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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Response to Reviewer’s Comments
Reviewer # 5:
1. In the Abstract, the reviewer asked us to state the survey years and also provide recommendation on what should be done to promote abstinence in the Ghanaian context from the results of the study.
Response: We appreciate the reviewer’s suggestion; accordingly, we have made these additions to the abstract as suggested by the reviewer (line 34 and lines 49-53).

2. In the Introduction, the reviewer suggested that it would be beneficial to add the ABC approach to the statement in line 116 (page 6).
Response: Accordingly, we have added the ABC approach to the statement as suggested (lines 116-118).

3. The reviewer noted that, “the gender differentials that exist for abstinence should not be ignored. Although gender is not the focus of present article, it is important to note how gender influences youth abstinence in African settings. There is enough literature that can be referenced for this. It is touched on briefly in line 132 but stating plausible reasons for this will better explain context”.
Response: We have revised the statement on gender differentials in sexual abstinence to focus on Ghana and also included the plausible reason why females in Ghana are less likely to abstain from sex (line 149-156).

4. Still in the introduction, the reviewer suggested that we include a theoretical framework for the study.
Response: Accordingly, we have revised the introduction to include the theoretical framework which guided the conceptualisation and selection of variables for the study. We have also included figure 1 which presents the conceptual framework of the study (lines 120-139).

5. In the data and methods section, the reviewer asked us to state why the three communities (James Town, Ussher Town and Agbogbloshie) were selected for this study.
Response: We appreciate the reviewer’s suggestion and have therefore provided the reasons for selecting the three communities (lines 211-218).
6. Still in the methodology, the reviewer asked as to cite studies that have used the same measure of secondary abstinence as our study.
Response: We addressed this comment by citing two studies in the sub-region that have used a similar measure of secondary sexual abstinence as our study (line 273-276).

7. The reviewer raised concerns about the absence of the conceptual framework which guided the selection of variables. The reviewer therefore suggested a brief justification of why we used the selected co-variates.
Response: We appreciate the reviewer’s concerns. The introduction of the conceptual, as indicated in our earlier response, addresses the above concerns of the reviewer.

8. With regards to the measurement of education (“in school and “out of school”), the reviewer is concerned that our measure of “out of school” might include both those who completed school and those who dropped out.
Response: While we appreciate the reviewer’s concern, it is important to note that the variable we used aimed at measuring “schooling status” since dropout rates in the study area are quite high compared to other parts of Accra. A similar measure has been used by other studies including Kabiru and Ezeh (2007) to study abstinence among adolescents in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Malawi and Uganda. Even though there might be a few youth in this category that have completed university or college, this number is too small to affect the measure as our analysis of the data reveals that less than 8% of people aged 20-24 years in the study area are either in university or college or have completed.

9. The reviewer also suggested that the inclusion of living arrangement for youth aged 20-24 years may be problematic as it is expected that they spend most of their time in university or college.
Response: As indicated above, very few youth in the study area enter college or university. A higher percentage of youth in the study area still live with their parents even at the age of 20-24 years. Table 1 of the manuscript shows that as much as 49% of the youth (even higher among males) still live with their parent(s). Thus, the inclusion of living arrangement in this study as a possible predictor of sexual abstinence is relevant and not problematic in the study context.

10. Finally, the reviewer asked us to reference line 380 and 381 (page 17).
Response: Accordingly, we have included the reference for the statement (line 417-418).