

PEER REVIEW HISTORY

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ARTICLE DETAILS

TITLE (PROVISIONAL)	An Exploratory Qualitative Study Examining Acceptability of Strategies to Improve Access to Substance Use Treatment and HIV Prevention Services for Young Adults on Probation in Ukraine
AUTHORS	Dauria, Emily; Skipalska, Halyna; Gopalakrishnan, Lakshmi; Savenko, Oksana; Sabadash, Liudmyla; Tolou-Shams, Marina; Flanigan, Timothy; Navario, Peter; Castillo, Theresa

VERSION 1 – REVIEW

REVIEWER	Francisco Bastos Fundacao Oswaldo Cruz, Health Information
REVIEW RETURNED	08-Mar-2022

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>First of all, this is the first manuscript I have ever reviewed from a country which has been deeply affected by a bloody war. It would be unethical NOT to give the authors the extra time they may need and to include a post-scriptum. Much probably several locations mentioned in the manuscript do no longer exist or have been so affected by bombing and different violent aggressions they may exist but are longer functional.</p> <p>I understood the authors are Americans who have been working in Ukraine for years. Unfortunately, the current situation is totally different.</p> <p>So either the manuscript will be defined as a historical record describing HOW the networks of services did exist BEFORE the war or maybe how they have been functioning (or not functioning) amidst a major war.</p> <p>Although living in a different country, my ancestors were Ukrainian and Polish and I worked myself in Odessa, Ukraine, as a member of the now defunct WHO taskforce. Unfortunately, I do not know the Ukrainian language, so in this sense I cannot help by any means. My relatives left Ukraine in the context of the I World War and stopped first in Germany. The old generation of my family used language German as their mother tongue, neither Ukrainian nor Polish.</p> <p>Maybe someone with good linguistic skills could help to revise the manuscript. Please, see as follows my suggestions to profit from contemporary linguistic tools.</p> <p>Notwithstanding I have no clue whether such tools work well with the Ukrainian language.</p> <p>Please explain why did the authors choose just three settings! It is clearly far from comprehensive and even minimally representative in</p>
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	<p>a country where two languages are spoken, Ukrainian and Russian and there are incredibly complex geographic and political heterogeneities</p> <p>According to the information provided by Dr. Google: Almost 100% of Ukrainians understand spoken Russian, and about 60% speak it. Russian continues to dominate for the simple reason that printed and wired media, TV, movies, books and industry are mostly conducted in the Russian language.</p> <p>Anyway, research carried out in Barcelona, where Catalan is spoken is quite different from studies carried out in France. I will share with the authors my own experience: I'm a fluent speaker of both Spanish and French, but without a dictionary and a grammar I cannot read Catalan. To read the famous Catalan poet Joan Brossa (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joan_Brossa) I had to spend hours and hours.</p> <p>Things may be similar, but not the same!</p> <p>Besides, linguistic issues, Eastern and Western Ukraine markedly differ. In the East there are Russian enclaves. They did exist for years now and everything inside them is totally different from the other parts of the country. Please, clarify such points!</p> <p>What may happen with a given interviewee, who may speak Ukrainian or Russian and was born in the Eastern provinces? Would this hypothetical guy/girl navigate the services networks in the same way as his/her Western counterparts?</p> <p>The Introduction is very clear and well-written and offers to those not acquainted with the context under analysis useful information. Congrats!</p> <p>The section on Methods is extremely short and do not help the putative readers.</p> <p>There is not a single line about the languages spoken by the interviewees (Of course, they are Ukrainian and Russian, but who is who?). This is a key issue in this region of the world.</p> <p>For instance, the founding father of Russian prose was Nikolai Gogol, who was born in Ukraine!. In a world of so many paradoxes, the founding father of Russian poetry and by the way of contemporary Russian language, the leader of the so-called Saint Petersburg elite circle of "white" Russians, Alexander Pushkin, was actually an African-Russian, as described by himself (please, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abram_Petrovich_Gannibal).</p> <p>Languages and ethnic backgrounds do matter!</p> <p>In a society plagued by successive wars and conflicts, there is a marked imbalance between genders and social strata. Right now, Ukrainian women have trying to escape the war with their children, whereas most Ukrainian young males have joined the Army or informal partisan groups. People from different social strata and networks (e.g. people with relatives living in Poland or the Czech Republic) may find some support or, alternatively, may be fully exposed to the most terrible consequences.</p>
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	<p>Once again, gender and social strata/networks do matter and cannot be simply ignored!</p> <p>I do believe in the Social Ecological Model, but in contexts such as the one under analysis it should be integrated with a fine-grained analysis of words in context. This is 100% feasible and key!</p> <p>This can be done easily using #Lancsbox (available for download: http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/lancsbox/)</p> <p>Sorry, but I cannot believe thematic analysis could be accurate, especially with transcripts from two different languages without the help of any linguistic tool!</p> <p>Although the authors are analyzing the English transcripts of Russian and Ukrainian excerpts, linguistic aspects do not disappear as rabbits after being taken from hats by magicians. Languages have a specific dimension and this dimension could not just remain in a dark corner.</p> <p>Although the seminal analyses developed by N. Chomsky are too complicated for the non-expert, modern concepts and tools can be easily used and are very helpful.</p> <p>Please, see the excellent and very clear suggestions made by Steven Pinker (e.g. https://www.amazon.co.uk/Language-Instinct-How-Mind-Creates/dp/014198077X/ref=sr_1_9?crd=35JA40JT9OCHB&keywords=steven+pinker&qid=1646743049&s=books&sprefix=steven+pinke%2Cstripbooks%2C307&sr=1-9)</p> <p>As well as several other publications by Pinker himself and other contemporary experts in linguistics.)</p> <p>I think that simply ignoring linguistic nuances there is no way to be accurate.</p> <p>Unfortunately, there is no “trick” to handle the abovementioned rabbits and hats.</p> <p>The overwhelming majority of interviewees were males....</p> <p>“Thirty YA on probation took part in the study, 86.7% of whom self-identified as male” (verbatim) may or may not reflect the underlying distribution by gender.</p> <p>This is NOT explained anywhere. By the way, no consistent effort has been made to increase the number and proportion of women (simply over-representing them), so in the end we have nothing by a tiny number of women, i.e. ~10% of a very small sample.</p> <p>Did such tiny fraction follow any criterion? Of course, criteria here do not follow quantitative strategies, such as the one proposed by Rothman and Greenland (https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29912015/), but at least it should follow the criteria of qualitative studies, such as saturation (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5993836/).</p> <p>Does it seem possible to reach saturation with just four women, from</p>
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	<p>three different places, who speak two different languages?</p> <p>The same applies to analyses respecting FIVE people attending different services, as follows:</p> <p>“Several factors shaping participants’ hesitancy to receive HIV-prevention services or referrals through the CJS (n=5)” (verbatim)</p> <p>The authors themselves state there are SEVERAL factors.</p> <p>Services are markedly heterogeneous, so basically they have in hands, say, one person affected from a single or a haphazard combination of a vast set of factors (“several factors”), attending different services or seeking care in different services.</p> <p>Without an in-depth analysis of their words in context this does not differ from looking for a needle in a haystack!</p> <p>To infer from such modest findings valid insights for guiding policy-making (as they did after page 18/30) seems too much! At least their findings should be triangulated with other sources, both qualitative and quantitative, as well as insights from policy analysis itself.</p> <p>The section on limitations is incredibly optimistic and conclusions are bold considering the actual limitations of the study.</p> <p>My personal suggestion is to redesign the manuscript as an exploratory study that may provide some insights BEFORE the massive destruction of a country and its infrastructure (of course, comprising the abovementioned services).</p> <p>In this sense, it can be a true gem!</p> <p>As a guidance for robust policy analysis, it simply doesn’t make sense. Just a quick look at the worldwide famous series on policy analysis edited by Bristol University (https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/international-library-of-policy-analysis) show the authors are brave and bold, but too much bold in face of the complex issues they have tried to address.</p>
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REVIEWER	CLEMENT NHUNZVI University of Zimbabwe, Rehabilitation
REVIEW RETURNED	12-Apr-2022

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>VERY INTERESTING AND INNOVATIVE STUDY. PLEASE PROOFREAD AND REVISE FOR GRAMMA. ALSO, REVIEW THE FINDINGS SECTION TO MAKE IT MORE LIVED AND CAPTIVATING BY USE OF PARTICIPANT INFORMED THEME NAMING AND DESCRIPTORS</p> <p>The reviewer provided a marked copy with additional comments. Please contact the publisher for full details.</p>
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VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Response to Reviewers. We sincerely appreciate the reviewers’ thoughtful comments on our manuscript and have made several changes and clarifying additions in response. We believe that

these revisions have strengthened the manuscript and enhanced its contribution to the literature. Below we have summarized the reviewers' comments and detailed our revisions for your review.

Noted strengths. Reviewers noted multiple strengths of the manuscript including that the study was innovative, and that the introduction was very clear and well-written.

Reviewer concerns. Reviewers expressed concerns about the following points:

Provide context related to how the current Russo-Ukrainian conflict may impact recommendations and interpretations of study findings. We thank the reviewers for their insightful feedback on the manuscript. The manuscript was submitted immediately prior to the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in February 2022, and therefore mention of this conflict in the initial manuscript was not incorporated. As requested by the reviewer, we have revised the manuscript to reflect that these data were collected *prior* to the most recent initiation of the conflict. Additionally, we have updated the manuscript to reflect the extent to which these systems are functioning since the conflict began (see "Discussion" section). Lastly, we have tried to emphasize, as was already noted in the manuscript, that this was a *pilot* qualitative study and therefore exploratory in nature. As one example, we have updated the title of the manuscript to "An Exploratory Qualitative Study Examining Acceptability of Strategies to Improve Access to Substance Use Treatment and HIV Prevention Services for Young Adults on Probation in Ukraine".

Provide a more detailed description of the methods used in the research study. The reviewers noted several points to strengthen and expand the presentation of this section. Each of these points are highlighted below:

- *Detail why there were only three locations for data collection.* We agree with the reviewer that sampling in only three sites limits the generalizability of study findings. However, as this was a pilot qualitative study, data were collected in sites in Ukraine where the local collaborative partner was already working and had established partnerships with the Criminal Executive Inspection. We have revised the limitations section of the manuscript to better acknowledge this restriction in the study design.
- *Explain data collection methods with more attention paid to the language that the interviews were conducted in and how this may have shaped data interpretation.* We have updated the methods to provide additional detail on the data collection methods (see "Procedures" section). Specifically, interviews were offered to the participants in the language that they preferred. In other words, the interviewers spoke both Russian and Ukrainian and were able to conduct interviews with participants in either of the languages that the participant preferred.
- *Specify additional details related to the recruitment of system stakeholders.* We have revised the "Recruitment" section to address Reviewer 2's feedback related to providing more detail on the type of sampling used for system stakeholders.
- *Review the application of the Social Ecological Model (SEM).* Reviewer 1 noted that they "believed in the SEM" but that the analysis should include context. The SEM was used to drive the development of the data collection tools and to guide the data analysis specifically for this reason, as the SEM situates the individual (and their experiences and perspectives) within broader interpersonal, organization/systems, community, and policy level contexts (as described in the "Procedures" section). Throughout the manuscript we have tried to situate participant's perspectives in these broader levels.
- *Explain whether acceptability of intervention strategies, and emergent lived experiences were explored during individual interviews.* As suggested by Reviewer 2, we clarified that the individual interviews with young adults on probation and system stakeholders also explored the "acceptability" of proposed intervention strategies (see "Procedures" section). Similarly,

we noted that the individual interviews also solicited guidance on additional potential intervention strategies based on the lived experiences of the study participants.

- *Describe the approach to qualitative data analysis in more detail.* Reviewer 1 provided significant feedback related to how the language of the data collected may impact data analysis and interpretation. As noted in the manuscript, data were collected in either Ukrainian or Russian. Audio recordings were transcribed in the language that they were conducted in and then translated into English for analysis. A Ukrainian company frequently used by our study partners was used for transcription and translation. To address a comment from Reviewer 2, we added language to emphasize that the quality of the transcription and translation were assessed for accuracy by members of the study team (see “Analysis” section). The analytic framework used in this study is “Inductive Thematic Analysis (ITA)”. Inductive Thematic Analysis is often used to find solutions to real-world problems and provide program recommendations; a primary goal of the present study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). We have revised the manuscript to highlight the purpose of this analytic approach and its alignment with the goal of the present study. Moreover, we expanded our discussion of this approach to provide more detail to ensure reproducibility.

Reviewer 1 suggested a more in-depth analysis of the specific language used by the participants to understand participant perspectives on the acceptability of strategies to improve access to substance use treatment and HIV prevention services for young adults on probation in Ukraine. We believe that this reviewer is suggesting the application of Discourse Analysis (Yazdannik et al., 2017). Discourse Analysis is rooted in linguistics and is the examination of written and spoken language in relation to its social context (Yazdannik et al., 2017). While this Discourse Analysis is certainly an approach that could be used to examine the linguistic differences in how participants who speak Ukrainian and those that speak Russian discuss their perceptions of the availability of substance use treatment services, this was not the main goal of the present study. While we appreciate the Reviewer’s feedback and understand the perspective from which this suggestion was shared, an application of Discourse Analysis to the present study would significantly change the study’s focus and presentation of study findings.

- *Saturation of themes related to gender.* We thank the Reviewer 1 for their feedback on the presentation of findings specific to our small sub-sample of women involved in the CJS (n=4) included in this study. Throughout the manuscript we reference the small sample to ensure the transparency of study findings. We recognize that this sample size does not reflect the gender distribution within the country, and we omitted reference to saturation among this group for that reason. Given that this was a pilot, exploratory study, we used a convenience sample and only sought variation related to the use of alcohol or other drugs. Given the limitations of study resources, we were unable to seek a representative sample of women for inclusion in this study. We have expanded the relevant section of the “Discussion” section to better indicate this limitation and suggest future research center on better exploring attitudes and acceptability among this population.
- *Clarification of the purpose of obtaining verbal versus written consent.* To address feedback from Reviewer 2, we revised the manuscript to include additional detail related why we obtained verbal versus written consent from study participants (see “Procedures” section).
- *Provide additional information on how descriptive statistics were generated.* To address feedback from Reviewer 2, we reviewed the “Analysis” section to indicate that descriptive statistics were calculated on demographic characteristics of young adults on probation and the occupational background of system stakeholders.

Reviewer 2 suggested that the header sections be renamed to better reflect participants’ perceptions of substance use treatment and HIV-prevention services. We appreciate the Reviewer’s feedback and where we were able to, we renamed the manuscript sections to better reflect the participant’s perceptions (see “Results” section). For example, the opening section of the “Results” section has been revised to: *‘Here it’s better’: Perceptions on referral to HIV-prevention services from CJS staff (Scenario 1).*

Reviewer 1 provided feedback that we should temper optimistic language used to present our findings to better mirror the “modesty” of the results, and to limit our suggestions for policy and program given the exploratory nature of the study. To address this feedback, we have revised several components of the “Discussion” section of the manuscript to soften our suggestions for future research and programmatic exploration. The scope of this exploratory study prevents the incorporation of a formal policy analysis. Considering Reviewer 1’s feedback related to restricting suggestions for policy and program based on our exploratory results, and in light of the escalating Russian Ukrainian conflict that has altered existing institutions and processes, we have opted to remove the “Policy and Program Implications” section of the manuscript. Where relevant, we have incorporated aspects of this piece of the manuscript into other areas of the “Discussion” section.

Improve the precision, clarification, and rewording of sections of the manuscript, as suggested by Reviewer 2. We appreciate the reviewer’s thoughtful and specific feedback on areas within the manuscript that could be strengthened. To address this focused feedback, we made the following revisions:

- In the “Analysis” section we expanded our presentation of the analytic procedures and addressed a typing error (i.e., “The final set of codes and ~~memes~~ categories were compared and combined into themes”).
- We revised language in the “Analysis” section to be more closely aligned with qualitative methodologies (i.e., replaced “validity” with “the trustworthiness of findings”).
- We revised the “Conclusions” section to revise the language from “right conditions” to “conditions that service consumers and system stakeholders identify with”.

Works Cited

1. Yazdannik A, Yousefy A, Mohammadi S. Discourse analysis: A useful methodology for health-care system researches. *J Educ Health Promot.* 2017 Dec 4;6:111. doi: 10.4103/jehp.jehp_124_15. PMID: 29296612; PMCID: PMC5747223.
2. Denzin NK, Lincoln, Y.S. Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research. In: Denzin NK, Lincoln, Y.S., ed. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Fourth ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.; 2011

VERSION 2 – REVIEW

REVIEWER	CLEMENT NHUNZVI University of Zimbabwe, Rehabilitation
REVIEW RETURNED	09-Oct-2022
GENERAL COMMENTS	Well done. Concerns addressed sufficiently. Care to attend to few suggestions in the attached proof The reviewer provided a marked copy with additional comments. Please contact the publisher for full details.