Reviewer's report

Title: Actor-partner effects associated with experiencing intimate partner violence or coercion among male couples enrolled in an HIV prevention trial

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Reviewer: Paul Hewson

Reviewer's report:

This is a well written article, and is clearly on an important topic. The problem is the small sample size, and I believe this is actually a subset analysis which is always a risky business. I'm not sure much of the inferential results have the validity claimed. Unless I'm mistaken, this is not a study "190 individuals (95 couples)", it's a study of a much larger number of individuals from whom this subset has been selected after other analyses have taken place.

I'll let the subject matter experts comment on the point, but given the inclusion criteria seem to include "reported willingness to complete a 3 month follow-up survey" I don't understand how one of the outcomes could logically have been partner coercion in completing study. Doesn't this put these respondents outside the inclusion criteria and hence they should not form part of the dataset for analysis.

Major revisions.

The article needs to be rewritten with the CONSORT statement in view. Presumably the primary outcome of the parent study is the one powered for analysis. I accept that the data are somewhat complex to describe any other way, but feel subset analyses cannot be presented as if it were designed to see whether education levels were associated with IPV. I don't see how any findings from this study can be anything other than speculative.

For myself, I would have preferred to do a complete analysis of the dataset, and examine whether the subset examined in this paper clearly differed from the rest of the population.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I have no competing interests