Author's response to reviews

Title: Violence against women by male partners and against children within the family: prevalence, associated factors, and intergenerational transmission in Romania

Authors:

   Cornelia I. Rada (corneliarada@yahoo.com)

Version: 4 Date: 12 September 2013

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr Jane M. Dalumpines, Journal Editorial Office

Please find attached the revised version of my previous manuscript “Violence against women by male partners and against children within the family: prevalence, associated factors, and intergenerational transmission in Romania.”

In the following pages are my point-by-point responses to the reviewers.

I also attached a new Certificate of English Editing from Edanz Editing.

I hope that the revisions to the manuscript and my accompanying responses will be sufficient to make my manuscript suitable for publication in *BMC Public Health*.

Details of ethics approval and questionnaires appeared in the previous version.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Cornelia Rada
Francisc I. Rainer Anthropological Institute, Blv. Eroii Sanitari no. 8, Sector 5, Bucharest
Ph, Fax: +40213175072; Mobile: +40728824852
E-mail: corneliarada@yahoo.com

**Response to comment from reviewer 1**

**Comment 1**
Not being able to define quantitative the questions' response options of "Often" and "Occasionally", as perception varies from person to person, is making the whole data analysis superficial, even if the author mention it as a limitation. It is not a limitation. It is a hole in the study's infrastructure.

*Response:*

Thank you for you comment. In response to your dissatisfaction with the Likert scale, I performed the same statistical analyses with dummy dichotomous YES and NO variables, with no degrees of intensity. The dummy variables were obtained by recoding into binary 1 (YES) and 0 (NO) the original ordinal variables. The dummy YES
substituted for Often and Occasionally, and NO was a recoding for Never, so that either violence was present or it was not.

Considering what you suggested, in Table 3, the analyses are performed without degrees of intensity. (Table 3. Violence in childhood and adolescence in the FOO and Agreeing with violence for corrective purposes)

Also, in Table 6, again considering the suggestion that you have made, the analyses are performed without degrees of intensity (Table 6. Types of violence to which women were exposed in the FOP and Violence in childhood and adolescence in the FOO)

Also considering what you suggested, the LCA analysis corresponding to Table 8. (Profiles of beliefs and judgments about violent behavior according to gender, environment and History of violence in the FOO) was made with dichotomous (YES / NO) variables.

The Likert type scale as used in this article is a method for measuring attitudes. The criticisms of the Likert type scale are that it measures subjective feelings and that results may change depending upon when a person takes the test. Despite issues with the scale (there are also controversies about Likert scales being nominal or ordinal), the Likert scale has been widely used since 1932 in worldwide social research, particularly when the limitations it presents are well understood.

Where there were problems in identifying differences between Often and Occasionally or to obtain additional information for analysis, I have therefore used dummy dichotomous YES and NO variables, as in Tables 3, 6, 8 and related interpretations.

Comment 2
The study is done in Romania and is meant to submit to the world's attention the deplorable situation of domestic violence that is going on unnoticed in Romania for a long time. I find no explanation why the author will compare in the "discussion" section the Romanian study findings with the ones of studies done in Norway, the US and Mexico which have different protocols and criteria. (e.g. the Norway study is a prospective study enrolling only pregnant women; the US study finds maybe that the boys are at higher risk of violence than girls but the criteria include wide range of exposure to violence besides family, such as schools, neighborhoods and the study measured the violence exposure of the past-year and lifelong term.

Response:
You are correct. The paragraphs below have been cut as you suggested.

“In the Norwegian Mother and Child Cohort Study, 1999–2009, on 65,393 women, physical abuse was reported in childhood (<18 years) by 4.8%, and it was more commonly reported that the abuse was done by a known perpetrator. The greater proportion of physical violence observed in the Romanian sample than in the Norwegian
survey may be partially due to differences in methodology and sample collection [38].”

“The American National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence, which dates from 2008, investigated 4,549 children and adolescents aged 17 years and younger; it also found that the boys (50.2%) were more likely to be physically assaulted than girls (42.1%) [36].”

“The Norwegian Mother and Child Cohort Study of 1999–2009 on 65,393 women showed that 12.6% had suffered emotional abuse, 5% physical abuse, and 4.6% sexual abuse; it was more commonly reported that the perpetrator was known [38]. The present study found much higher percentages for those types of abuse. In our study, psychological abuse against women by the partner was expressed in almost half of the cases. The prevalence of psychological abuse against women in this Romanian sample is comparable with that over a period of 12 months reported in a rural community in the United States [49]. The prevalence of psychological abuse against women in the present sample is also similar to that over 12-month periods in 15 locations in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Peru, Namibia, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Tanzania, and Thailand [50].”

I am sorry, but regarding the phrase below I do not agree.

“In the present study, controlling behaviour or emotional, physical, or sexual abuse against women by the partner was expressed as having occurred at least once in more than half of the cases. The prevalence of IPV against women found in the present study is comparable with that reported for Mexico.”


Comment 3. The study is of high public health interest for the Romanian society and government and can have a big impact on Romanian public health policies, but for the international public health world is not bringing anything new to the table.

Response:
The merits of this paper are as follows. There are very few English-language studies on the family environment in Romania, and therefore this study fills such a gap. This paper looks at ‘hidden’ violence in Romania, and in doing so it focuses on the general public, i.e., those that may have not even considered domestic violence previously nor sought any assistance.

Also, the study shows the correlation between the description of feelings towards the FOO and exposure to domestic violence within the FOP. Moreover, this paper demonstrates the association between violence exposure in childhood and adolescence in the FOO and belief in the use of violence for corrective purpose.

The three studies presented in the Background section that were done in Romania do not have the same focus or content as my study. I have also not found studies conducted in other countries that deal with what I have mentioned above. The Romanian studies
referred in the background are quite old: 2003, 2004 and 2007. This current study is based on three new studies, done in 2009, 2010 and 2011.

**Comment 4.** I recommend the study to be published in as many as possible medical and public health Romanian Journals, first.

**Response:**
As you have said, “The study is done in Romania and is meant to submit to the world's attention the deplorable situation of domestic violence that is going on unnoticed in Romania for a long time”.

In the global world where we live now, interest in the social problems and research findings in a particular country are not be restricted by geographic borders of that country or nation. The general knowledge of social issues is greatly improved when researchers learns from worldwide experience. I myself learn a lot about violence reading journal articles about this subject written by researchers from different countries and continents.

In this article, we also proposed the use of the LCA approach to assess the violent behaviour as a novelty element. See the merits of this paper on page 4.

I believe that this study should be published in BMC Public Health for several reasons:

- It is a prestigious journal that can be accessed free of charge. This increases the opportunities to learn about the public health problems in Romania. For example, the law on domestic violence in Romania was changed just because the situation in Romania was made public abroad. This change of the law has been made to harmonize the laws of Romania with the European Union and non-European developed countries. The European Union continuously monitors the respect for human rights. Violence against the human person is a violation of his rights.

- Presentation of national situations with regard to sensitive areas such as STDs, HIV, domestic violence, etc. (both knowledge and practice) is found in many articles.

- The missions of WHO, UNICEF, etc are among other things to support less developed countries in solving these problems. Therefore, I consider it necessary to bring the domestic violence situation in Romania to the attention of world nongovernmental and international governmental organizations. On repeated occasions, experts in the field have met with representatives of national governments to report such thorny issues without important steps being taken.

- Such issues as high population mobility in the labor market, mixed marriages, etc. require international exposure. Hindering knowledge about public health issues at the national level and hiding these problems belong to the communist era. In the current global context, problems considered as merely national in the past have now become international.

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Response:**
The paper has now been professionally edited. I have sent to the Editor a new Certificate of English Editing from Edanz Editing. See Acknowledgements.

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

**Response:**
Thank you for this appreciation.

**Responses to comments from reviewer 2**

**Aims**

**Comment 1**
The aims are not clear and somewhat contradictory. On page three the following aim is stated "to identify the prevalence of domestic violence in Romania and associated factors"; However, on the next page different "objectives" are presented which confuses the reader.

**Response:**
Thank you for this observation. I hope that the new formulation has now expressed more clearly the objectives and the merits of study. See pages 3-4.

**Comment 2**
The rationale of the study is not clear. According to the background, three major studies have already been conducted about this issue in Romania. It is not clear what is this study adding to the current knowledge available in the country.

**Response:**
Thank you for this remark. I hope that I have clearly understood your comment and have more precisely formulated the rationale and value of my study.

“The merits of this paper are as follows. There are very few English-language studies on the family environment in Romania, and therefore this study fills such a gap. This paper looks at ‘hidden’ violence in Romania, and in doing so it focuses on the general public, i.e., those that may have not even considered domestic violence previously nor sought any assistance.
Also, the study shows the correlation between the description of feelings towards the FOO and exposure to domestic violence within the FOP. Moreover, this paper demonstrates the association between violence in childhood and adolescence in the FOO and belief in the use of violence for corrective purpose.”

The three studies presented in the Background section that were done in Romania, although similar, are now somewhat dated, as they are from 2003, 2004, and 2007. The current study is based on three new research studies done in 2009, 2010, and 2011. In addition, I have not found studies conducted in other countries that deal with the same topics described above.
Comment 3
The terms family of origin and family of procreation are confusing. Please, define them clearly in the methods section or before.

Response:
Thank you for noticing this need. I have clarified the terms in the section “Domestic violence in Romania” on page 2.

Sampling and design
Comment 4
It is not clear if three separate studies were conducted or a panel study, following the same population in three rounds was done.

Response:
There are three separate studies. See Acknowledgements. To avoid possible confusion, I have changed the text; see at “Design and sampling”, page 4.

Data collection
Comment 5
The way the data was collected calls for collection bias because some subjects were asked by an interviewer whereas others filled the questionnaire by themselves.

Response:
Thank you for your observation. This comment has been addressed by acknowledging this limitation; see “Limitations of the study” section, pages 22-23.

Comment 6
In addition, it is said that a 10 months period between the women and the men data collection was done. This also raises issues about recall bias. Both this biases are not discussed in the limitation of the study.

Response:
I have written the following : “a time delay of 6 to 10 months for each partner was used when surveying couples”

The time spent collecting data within a research field can be over an entire year. There is always the possibility that there could be a bias as a result of a difference between those who respond in the first days or months and those who respond towards the end. I do not think that this should be reported as a limitation. This is not about biological analysis or about opinions measured in a political survey at one fixed point in time, especially in the case of these questions, where persisting modes of behavior over time or remote past memories are being queried.

If you insist, I will specify this in the next review session
Measurements

**Comment 7**
a) The study outcomes are not defined clearly and b) some of the descriptions instruments used are too extensive. This section need to be clarified.

a) *Response:*
I'm sorry but I do not understand the meaning of this comment: “Measurements: ‘The study outcomes are not defined clearly’.

Do you mean in the Results section?
I have made some changes there which I hope will address your concerns.

b) *Response:*
You are perfectly right. All the questions that you put to me during the first and the second reviews have made this section very long. Perhaps my answers should have been more extensive in the cover letter and less in the manuscript.

I have now shortened the Methods section by more than one page.

**Comment 8**
The a) results and b) discussion are too extensive and difficult to follow.

a) *Response:*
The Results section was divided into sub-sections as you requested. I have followed point by point the 5 objectives of the study. Because the study has many objectives, the resulting text has required a corresponding size. Any redundant information has been reduced as much as possible.

b) *Response:*
The Discussion section was shortened by almost one page.


It is a good reference for the research that I have now in progress.
Please tell me if you are one of the authors or is it just a coincidence of names?
If yes, please could I ask you some information?

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

*Response:*
The paper has now been professionally edited. I have sent to the Editor a new Certificate of English Editing from the Edanz Company. See Acknowledgements.

Comment 9

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

*Response:*
As this reviewer does not feel qualified to assess the statistics I suggest that the decision regarding a statistical review is based upon the comments from reviewers 1 and 3 who have confirmed this to be unnecessary. “**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician”.

I nevertheless understand your prudence and I have now added to Acknowledgements the contribution regarding the statistical analysis of two specialists.

**Responses to comments from reviewer 3**

Dear Dr. Stenbacka,
I would like to thank you very much for all the work you have done to improve my article. I also appreciate your open and fair attitude about my manuscript. This attitude has helped me a great deal to continue on. I will remain grateful.

**Reviewer:** Marlene Stenbacka
**Report:**
The authors have addressed most comments adequately and the manuscript is ready for publication.
**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field
**Quality of written English:** Acceptable
**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.