Author’s response to reviews

Title: Partner support in a cohort of African American families and its influence on pregnancy outcomes and prenatal health behaviors

Authors:

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Response to Reviewers

Reviewer 1:
Reviewer’s report
Title: Partner support in a cohort of African American families and its influence on pregnancy outcomes and prenatal health behaviors
Version: 1 Date: 20 May 2013
Reviewer: Angela Miller

Reviewer's report:
The authors have made a thoughtful attempt to expand upon previously published observations between father involvement and partner support with pregnancy outcomes and prenatal health behaviors.

Discretionary Revisions
1. None

Minor Essential Revisions
Comment 1. There are a number of spelling and grammatical errors throughout the manuscript that need to be corrected (e.g., Background, paragraph 1: “lives births”; last line of background section: “during pregnant among Black women”; Results section, paragraph on Relationship Type: “abuse was a confounder is the association”).

Reply 1. These errors have been corrected throughout the manuscript. They are marked in track changes.

Comment 2. The authors list as a strength their ability to better classify relationship type. The three categories used do go beyond the basic married vs. unmarried classification. However, it may be worthwhile to see if it is possible to further divide the unmarried/non-cohabiting group into those romantically involved vs. those who are no longer in a romantic relationship but the father may maintain an active role, similar to the “visiting” and “just friends” categories used by the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study.

Reply 2. We appreciate the reviewer's suggestion. Unfortunately we do not have the data necessary to further divide the unmarried/non-cohabiting group based on romantic involvement. We hope to collect this data in a future study.

Comment 3. The authors also assume that father involvement is completely dependent on relationship status. As stated in fourth paragraph of Methods section, “...did not have a regular partner or fiancé, thus...questions were not applicable”. This may be true, with the items included in the partner support scale, but may not be true more broadly. Given this analysis focuses on the potentially more nuanced paternal relationships in the African American community, fathers can be involved or provide support without being romantically involved. A better description of the support items would be helpful (see below).
Reply 3. The reviewer raises a good point about support and relationships in the African American community. In this study, women who reported that they did not have a regular partner or fiancé did not complete the portion of the interview that asked about partner support. Therefore, we cannot incorporate those women into the analyses. We modified the text so that it is clear that the partner support questions were not asked of women without a regular partner or fiancé (page 7).

Major Compulsory Revisions
Comment 1. It would be beneficial to the reader if the authors further described their 8-item partner support scale. A description of the types of partner support (material support, household support, etc.), or a list of the questions should be provided. The authors compare and contrast their findings to other studies of involvement. The difference in measures of involvement may very well explain the difference in findings.

Reply 1. We have added additional details about the questions to the methods section and we added a table that details the items included in the 8-item partner support scale. In addition, we modified the discussion (page 10) to explicitly state that differences in defining and measuring partner/father involvement may explain differences in study results. It now reads:

"Our large study of low income Black women did not find any associations between relationship type or perceived global partner support with preterm birth, low birth weight, or maternal health behaviors. These findings agree with some, but not all previous studies, although many used different indicators of partner or father involvement than used here. Furthermore, within studies, findings may vary depending on how partner or father involvement is defined. Differences in defining and measuring partner or father involvement may explain discrepant results."

Comment 2. The study enrolled women both pre- and postnatally. The authors do not state how many women were enrolled at each of the time points, and it is unclear if the authors evaluated differences in women enrolled at the different time points. In the description of data collected, it seems that the same information may not have been collected from women in both subsets.

Reply 2. The women enrolled postpartum were given a longer interview that incorporated the information captured by the 2 interviews administered to women enrolled prenatally. Some questions in the interview were asked about specific time periods, thus the postnatal interview asked about measures for the duration of the pregnancy. In the case of questions used in the analyses for this manuscript (the eight item scale described in Reply 1 above), this scale was asked in a general way, not with regard to a time period in pregnancy, for both the prenatally and postpartum enrolled women. For the women enrolled prenatally, this scale was on the prenatal interview.
We have modified the methods section on page 6 to better describe the timing and recall periods for these interviews.

Approximately half of the women were enrolled prenatally (54.7%) with the remaining being enrolled postnatally (45.3%). Timing of enrollment did not differ by relationship type (p=0.81). Timing of enrollment did differ by partner support status, as might have been expected given that women enrolling postpartum had late or no care by design, but controlling for timing of enrollment did not impact our effect estimates. We have added these results to the manuscript.

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published. We have endeavored to correct grammatical and spelling errors.

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I have a non-financial competing interest in relation to this paper. I recently completed my doctoral dissertation (May 2013), on paternal involvement during pregnancy and preterm birth, though my analyses used different measures of paternal involvement and support. In June 2012, I engaged in email conversations with Dr. Misra regarding this manuscript, and received a confidential draft by email. I did not read the paper at that time, and declare that I have provided an unbiased review of the paper.
Reviewer 2:
Title: Partner support in a cohort of African American families and its influence on pregnancy outcomes and prenatal health behaviors

Version: 1 Date: 29 May 2013
Reviewer: Mahmooda Khaliq

Reviewer's report:
The article looked at partner involvement, defined by relationship type and involvement as reported by mother, to discover impact on pregnancy outcomes (i.e. preterm birth, low birth weight).

Abstract:
The abstract is well written. It provides the research question at the beginning and builds on it through each of the sections of the abstract.

Introduction:
The introduction does a great job of presenting existing research and brings up issues of contention. In addition, it builds up to the research questions and also provides an overview of research implications.

Minor Essential Revision
Comment 1. how come “Black” is capitalized in the writing, whereas “white” is not capitalized? I am uncertain about the rationale and wanted to bring this to your attention.

Reply 1.
This is the accepted approach taken by scholars in a number of disciplines who study these populations as well as the community. This is consistent with our prior publications (see our Feb 2010 editorial in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology.) Please see the editorial (http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/_latimes-why_im_black.htm) which does an excellent job delineating this usage.

Methods:
Comment 1. A very detailed methods section with most questions addressed. Thank you for providing the psychometric properties for the scales. Additionally, I liked the explanation defining the non-responders.

Reply 1. We thank the reviewer for the kind words.

Comment 2. Discretionary Revision I would add a sentence indicating why prevalence ratio was selected over Odds Ratio. A reference to the commonality of the outcome, etc… could be used as an explanation.
Reply 2. We have updated the methods section to include a statement that explains why we chose to use prevalence ratios as opposed to odds ratios. The additional text reads:

“Some of our outcomes do not meet the rare disease assumption of logistic regression; therefore prevalence ratios as opposed to odds ratios were calculated.”

Comment 3. Minor Essential Revision: Could you give an explanation for the range of the “Family Resource Scale,” since I am unfamiliar I have no idea how to make sense of the number given in table 1.

Reply 3. We have added additional information to the description of the family resource scale in the methods section. Specifically, we added details about the response choices, the theoretical range and the meaning of high vs. low scores. The text now states:

The Family Resource Scale is a 25 item instrument assessing adequacy of resources across several dimensions, including time and money needed for necessities (e.g., rent, heating) as well as for non-necessities (e.g., toys, vacation, restaurant meals) [17, 18]. For each item, study participants indicated how often they had enough resources (on a five-point scale from ‘almost always to almost never’) during the past year with high scores reflecting inadequate resources (theoretical range 25-125).

Results/Discussion:
Comment 1. Both sections were well developed and provided the necessary information. They presented the information, gave an explanation, addressed strengths and limitations, gave implications and the next steps for the study.

Reply 1. We are glad that the reviewer found the results section well developed and informative.

Comment 2. Minor Essential Revision: For the first research question on relationship type – I would ask that the PR along with the CI are provided in the sentence. This was done for partner support but not for the relationship status. In this way, one does not have to refer to the table but has it in front of them. You may want to consider the same for some of the other variables.

Reply 2. We have updated the text to include the PR and CI in several places in the manuscript text as suggested (see pages 9 and 10).

Table 1:
Comment 1. Minor Essential Revision: You may want to make a reference to the significant p-values (i.e. put an asterisk
next to the significant ones and then put a footnote indicating what the asterisk signifies.)

Reply 1. *We added an asterisk to the significant maternal/infant characteristics and used a footnote to indicate what it means.*

Table 2:
Comment 1. Minor Essential Revision: In the title, I do not believe you need “selected” before pregnancy

Reply 1. *We deleted the word "selected" from the title as suggested.*

Figure 1:
Comment 1. Discretionary Revision: In my opinion this figure does not add value to the manuscript.
Overall, the authors did a great job of setting up the research question and providing the results and discussion. One of the strengths of this paper is how the authors situate the research within the context of current and future research. It is done in such a fashion that I have comprehensive overview of the field without having to dig out the information.

Reply 1. We prefer to keep the figure. The mean score on the partner support scale may be useful for designing future studies that seek to use similar scales.

**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