Reviewer’s report

Title: Community-level influences on women's experience of intimate partner violence and terminated pregnancy in Nigeria: A multilevel analysis.

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Reviewer: Miriam Taegtmeyer

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for asking me to review this interesting manuscript in what is a very difficult and challenging field of research. The paper makes a good argument for further research in the field of violence and gives some recommendations for possible interventions based on its findings in Nigeria. It is a coherent and sound piece of analysis but the addition to scientific knowledge overall is limited. I should say that I am not a statistician but have reviewed the paper from a programme and gender perspective.

Minor essential revisions:

The manuscript is well written and there are very few typos or corrections to the material from an editorial perspective. Page 16 paragraph 3 ‘women's low level of justification’ – was this intended to read women’s level of justification? I have no other comments under the headings minor essential revisions.

The main hypothesis underlying the paper is that aggregated data on the educational level, contraceptive use, mean age at first marriage and justifying wife beating provide a proxy for community attitudes to violence. However the objectives are broader than this and include understanding the relationship between IPV exposure and pregnancy outcome as well as between controlling behaviours and termination in association with IPV. Although the paper is confined to analysis of data from female respondents it makes limited exploration of women’s experiences and it might therefore be better to change the title “Community-level determinants of intimate partner violence and terminated pregnancy in Nigeria”.

The mixture of objectives means that the questions posed by the authors are less clearly defined than they could be. The primary and secondary objectives could come out more clearly just before the methods.

The paper describes a review of secondary data, rather than primary research and the premise underlying the paper that community-level influences are critical to IPV and pregnancy outcome is the least well developed aspect of the analysis. In particular the influence of religion and ethnicity on cultural aspects is not controlled for, yet is key to age at marriage and contraceptive use among other aspects. At times there is confusion between what is seen as a community level influence and what are behaviours resulting from the individual relationships that women find themselves in (and how these are linked).

The discussion is the main area of the paper that could be strengthened. In terms
of structure it would really benefit from some subheadings to make it easier to follow the logical argument and how this is built up. Recommendations for potential interventions could be grouped together rather appearing separately as they do at present.

A number of the findings conflict with the existing literature and also within the data analysis internally and this significance of this is not adequately discussed analytically. For example the issue of control and poor access to contraception leading to higher rates of termination is unclear and the findings are mixed. Are the authors postulating that women are deliberately getting pregnant to avoid IPV and then being forced to terminate or that controlling behaviour means that their fertility is controlled by men who want them to get pregnant and then they terminate?

The limitations section is clear and well written. The authors mention alcohol as a confounder and this could have been discussed in more detail as it has been shown to be a critical determinant in a number of other settings. HIV is also linked to vulnerability and since DHS data are available on knowledge of status is could have been taken into account in the analysis.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests