Author's response to reviews

**Title:** The Prevalence of Exposure to Domestic Violence and the Factors Associated with Co-occurrence of Psychological and Physical Violence Exposure: a Sample from Primary Care Patients

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**Author's response to reviews:** see over
Title
The Prevalence of Exposure to Domestic Violence and the Factors
Associated with Co-occurrence of Psychological and Physical Violence
Exposure: a Sample from Primary Care Patients

General Comments

1. The authors strongly believe that the findings of Hines and Douglas [11] have
important implications for family violence researchers and practitioners, especially
considering that both men and women can be victims of severe types and levels of
intimate partner violence, including controlling behaviours. The authors also share the
opinion of Hines & Douglas [11] that public awareness/education campaigns that
address intimate partner violence should be gender inclusive, and that the public
should understand that both genders can be both instigators and recipients. Moreover,
the authors are certain that in research concerning family violence, perpetration and
victimization should be asked of both men and women in all relationships, regardless
of gender. Because domestic violence (either common couple violence or intimate
terrorism) can be perpetrated by both men and women, against both men and women,
it is imperative that researchers reconsider the theory that patriarchy is the foundation
of domestic violence. The determinants should therefore be explored in a gender
inclusive way, which was also the authors’ intention.

2. The reviewer suggested the use of specific terms: instead of “female and male
participants”, she suggested using “women and men”. Since proof reading was
performed after every revision, the authors are comfortable with the language corrections made by a competent proof reader.

3. Throughout the manuscript authors have tried to address the suggestions. However, we would like to repeat the point we already made after the 2nd revision: we were gender sensitive, bearing in mind that DV is a qualitatively different phenomenon for men and women, with different origins, development, and dynamics, which we tried to present and discuss throughout the manuscript. Some suggested analyses were not possible:

If the logistic regression model (Table 3) is calculated for men (n=26) and women (n=101) separately, the sample size for each group will be too small and statistical power will be compromised; therefore comparing the patterns of female and male experience is not feasible.

Abstract

Results

The sentence:

Of 829 patients, 15.3% reported some type of domestic violence experienced during the previous five years; 5.9% reported physical and 9.4% psychological violence.

was broadened to clearly demonstrate gender sensitivity:

Of 829 patients, 15.3% reported some type of domestic violence experienced during the previous five years; 5.9% reported physical and 9.4% psychological violence; of these 19.2% males and 80.8% females had been exposed to psychological violence, while 22.4% men and 77.6% women had been exposed to physical violence.

Regression modelling was not possible separately for women and men; the authors explained that after the 2nd revision. Therefore the changes in this section of the Abstract were not made.
Conclusions

The sentence:
As far as the study design permits, the identified factors associated with both psychological and physical violence exposure could serve as valid guidance for family physicians exploring the prevalence of domestic violence.
was rewritten according to R#1’s suggestion to replace the word “valid guidance” in this context with something like “factors which raise physicians’ attention to patients’ experience with violence”:

As far as the study design permits, the identified factors associated with both psychological and physical violence exposure could serve as determinants to raise family physicians’ awareness when exploring the prevalence of domestic violence.

MAIN TEXT

The Reviewer suggested as a minor, technical point to provide a space between the number and the percentage in the brackets, which was done through the text.

Background

Pg 4-5
As suggested by the Reviewer, the authors added a few sentences about the characteristics of domestic violence exposure among men, to justify why they were included in the study as well (apart from Slovenian studies). By that, the missing aspect was covered.
In the added section, works from Johnson [7,8] and Hines and Douglas [11] were introduced and results from population-based studies [9,10] were presented to illustrate the proportion of male victims of IPV.

When stating “patients in primary health care” authors meant female and male primary care patients, the use was checked by the proof-reader.
The Reviewer also wanted the authors to replace the term “individuals” with a particular gender, or both. She noticed that in the majority of the text it was already improved, but warned us that it remained at some places. Since we believe that the term “individuals” is gender inclusive, we left the proof-reader to consider the language correctness.

Methods

Participants
The reviewer mentioned age 18 years or above as the eligibility criterion – explanation: Age 18 years or above as the eligibility criterion is connected to the rights and obligations of citizens as adults. Under the age of 18, the permission of parent or legal guardian would be needed for a person to participate in the survey. People under the age of 18 are not family medicine attendees according to Slovenian legislation and health policy, they are covered by paediatricians. To be completely clear, the sentence:

A random sample of general practice attendees, aged 18 years and above …

was rewritten:

A random sample of general practice attendees, who are aged 18 years and above…

The reviewer suggested to make sure that is it clear that both women and men were included in the study sample. Therefore the sentence:

A random sample of general practice attendees …

was broadened:

A random sample general practice attendees regardless of gender …

The relevant ethical committee approved the study protocol and the sentence:

The National Medical Ethics Committee of the Republic of Slovenia approved the protocol of the study.
Procedure
The Reviewer noticed that the first 1.5 sentences, as a justification of the procedure, should not be placed in the Method, but rather somewhere in the Introduction (especially since it is not clear whether patients were asked about violence because of the data collection, or an intervention, or both).

The authors believe that the sentences from the previous version of the manuscript:

Many experts in the field of violence recognition have identified that a direct approach to violence screening is the most effective [8,22; 3rd revision: 14,28]. Inspired by this, although considering that there is insufficient evidence to support domestic violence screening in health care settings [12; 3rd revision: 18], in our study eligible patients were asked to answer questions about their exposure to psychological or/and physical violence, and to state the perpetrator and the frequency of exposure.

properly describe the justification of the procedure, but nevertheless, to clearly explain the aim of the survey, the wording was changed:

... in our study eligible patients were asked to answer questions about their exposure to psychological or/and physical violence, and to state the perpetrator and the frequency of exposure with the aim of assessing the prevalence, perpetration and victimization of domestic violence in primary care attendees.

Measures
The Reviewer warned us against the citation of the reference [25, 3rd revision: 31] as a basis for constructing the questionnaire. She emphasized that this reference is a literature review, the most up-to-date one related to violence against women, but not the one where the questionnaire designs are discussed.

Explanation:
As it was stated in the previous (Procedure) section of the manuscript:
The second part of the survey was addressed to the GPs themselves; the questions related to the factors shown to be associated with exposure to domestic violence in previous Slovenian studies in primary care [18,19; 3rd revision: 24-5], and other generally accepted risk factors (Heise and Garcia-Moreno [25; 3rd revision: 31]). The authors referred to the factors shown to be associated with exposure to domestic violence in previous Slovenian studies in primary care, and other generally accepted risk factors – we did not refer to the questionnaire construction process, but to the determinants which have already been proven to be associated to DV exposure, regardless of gender.

At the beginning of the Measures section, it was stated:

A Domestic Violence Exposure Questionnaire, derived from the work of Heise and Garcia-Moreno [25], was constructed and tested in previous studies in Slovenian primary care [18,19] (see Additional File 1).

To be completely on the safe side and to avoid any misunderstandings, the sentence is now clarified:

A Domestic Violence Exposure Questionnaire, mostly derived from the work of Heise and Garcia-Moreno [31], was constructed and tested in previous studies in Slovenian primary care [24-5] (see Additional File 1).

The authors feel confident that the wording needs no further corrections.

Data Analysis

The Reviewer stated that the criterion for determining variables to be used in multivariate regression modelling is currently missing.

Explanation:

All variables from the questionnaire were included in the modelling process. According to this, the sentence:

Multivariate binary logistic regression analysis was used to determine the factors associated with exposure to both psychological and physical violence.

was rewritten:
Multivariate binary logistic regression analysis was used to determine the factors associated with exposure to both psychological and physical violence; the modelling included all the variables from the questionnaire (see Additional File 1).

Data Analysis

The sentence:
Multivariate binary logistic regression analysis was used to determine the risk factors for the shift from psychological violence to physical violence.

was rephrased:
Multivariate binary logistic regression analysis was used to determine the factors associated with exposure to both psychological and physical violence.

Results

The Reviewer wondered if in the first paragraph, ‘the majority (702, 84.7%)’ referred to women or men, and asked us to segregate the data.

Since the gender structure is described on page 12:

Of these, 15(19.2%) males and 63(80.8%) females had been exposed to psychological violence, while 11(22.4%) men and 38(77.6%) women had been exposed to physical violence. The domestic violence victims were mostly women (p<0.001) and aged up to 35 years (p=0.001).

The authors believe that this is sufficient to present the sample in the gender sensitive manner.

Table 1. The Reviewer wanted us to provide a strong rationale as to why physical violence as a category to-stands-alone is missing, and is always joined with psychological violence. She wondered whether the co-occurrence was the case for both women and men.
As it was already possible to check in Table 1 in the previous version of the manuscript, the co-occurrence of both psychological and physical violence exposure was presented for male and female participants. To be completely clear the sentence:

*The victims of physical violence were all exposed to psychological violence.*

was added.

The frequency of **co-occurring physical and psychological domestic violence exposure in male and female participants** and its perpetrators is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Reviewer noticed that it is not clear what the figures 0.057, 0.456 and 0.002 mean. The statistical significance (p) was added within the Table 2 (marked yellow).

Factors Associated with exposure (...)

The Reviewer asked to explain how we come up with the “correctly identified cases of physical violence”.

Explanation: The proportion of correctly identified cases of physical violence in the regression model was 76.3 % (sensitivity), and of psychological violence was 77.5 % (specificity).

Therefore the wording in the section:

**Factors Associated with Exposure to Psychological and Physical Violence: A Multivariate Regression Model**

Table 3 shows the characteristics of victims exposed to both psychological and physical violence within a family. The proportion of correctly identified cases of physical violence in the regression model was 76.3%, and of psychological violence was 77.5%.

was rewritten to respond to R#1’s question:

**Factors Associated with Exposure to Psychological and Physical Violence: A Multivariate Regression Model**

*Table 3 shows the characteristics of victims exposed to both psychological and physical violence within a family. The sensitivity and specificity in the modelling process were 76.3 % and 77.5 % respectively.*
Factors Associated with Exposure to Psychological and Physical Violence: A Multivariate Regression Model

The Reviewer asked to state in the title of the Table 3 that it is the model built for women, and to avoid writing statistical results in the title.

Table 3 shows the characteristics of victims (regardless of gender) exposed to both psychological and physical violence within a family. The statistical results were moved from the title.

The Factors Strongly Associated with Exposure to both Psychological and Physical Violence

The Reviewer wanted to know, what the gender of 14 people with a history of an employment was.

To meet this demand, the sentence:

There were 14 people with a history of unemployment …

was broadened:

There were 14 people with a history of unemployment (3 men (0.9 %) and 11 women (2.2 %)) …

Discussion

The reviewer suggested that the points mentioned above (gender sensitivity) have to be also emphasized in the Discussion.

The Authors are confident that the Discussion section is written in a gender sensitive manner.

The gender inclusiveness was emphasized by the added sentence:

All of the male victims in Hines and Douglas study [11] indicated that they had sought help of some form; it is obvious that training for members of the caring professions should include information about men’s IPV victimization. Systematic research and education in this direction is also necessary in the field of family medicine.

Language corrections were performed by Justi Carey B.Sc. B.A.