Reviewer’s report

Title: Cross-sectional Prevalence Survey of Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration and Victimization in Canadian Military Personnel

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Reviewer: Kristin Vanderende

Reviewer’s report:

This paper addresses IPV perpetration and victimization in the military setting, an important public health issue. The manuscript is well written and well organized. The question posed by the researchers is well-defined, and the methods are appropriate and well-described.

Major compulsory revisions

1. While the authors have included both men and women in the sample, there needs to be a more detailed discussion of gender and IPV, and how the study findings can be interpreted in light of the literature on this topic. Please see Langhinrichsen-Rohling (2010) and Johnson (2010) for discussion of the controversies in this literature. Specifically, the authors should address how the survey instrument, time period for reporting of IPV, and limiting the response to the current relationship may impact the study findings. The authors should also address issues related to common-couple violence versus intimate terrorism (Johnson 1995, 2010), bi-directional violence, and acts of self-defense. I would also suggest showing perpetration/victimization items shown in Table 3 and in figures 1 & 2 stratified by gender.

2. In Table 8, the N varies across all models. If because of missing data, were there any significant differences in demographic characteristics between those included and those excluded from the model? Also in Table 8, the authors excluded variables from the model if they did not have a univariate relationship with the outcome. This approach does not take into account possible mediating or moderating effects of these variables, appears to change the sample size across models, and limits the comparability of models, as different covariates are included in each of the four models. A suggested alternate model building approach would be to include the same set of variables in all four models, and include variables, such as marital status and high-risk drinking in final models for theoretical reasons, even if univariate relationships are not statistically significant.

3. The first sentence in the final paragraph - “we did not find evidence of an epidemic of perpetration of severe forms of physical abuse by recently deployed male personnel on their civilian spouses” is problematic. The authors note the limitations to the study, particularly related to the relationship between IPV and deployment, and the potential for confounding. Under-reporting may have been possible due to self-report of perpetration, survey mode (paper), and the
unspecified recall period. Also, this research did not interview partners of deployed male personnel about their experiences of violence. It is quite possible that recently deployed male personnel perpetrate severe forms of physical abuse against their intimate partners but the methodological limitations of the current study, as described by the authors, were limited their ability to address this particular research question. As Johnson (2010) notes, situational couple violence "dominates general survey data, because of the biases of so-called representative survey samples. These biases arise from the little-noted high rates of refusal in survey samples - 40 percent in the much-cited National Family Violence Surveys (Johnson 1995). Because intimate terrorists and their partners refuse to participate in such surveys, the former because they do not wish to implicate themselves, the latter because they fear retribution from their partner, general social survey data include almost not intimate terrorism or violence resistance (Johnson et al. 2008)." (p. 213).

Minor Essential Revisions

Background

1. How are the authors defining IPV? The term IPV is used interchangeably with the term “family violence” which is also not defined.

Survey Instrument

1. Please provide any information on the reliability and validity of the instrument used to measure IPV.

Results/Tables

1. From the information provided in Table 3, there appear to be very few responses to the sexual IPV item (forced into unwanted sexual activity) but exact numbers are not provided because they were so few in number. While my assumption is that responses to this item were included in the construction of the any physical or sexual IPV variable, this is not clear from the text. This raises a related concern regarding the use of the terms “physical and sexual IPV,” “physical or sexual IPV” and “physical/sexual IPV” – all are used by the authors. If the sexual IPV item was included in the construction of this outcome, then “physical and/or sexual IPV” would be most appropriate. Considering the small number of positive responses to the sexual IPV item, however, I would suggest focusing only on physical IPV as an outcome, noting in the text the small number of responses to the sexual IPV item as a rationale for focusing only on the prevalence and correlates of physical IPV.

2. Please include the total sample size in all tables. Also, please address more clearly how missing responses were handled.

Discussion

1. Relationship between marriage and IPV. Since the questionnaire assessed abuse over the life of the current relationship, it is possible that those who were
married had, on average, a longer length of the current relationship than those who were not married. The (possible) longer exposure period for married, as compared to unmarried, individuals may account for the finding of higher risk of experiencing physical and/or sexual IPV.

2. 66% of sample is currently married, yet the authors refer to “understanding their perpetrating spouses will aid . . ” (Implications, p. 25) and “we did not find evidence of an epidemic of perpetration of severe forms of physical abuse by recently deployed male personnel on their civilian spouses” (Conclusion, p. 27). In both instances, the perpetrators and those experiencing violence could be intimate partners as well as spouses.

References:


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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.