Reviewer’s report

**Title:** Intimate partner violence against women in rural Vietnam: different socio-demographic factors are associated with different forms of violence. Need for new intervention guidelines?

**Version:** 1 **Date:** 16 July 2007

**Reviewer:** Jacquelyn Campbell

**Reviewer’s report:**

General - important article - adds significantly to knowledge

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Abstract: lines 12-13 & throughout manuscript -rather than speaking in terms of “risk” of IPV, more accurate and comparable with other literature is lifetime and past year “prevalence” – I see the justification for the risk terminology on p. 6 but it is not persuasive – it either needs to be explained more fully and persuasively or dropped – the appropriate terminology for the occurrence of IPV was considered extensively by epidemiologists and IPV experts by CDC (Saltzman et al 1999) & WHO prior to the multi-country study – if these authors want to differ from those panels of experts in terminology, much justification with citations and explanation is needed. If the “prevalence” terminology is the issue, then the lifetime and past year “occurrence” language on p. 9 is preferable to “risk”.

Prevalence of combination of physical and/or sexual violence or physical alone is important to have in the abstract – making it comparable to most other studies & more important than combined physical & psychological – are the risk factors for psychological abuse given the risk factors for psychological abuse alone? If so, please make that clear – and I would argue the terminology psychological “abuse” is preferable and more accurate than psychological “violence”

pp. 5-6 – more description is needed about this area of Vietnam – are the norms highly patriarchal, is polygamy common? What are educational levels for men and for women?

Why not use the WHO definition for IPV? Using the word violence as part of the definition of IPV is not defining the term.

p. 7 - measures: were “back” translation strategies also used? Was conceptual equivalence considered? Especially challenging to get culturally equivalent and appropriate are the sexual violence questions – were those considered specifically in the focus groups? Which items were removed? What replaced them to address that particular concept?
p. 8 – lifetime occurrence of any violence – therefore means one insult happening to a woman once from a partner constitutes violence – this is a pretty extreme definition of “violence” and goes beyond what most of the public would see as violence – thus the preference by many of talking about psychological abuse separately and not calculating those with psychological abuse only as part of the violence category – your results – with different risk factors - support thinking about the two as different concepts – both harmful but DIFFERENT as in your conclusions

pp. 9-10 The authors are to be commended for using the WHO ethical guidelines – did that include extensive training of the interviewers as recommended? Did it include bringing an alternate survey for other household members?

p. 9 – why .4 for correlation coefficient cutoff – needs some citation for justification

p.10 – is the one child policy per wife/per couple or per male?

Results – As stated above – the prevalence of lifetime and past year physical abuse alone and physical &/or sexual (32.7% lifetime & 9.2% past year) is far more important to report here than the prevalence of all 3 combined and is what should be emphasized here, the first paragraph of the discussion, & in the abstract. This is what is comparable internationally as you actually present in your discussion section. Table 2 is excellent – one of the best full prevalence of IPV tables I have seen. The table well illustrates the peril of expressing overall prevalence of IPV as including those psychologically abused only – especially those for whom the psychological abuse happened only once – did something to scare her only once counts the same as being repeatedly hit – or even hit once? Also the item 6 under physical is “threaten with or used a weapon.” The proportion of those physically abused who are also sexually abused is also important for comparability with other international studies

The Ven diagram is excellent to present but the %’s for those abused should be added (Figure 1). The risk factor analysis should be for physical &/or sexual versus combined physical and sexual – the tables say physical &/or sexual but page says physical and sexual – but gives the % for physical and/or sexual - be clear

p. 12 & table 3b - Is number of children those of the woman’s only or in the household (counting children from other mothers) – please clarify

p. 13 – please be clear – add - that the contrast on the risk of abuse for more than one wife is not present for psychological abuse “only”

p. 14 – strengths & weaknesses - the prevalence of abuse here is not particularly high – in comparison to what? & where? especially since this kind of study has never been done before in Vietnam there is really no way to make that kind of claim about knowing the interviewer to a certain degree increasing disclosure in this context – therefore eliminate last sentence in this paragraph unless there is
other justification

p. 15 - I agree with reporting both lifetime & past year prevalence because there is evidence of lasting health effects as well as the recall issue

p. 16 – actually the multi-country study and the China study used exactly the SAME definitions of IPV and the same measure (as did this) & the Nicaragua study used very similar definitions and measures. The China study was slightly different methodology but probably most comparable – the differences are probably REAL and reflect cultural and contextual differences. What was the past year prevalence of physical violence in the China study – that would also be very useful to compare. What was the rate of IP sexual assault in China? Again important to make those comparisons – aren’t these two cultures the most similar versus Vietnam and Nicaragua for instance?

p. 17 – marital rape is rarely against the law around the world and even when it is against the law almost never prosecuted yet in the multi-country study high rates of forced sex were reported in many countries – so this explanation is not very persuasive & the above issues should also be presented here – women not being able to refuse husbands’ sexual demands is a very common phenomenon around the world

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Line 15 – “exercised as” – not usual English

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

additional discussion might be in terms of rural settings – for instance those in the multi-country study and Uganda for instance

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests