Author's response to reviews

Title: Controlling behavior, power relations within intimate relationships and intimate partner physical and sexual violence against women.

Authors:

Diddy Antai (theangelstrust.nigeria@gmail.com)

Version: 2 Date: 29 April 2011

Author's response to reviews: see over
**Response to Reviewers**

**Reviewer 1 (Ahmed)**

Title: Controlling behavior, power relations within intimate relationships and intimate partner physical and sexual violence against women.

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 16 December 2010  
**Reviewer:** Farah Ahmad  
**Reviewer's report:**

**A. Minor comments:**

**Abstract:**

1- The ‘background’ section should specify that Nigerian context.
2- In the ‘method’ section, the author immediately start with the analysis. It is important to first describe the cross-sectional survey they used examined by secondary analysis and the types of variables examined.

**Author response:**

1. The ‘Nigerian context “has been specified in the background section as the reviewer requested.
2. The description of this cross-sectional survey has been provided in the ‘method’ section as the reviewer requested.

**Introduction:**

3- Para 1: in the last sentence, the author states that “being controlled by an intimate partner and the use of emotional threats are highly injurious behaviors that warrant as much focus as other forms of violence”. Please elaborate on this point using evidence from existing literature.

4. Para 2: It is not clear whether the author is referring to “sex” or “gender” in the sentence starting as “A key element when examining...”

**Author response:**

3. “Being controlled by an intimate partner and the use of emotional threats are highly injurious behaviors that warrant as much focus as other forms of violence [4] [13, 14]”. I believe the statement is quite self-explanatory. It means that control be an intimate partner, as well as the use of emotional threats (these are not identical!) are highly injurious behaviors that warrant as much focus as other forms of violence, such as physical and sexual violence.
The phrase “such as physical and sexual violence” has been added as the reviewer requested, and evidence from existing literature was given previously (see 4, 13, and 14 above).

4. The author is referring to “gender”. The sentence is correct. The sentence “the unequal social distribution of power between sexes…” is indicative of gender.

B. Major comments

Introduction

1- Para 1: The author states that “..most of the existing studies have been carried out in North America, the United Kingdom, and Asia”. There is some important work on ‘controlling behavior’ conducted in the Middle East by MM Haj-Yahia with Jordanian and Palestinian populations.

2. Para 5: The hypothesis should be rephrased because the analysis is based on a cross-sectional survey and the use of word “subsequently” implies that it would be longitudinal.

Methods:

Author response:

1. One work from the Middle East by Haj-Yahia MM (i.e. Haj-Yahia MM: Beliefs about wife beating among Palestinian women: The influence of their patriarchal ideology. Violence Against Women 1998; 4:533-558), has been cited as the reviewer requested.

2. The word “subsequently” has been deleted from the sentence “Women who differ from the societal gender roles may be regarded as challenging their partner’s masculinity as provider or breadwinner; these partners may resort to using control tactics to curtail such “deviant” behavior, which subsequently may result in violence [19]” as the reviewer requested.

Methods

3. Under “measures”, the authors should cite original sources of the scales used.

Author response:

The original source of the scale used (see “Strauss MA: Straus MA: Measuring intrafamily conflict and violence: The Conflict Tactics (CT) Scales. J Marriage Fam 1979, 41:75-88”).

Results

4. The prevalence of physical violence is 15% in the studied sample, consistent with existing studies. My question is about appropriateness of using “logistic regression” and reporting odd ratios for such a high prevalence. The odds ratios may be misleading because they overstate

Author response:
The estimates are presented as relative risk (RR) as the reviewer requested.

Discussion
5- Some parts of the discussion are confusing. For example, (para 2 of this section) the author states that “Controlling behavior by husband/partner and physical and sexual IPV against women was one the strongest risk factors for both physical and sexual IPV,...”. What does the author mean by saying that physical and sexual IPV...was the strongest factor for physical and sexual IPV? Which one is independent variable and which one is dependent variable? They seem same to me.

6- In the conclusion section, the author states that “This study indicated that controlling behavior by husband/partner is a strong risk factor for physical and sexual violence.” I am not that sure about it because the data set is cross-sectional in nature. Also there is debate about it in the literature. Some argue that “controlling behavior” is a precursor of “physical/sexual violence”. Others argue that the two co-exist and are only different forms of partner violence. This should be discussed.

Author response:
5. This sentence has been corrected to “Controlling behavior by husband/partner was strongly associated with for both physical and sexual IPV…”, as the reviewer requested.
6. This sentence has been rephrased to “This study indicated that controlling behavior by husband/partner was strongly associated with physical and sexual violence”, so as to take into consideration the cross-sectional study design, which (as stated in the limitations) makes it difficult to determine causal inference.

In the 2nd paragraph of the “Discussion” section, the author has stated that “This finding is in support of the feminist theory [30], and is also in favor of the hypothesis that controlling behavior is associated with increased likelihood of violence, most likely acting as precursor to violence”, thus responding to the subsequent comment of the reviewer.
Reviewer's report

Title: Controlling behavior, power relations within intimate relationships and intimate partner physical and sexual violence against women.

Version: 1 Date: 15 February 2011

Reviewer: Victoria Frye

Reviewer's report:

Controlling behavior, power relations within intimate relationships and intimate partner physical and sexual violence against women

Review

This paper focuses on a critical public health and social issue, examining the prevalence of controlling behavior and intimate partner physical and sexual violence among a population-based sample of Nigerian women. The paper has several strengths, including the importance of the topic and the large and representative population-based sample. However, there are a number of weaknesses that significantly diminish this reviewer’s enthusiasm for the report. The journal has asked the reviewer to answer several questions about the manuscript; in so doing, I will also attempt to draw out what I see as the problems of the analysis as reflected in the manuscript. Below, I describe the paper’s weaknesses; I would consider all such weaknesses to require “major compulsory” revisions in order to render the paper suitable for publication.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
A. The authors focus their analysis on controlling behaviors and how this phenomenon relates to other forms of partner violence. This is an understudied form of violence outside of the US, thus this is important to document in the Nigerian context.

B. The introduction emphasizes the role of feminist and other theories of violence. The authors emphasize the focus on social structure that feminist theory posits, but the analysis presented focuses very much at the individual level. The authors need to tie the theories within which their research question is contextualized much more tightly to the specific research question asked. Controlling behaviors, according to some, may be a manifestation of an individual-level personality type or psychological factors; how does the
analysis presented reflect the various structurally-focused theoretical frameworks presented by the authors?

**Author response:**
The author has modified the “Introduction” and “Discussion” sections of the manuscript in order to tie the various theories in the theoretical framework more closely to the hypothesis/specific research questions, as the reviewer suggested.

C. In defining the issue, the authors make several statements that either need to be supported with citations to the relevant literature or elaborated upon in other ways. Specifically, the first sentence is simply no longer the case in the United States; there is a growing body of research that posits that there are various “forms” of partner violence, with some that are the result not of the need to control the partner entirely, but of an argument gone out of control (Michael Johnson is the architect of this work that sprang from an attempt to understand better the gender symmetry finding in the US literature.). Later the authors assert that controlling behavior is “highly injurious,” but the citations do not specifically support these statements. In the spirit of accuracy and specificity, the authors ought to attempt to locate a reference that specifically identifies the adverse physical or mental health and/or well-being outcomes of controlling behavior.

**Author response:**
A reference that specifically identifies the adverse physical or mental health and/or well-being outcomes of controlling behavior has been located and added (see … resulting in adverse effects on well-being (Coker et al. 2000)) as the reviewer requested.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

• The authors describe the data sources, measures and analyses well.
• The most significant problem with this analysis is with the time frames surrounding the outcomes and primary independent variable. The outcome is lifetime intimate partner violence; the primary independent variable is current experience of controlling behavior by a partner or husband. Thus, it is not possible to connect directly the exposure to the outcome.

**Author response:**
Controlling behavior is specific to “current or former partner”, which is more or less “lifetime”. This has been made much clearer in the measurement section, as the reviewer requested (same as in reviewer comment 6 below).

3. Are the data sound?
• The DHS dataset is a generally sound one and the authors note that care was taken in conducting research on intimate partner violence and in accordance with WHO standards.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
- Generally, yes. I would have liked to see a reporting of the items endorsed for the controlling behaviors measure. Given how little is known about this form of partner violence in the Nigerian context, such a detailed reported would like be appreciated by readers.

**Author response:**
Items endorsed for the controlling behaviors measure have been included (see Figure 1), as the reviewer requested.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
- This is another major problem of the manuscript. The authors, from the start, use language that implies causality when this is a cross-sectional study where causality cannot be established. Thus, in the abstract’s conclusion they state that “controlling behavior … significantly increases the risk of physical and sexual IPV.” But they cannot establish the direction in the analysis so to conclude that one causes the other (and not vice versa) is simply not supported. The same issue applies to another independent variable assessed “justifies wife beating;” we do not know if this attitude resulted from the lifetime experience of being beaten or is antecedent to experiencing abuse.

**Author response:**
This has been corrected throughout the manuscript so as not to imply causality (same as for the next reviewer comment immediately below), as the reviewer suggested.

- “Throughout the paper, the authors use the term “risk factor” and phrase “increases risk,” but given the problem described above related to the measures and that this is a cross-sectional study where a causal relation may not be established, I think it wise to use a term such as “correlate” or a phrases like “associated with” or “related to” to describe the relations.

**Author response:**
The terms “risk factor” or “Increased/lowered risk” have been replaced with “correlate” and “higher/lower likelihood”, respectively as the reviewer suggested.

- I am also somewhat unclear on how the authors assessed the “cultural context” here. In the Conclusion they state that “the cultural context that they live in predispose them to violence
by conferring power upon men…” How did this paper establish that it is the cultural context that does this?

**Author response:**
For clarity, the word “cultural” has been deleted! In any case, the cultural context referred to the Nigerian context which all its cultural ramifications (e.g. patriarchy, justifying wife beating etc), which definitely plays a significant role in the prevalence and outcome of controlling behavior as well as physical and sexual IPV.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
• Most of the limitations are clearly stated, except they do not note that the major independent variable, controlling behavior, is specific to a current partner, whereas the outcome is a lifetime measure. If this is not the case, then the authors need to make the measurement section much more clear.

**Author response:**
Controlling behavior is specific to “current or former partner”. This has been made much clearer in the measurement section, as the reviewer requested.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
• Generally yes.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
• The title should indicate that it is set in Nigeria or was conducted with a sample of Nigerian women.

**Author response:**
The Nigerian context has been added to the title as the reviewer requested.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
• Yes.