).

8. In page 5 (line 109) we used “the current study” to refer to our study and the reviewer wanted clarification on whether we were referring to our study or studies in general.
Response: To clarify this statement, we replaced the phrase “the current study” with “this study” to avoid any ambiguity (page 5, line 109).

9. In Page 6 (line 133-136), the reviewer indicated that the statement; “For instance, adolescent males in Malawi are less likely to be abstinent compared to their female peers. But in Ghana, adolescent males are more likely to be sexually abstinent than females” was not clear.
Response: We appreciate the reviewer’s comment. This statement sought to use Malawi and Ghana to show that gender difference in sexual abstinence was not uniform across countries in sub-Saharan Africa. To address the reviewer’s comment, we revised the statement to make it clearer (page 6, line 133-136).

10. In line 137 (page 6) the reviewer asked us to clarify the meaning of the word “conducive”.
Response: To address this comment, we replaced the word “conducive” with the phrase “amenable to”.

11. In line 156 (page 7), the reviewer asked us to clarify the meaning of the phrase “to refuse sex”.  
Response: To clarify the meaning of this phrase, we replaced it with “to refuse sexual intercourse”.

12. In the measurements section (page 11, line 235), the reviewer noted the omission of the word “in” in the sentence.
Response: To address this comment, we included the word “in” accordingly.

13. In the Discussion section (page 17, line 383), the reviewer suggested that we replace the word “vulnerable” with the phrase “are more likely to…”
Response: To address this comment, we replaced “vulnerable” with the above phrase suggested by the reviewer.

14. In page 18 (line 397), the reviewer noted the omission of the word “to”.
Response: We are grateful to the reviewer for noting this error. We have made this correction by including the word “to” into the sentence.

15. In page 19 (line 407), the reviewer also noted the omission of “and” between “Ghana” and “across…”
Response: To address this omission, we included the word “and” between Ghana and across.