Reviewer's report

Title: Acceptance of routine inquiry for intimate partner violence: a mixed method study

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Reviewer: Amy Bonomi

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This study used a mixed-method approach to examine the acceptability of screening for intimate partner violence among German women in the antenatal period. This critically important topic has been understudied, to date, within German samples. A modified version of the Abuse Assessment Screen—a well-validated measure—was used to assess experiences of physical, sexual and psychological abuse during and after pregnancy. Questions were also asked as to whether women felt doctors should ask pregnant and non-pregnant women about abuse experiences. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 7 women in their homes, after they indicated experiences of intimate partner violence and included their contact information on the surveys. Physicians approached all women on an in-patient maternity ward 1 to 7 days after delivery and asked for their participation; the response rate for completed questionnaires was 73% (401/552). The authors have undertaken an important study. However, there are several issues that must be addressed.

Abstract:

- Please specific the directionality of the associations reported in the results; the following sentence doesn’t give the reader a sense of directionality: “…Acceptance of screening for intimate partner violence during antenatal care was significantly associated with women’s experiences of child sexual abuse, their level of education, age, marital status and smoking during pregnancy …”
- The conclusion statement in the abstract sounded more like screening recommendations than direct inferences from the study findings: “Screening for intimate partner violence is acceptable if done by trained providers in a professional manner. Until adequate training is in place, health care providers need to be aware of the prevalence and health consequences of violence during pregnancy.”

Introduction:

- This sentence requires a reference: “…International studies on intimate partner violence during pregnancy show a prevalence of one to 26 percent for physical violence [INSERT REFERENCE HERE], with most studies conducted in Europe finding a prevalence of one to five percent [2-4]…”
- Similarly, is there a reference for this statement: “…These detrimental health effects have led to international discussions and recommendations that health care professionals should screen for intimate partner violence during general
health care visits…”
• In addition to the antenatal period providing a sure point of contact for screening, I believe there is also literature showing an increase both in the risk of intimate partner violence and in the severity of violence experienced during and immediately following pregnancy. Please include some of that literature here.

Methods:
• Please provide rationale regarding why the sociodemographic factors analyzed in the study were important from a theoretical perspective, using extant literature. For example, why would smoking (or not smoking) be hypothesized to relate to whether women accept (or don’t accept) screening for intimate partner violence? How would the other demographics be hypothesized to relate to screening, as well?
• Please provide rationale for why the screening questions were pre-tested at a homeless women’s shelter if they were intended for pregnant women.
• Please include reliability/validity data on the German language version of the Abuse Assessment Screen.
• For the qualitative portion of the study, more details are needed regarding 1) The rationale for undertaking the qualitative study – why was that portion of the study undertaken and what was the objective; 2) The stem questions for the qualitative interviews. What was asked of women, and what were the probe questions; and 3) How the qualitative analysis was done. What interpretive framework was used for the analysis and why? I see some of that information is included in the analysis description; however, more description is needed when first introducing the qualitative component.
• On the analysis description, why would chi-square tests, Fishers exact tests and independent sample t-tests be needed to analyze the acceptance of screening for intimate partner violence? Please specify the cross variables you considered in these analyses.

Results:
• This summary sentence from the Discussion section should also appear in the Results section: “Overall, acceptance of screening for intimate partner violence during antenatal care was high among women who participated in the maternity ward survey, with 92 percent agreeing to it unconditionally or agreeing under certain conditions …”
• When referring to acceptance of screening efforts, please refer the reader to Table 1.
• I don’t understand these two sentences; please elaborate what is meant by “more likely to accept it under certain conditions…: “…Only women who experienced child sexual abuse were significantly less likely to say that doctors should screen women for intimate partner violence during antenatal care. But they were significantly more likely to accept it under certain conditions compared to women who did not report child sexual abuse …”
• Under the results for “open-ended questions,” the authors suggest that “most women who accepted screening in antenatal care under certain conditions provided further comments on how this should be done.” Please specify the number and percentage of women. Also under this same section, the authors provide numbers of women who provided certain types of explanations, but did not provide numbers of women for the other types of explanations given. Why not? The data from the open-ended questions might be best summarized in a table, so that the reader can get a sense of how frequently certain types of responses were given. Please consider adding a table.

Discussion:

• The authors make a tentative claim as follows: “...This is likely to be related to the high frequency of antenatal care visits, the trust that builds up between the health care provider and the woman and the wish to ensure a safe and healthy pregnancy...” It seems the authors can make this claim more definitively based on the results of their qualitative interview findings.

• These two sentences don’t make sense together: “...Few associations were found with sociodemographic factors and acceptance of screening. There seems to be a need to approach screening with greater care among younger, less educated women and women who smoke during pregnancy...” The authors state that few associations were observed, but then contradict the statement by suggesting that screening must be approached with greater care among younger women, less educated women, and women who smoke during pregnancy...

Related to this, please see my earlier comment about the theoretical motivation for examining the particular sociodemographics in the study; the authors should elaborate upon this in the discussion section.

• The former two sentences are then followed by this sentence: I’m not sure who the authors mean when they say “this population” ... which population ...?: “...Literature suggests that some women feel that screening for violence may have a stigmatizing effect and this may be especially true among this population [16, 17] ...

• This sentence requires a citation: “...The importance of how a doctor should screen women for intimate partner violence has already been acknowledged in the literature...”

General:

There are syntax/grammatical issues that will need to be addressed throughout the manuscript; here are three examples, but there are many others throughout the manuscript:

• On page 3: “... A study by Hellbernd et al, for example, found that 79 percent of women attending an emergency department would accept doctors ASKING ABOUT intimate partner violence [14]. Authors by the same study recommended several screening instruments and support for screening [12]. Apart from that, no empirical work has been conducted in Germany on whether women are more
acceptant (SUGGEST: ACCEPTING) of screening …”

• On page 5: “…Acceptance of screening was significantly higher in antenatal care with 56 percent SUPPORTING IT (n=222), 36 percent (n=140) of women supporting it under certain conditions, and only 8 percent (n=33) being opposed to it …” There are numerous other examples.

• On page 7: “…All seven women believed that antenatal care is a good time to screen women for intimate partner violence due to the greater trust and better relationship they experienced with the doctor, which is a result of the shorter treatment intervals…” I don’t know what this sentence means, and my confusion stems in part from the sentence syntax.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare I have no competing interests.