Reviewer's report

Title: Intimate Partner Violence among HIV Positive Women in Care - Results from a National Survey, Uganda 2016

Version: 0 Date: 15 Apr 2019

Reviewer: Lucky Lawani

Reviewer's report:

COMMENTS TO THE AUTHORS

General comment

This is an interesting reproductive health topic in the care of HIV positive women. However, I have some comments and recommendations which if addressed will improve the quality of the manuscript. I also recommend thorough English editing to enhance the quality of the manuscript.

Abstract

Conclusion: Stated that… "Experiencing IPV was associated with circumstances related to the relationship between the woman and her male partner".

Comment: Be specific on what relationship.

Main text

Introduction: The last paragraph states that…. "We analyzed data from this survey to establish the prevalence of intimate partner violence against women in HIV care and assess the factors associated with experiencing intimate partner violence".

Comment: What knowledge gap do you hope to address and what is novel about the current study?
Methods:

1. The first paragraph states that…”This was a secondary analysis of data from a facility based cross-sectional study that was conducted across the 5 geographical regions of Uganda to assess the uptake of family planning services and establish the unmet need for family planning services among HIV infected women in care”.

Comments: The current study has nothing to do with family planning? This statement contradicts the research question and the last paragraph of the introduction. The focus of this paper was supposed to be on IPV, how come data from unmet family planning needs of patients were used?

2. The authors stated also in the first paragraph that….."A detailed description of the methods including the study sites, sample size determination and sampling procedures have been published elsewhere [13]"

Comments: Since both publications are different, kindly include the details of the methodology used in the current study by highlighting; selection of subjects/sampling procedures, sample size calculation, inclusion and exclusion criteria etc.

3. Line 124-126 stated that…. All eligible women were identified and randomly selected at the sampled health facilities using systematic sampling.

Comments: Provide detailed explanations on how this was done?

Assessment of Intimate Partner Violence:

1. The authors stated that…”For the purposes of this study, the definition of intimate partner violence was restricted to experiencing any physical or sexual violence. A questionnaire was used to assess women's experience of any form of physical or sexual violence by their partner”.

Comments: This approach of not applying the standard definition (World Health Organization) of IPV in the recruitment of subjects will eliminate a large and very significant number of women who experienced IPV and constitute a major drawback and source of bias in the current study. I recommend that women with emotional/psychological violence should be included.
Where and how were the questionnaires administered, especially for those who were accompanied by their partner's, considering the challenges of disclosure under such setting?

2. Line 137-140 stated that….. Participants were also asked about possible predictors such as their partner's age, HIV status disclosure to sexual partner (and whether or not both partners had mutually shared their HIV results), relationship status and HIV status of partner, HIV treatment status (ART versus non-ART and duration on treatment)…….

Comments: How possible was this for those who were accompanied by their partners, especially when a significant proportion of your subjects have not disclosed their HIV status and even treatment to their partner's (as reflected by the high non-disclosure rate in your results)?

IPV and these other assessment/evaluation are best conducted one-on-one with strict privacy and confidentiality assured, otherwise the true situation will never be disclosed or reported?

3. Line 142-144 stated that….The questionnaire was pre-tested to check the suitability of various aspects such as the clarity of the translation, skip patterns and filtering questions.

Comments: How was it pretested, on which group of subjects and what number was used?

Results:

1. Line 177-179 stated that…."This study was based on an analysis of data from 5198 HIV positive women who participated in a survey to assess the unmet need for family planning services among HIV infected women in care".

Comments: I am still of the opinion that the current study has nothing to do with family planning and this statement contradicts the research question which was supposed to be on IPV among HIV positive women in care.

2. Line 185….. "Of the 5198 women that participated in the survey, 1664 (32.1) reported to have experienced physical violence"…..

Comments: 1664 (32.1%).
3. Line 192-193 stated that….. "1491 (48.4%) had experienced some form of intimate partner violence".

Comments: What form of violence does this represent, since only physical and sexual assaults were assessed in the present study?

4. Line 199-203 stated that…. "Women in relationships where the partner was younger were more likely to experience any form of intimate partner violence PRR= 1.43, 95% CI: 1.14-1.79, as were women in relationships where the partner was <10 years older PRR= 1.20, 95% CI: 1.00-1.43, and women in relationships where the partner was ≥10 years older PRR= 1.31, 95% CI: 1.05-1.64".

Comments: This result and its significance are difficult to appreciate, as it is not clear cut. The results show that women who had either younger or older partners (equal/less than 10 years and equal/greater than 10 years) had greater risk of experiencing IPV, indicating that age is not a significant contributor as reported by the authors- The results show that both younger and older partners have higher risks of IPV.

5. Line 203-206 stated that…."Compared with women who did not have any biological children, women with 3-4 biological children were more likely to experience any form of intimate partner violence PRR= 1.27, 95% CI: 1.00-1.59 as were those with 5 or more biological children PRR= 1.34, 95% CI: 1.06-1.71".

Comments: I think the authors should compare those with biological children vs those without biological children, instead of comparing no children vs 3-4 and >5 biological children.
Tables

Table 1:
1. What does -n- indicates?
2. What is the difference between Pentecostal/Born Again/Evangelical and Anglican and protestant?
3. What is the difference between "in relationship but never married" and the group "never married"?
4. Why not classify region of residence as urban or rural?
5. What is significance of owning a radio, mobile phone or bicycle in the current study?
6. What do ART and HC mean? Please indicate full meaning on first use.

Table 2:
1. Table 2 is too congested, kindly edit
2. All is not a variable, do you mean total?
3. What does "any violence" represent? The methodology indicates that this group was excluded. Please indicate what constitute any violence?

Table 3:
1. Just like Table 2, table 3 is also too congested. Can only important variables be considered? Indicate p-values that are statistically significant.
2. What does P indicate?
Discussion

1. Line 272-275 stated that…. "In addition, the lower prevalence of IPV in sero-discordant relationships might reflect the extra support and attention these couples receive in anticipation of the violence compared with their positive concordant counterparts in a setting like Uganda where the prevalence of IPV is already high".

Comments: The message is not clear. It appears you mean that sero-discordant partners get extra support and care as compensation or in anticipation for IPV which will occur? Kindly rephrase to make statement more explicit.

2. Line 286-287 stated that…."excluding emotional/psychological violence and controlling behavior both of which were not assessed".

Comments: So what does any violence in table 2 mean or what constitute any violence? This is a major limitation, as there are likely to be more emotional/psychological torture than physical and sexual assault in the African setting where families/couples are likely to keep their HIV status as a secret to society, making physical violence a red flag to neighbors. In such cases the prevalence of emotional/psychological violence are likely to be concealed and even higher. Therefore, excluding women who experienced emotional/psychological violence is a major flaw.

Conclusion

1. This is too long and contains a lot of irrelevant information; please edit to make conclusion more concise by highlight the key findings and recommendations in one or two sentences.

2. Paragraph 1, line 293-295 reads…."This violence could dampen the attitudes of these women towards seeking care and treatment and thereby retard the likelihood of viral suppression".

Comment: The current study did not assessed or show that women who suffer IPV were less likely to access treatment and care, therefore this cannot be part of the conclusion.

3. Line 295-297 stated that…."Health care workers offering HIV care and treatment services should screen women for intimate partner violence and offer or recommend the appropriate psychosocial or medical assistance".

Comment: The approach used to screen women in the current study is subject to bias due to lack of confidentiality, especially for respondents who were accompanied by their partners. Kindly follow the standard approach for screening women for IPV.
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I recommend additional statistical review

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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