Author’s response to reviews

Title: Struggling to survive for the sake of the unborn baby: a grounded theory model of exposure to intimate partner violence during pregnancy

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor in Chief,

We hereby re-submit the manuscript MS: 4656316581137952 titled:

Struggling to survive for the sake of the unborn baby: a grounded theory model of exposure to intimate partner violence during pregnancy

First of all we would like to thank you for inviting us to revise and resubmit our manuscript for further review. Now, we have carefully addressed the issues raised in the comments from the reviewer, point by point (attached).

We would appreciate if BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth would consider publishing this manuscript.

Yours sincerely,

Hafrún Finnbogadóttir, PhD
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Title: Struggling to survive for the sake of the unborn baby: a grounded theory model of exposure to intimate partner violence during pregnancy

Version: 2 Date: 19 June 2014

Reviewer: Abigail Hatcher

Reviewer’s report:
This represents important, qualitative work in an under-explored field. The authors do a nice job of synthesizing the research findings. Moreover, the writing is articulate and clear. However, there are several smaller revisions that would strengthen the manuscript and prepare it for publication.

Major Compulsory Revisions
1. Results: Kindly attribute all quotes to a particular woman (using pseudonyms and/or basic demographic description). For example, you might write a direct quote followed by:
- Mathilde, 24 years old, mother of 2

#1. Thank you for your suggestion. We have really discussed this. This sensitive topic raises important ethical and methodological challenges in addition to those challenges that are related to research on human subjects in general. Therefore it’s extremely important that the presentation of our findings does not disclose the identity of the informants who were promised full discretion and confidentiality. There are only 15,000 births annually in the Scania region and we truly think there is a risk of revealing the identity if we follow your proposal despite using pseudonyms. Also, this is one of the reasons why we chose Grounded theory as a method which is not about description, but about explaining what happens in the acquired data and how the situation is handled. However, we have applied codes after each quote.

2. The Results would be greatly improved were additional direct quotes used. This highlights the voices of participants and illustrates the themes nicely.

#2. Thank you for your remark. We have discussed your point of view and our understanding is that the method chosen for analysis of the empirical material is Grounded Theory according to Glaser and it does not encourage to have any quotation at all when building up a theory or theoretical model as in the present study. Nevertheless, we made a little deviation by putting in some quotations to give the reader the authenticity and credibility to the empirical material.

3. Please explain the terms “exposed to mastery” and “destructive togetherness” as these are somewhat confusing phrases for a lay reader.

#3. Thank you for your remark, now we can see this can be better explained. We have revised the text p.13, 274-276 to as follows (yellow marked text).

‘Exposed to mastery’ is a property of ‘Struggling to survive for the sake of the unborn baby’ and demonstrates the destructive togetherness where the perpetrator is very...
dominating and uses psychological, and mostly also physical violence to get his will. The relationship is only on his terms.

4. Discussion: on page 16, rather than using the terms “sub-core” and “core”, could the authors rather describe their analytical conclusions using layman’s terms? What do these findings tell us practically and theoretically about IPV in pregnancy?

#4. Thank you for your suggestion. The text you refer to on page 16 is written to explain the theoretical model which has been developed. We should have in the first place referred to the figure 1 already after the first sentences. However, we also understands that it’s important to be clearer for the lay reader.

Now, we have referred to the figure in the first sentence, revised and extended the text a little bit, all to be clearer.

P.17-18, L.357-377(yellow marked text)

In this grounded theory study a core category derived from the empirical data emerged: ‘Struggling to survive for the sake of the unborn baby’ (Fig. 1) which means that the main concern for the survivors are to survive the pregnancy for the sake of their unborn baby. Also, it explains how the survivors handled their difficult situation. In practice this knowledge is very important for clinically working midwives and other health care providers. For example, in fact violence–exposed pregnant women are prone to stay in the relationship during pregnancy in order to protect their unborn baby. Also, signs of anxiety, stress and sleeplessness can be indicators of domestic violence. The social behaviors that are demonstrated by the theoretical model do not represent a linear process, but rather a process that moves back and forth between the three sub-core categories, all of which are interrelated. ‘Trapped in the situation’ explains how the pregnant women felt when trapped in the relationship. The initial development of the relationship was included in this sub-core category. The women can’t find the way out of this destructive relationship because of the pregnancy and lack of social support. In practice the midwife can in a natural way be the survivors social support during the pregnancy. However, the first step is to disclose the violence. ‘Exposed to mastery’ explained the destructive togetherness whereby the perpetrator’s behavior jeopardizes the safety of the woman and the unborn child. This phase was chronic during the relationship, and the violence increased as the pregnancy advanced. ‘Degradation process’ explained the survivor’s gradual degradation as a result of the relationship with the perpetrator and was connected to ‘Exposed to mastery’ and constantly reiterated in every new situation. However, all three sub-core categories with categories are properties of the core category ‘Struggling to survive for the sake of the unborn baby’ (Fig. 1).

Minor Essential Revisions

5. Intro: on page 3, “a Swedish interview study” should be changed to “a Swedish qualitative study”
#5. We have changed the word interview to qualitative on page 3, line 51 (marked with yellow colour)

6. The authors might consider starting a new paragraph at the phrase starting, “However, lack of consensus…”

#6. Thank you for your remark, but we like to keep the text as we are still discussing the complexity of screening for domestic violence during pregnancy or not.

7. Ethical Considerations: Should be “verbal consent,” not “oral consent”

#7. Thank you for your observation. We have changed this on p.9 line 171 (marked with yellow colour).

8. Results: Kindly indent any quote over 40 words (I believe that is the BMC Pregnancy requirement, but may be mistaken). 

# 8. Thank you for your comment. Although, we can’t find he requirement of limitation of words of 40 in one quote. However, we have reduced the text as demonstrated in following three quotes without destroying the essence. The quotes are marked with yellow colour.

P.11, L.220-222
“He leaned over the table and started to hyperventilate. I managed just in time to leap to the side so the table flew right into the wall… I was so scared. He started to scream and howl and I’m like between the wall and … the wall is here and he just…. I am crying and I can only think about my belly.” (I:6)

P.12, L. 239-242
“Of course, my future was lying there inside me, so I mean but in reality I felt like I couldn’t go on (said with great emphasis) because I felt so awful…. But I had no choice. You can’t just say, I have had enough, really, because I am the one carrying this responsibility, I am carrying this life, I can’t do anything except try to keep going on”(I:4)

P.16. L. 333-337
“I wanted to leave him, but then I wanted to give him a chance, maybe the birth would calm him down, when he got the chance to hold the baby in his arms, maybe he would come to realize that … I hoped somehow that he would be overcome with some sort of fantastic feeling of love… (it was) the last hope, the last tiny shred of hope that when he became a father, then he would … if anything was going to calm him down, it would be that.” (I:6)