Reviewer’s report

Title: Trends in prevalence and correlates of intimate partner violence against women in Zimbabwe, 2005-2015

Version: 0 Date: 09 Aug 2019

Reviewer: Kalysha Closson

Reviewer's report:

Overall - This is a study using national survey data to look at trends in IPV prevalence and correlates of IPV among a large sample of cohabitating and/or married women. The manuscript adds important data to the literature around prevalence and correlates of IPV and I believe is worth publishing after some recommended revisions to the framing and analysis.

There are a number of areas that should be revised from grammar and punctuation

Abstract

In the abstract it would be important to note which types of IPV were assessed. Also, it is unclear whether or not a trend analysis was conducted to see if changes in prevalence seen were statistically significant or not

Background

1. The first sentence could be broken into two sentences one stating a definition of IPV and one stating global prevalence

2. In the introduction the authors could also discuss Sustainable Development Goal 5 target 2 which aims to end all forms of violence against women by 2030

3. Page 3 line 38- the authors use the term ignorant which I would consider re-framing to 'unaware' as the term ignorant has a negative connotation and places blame on women
4. On page 3 the authors end the second in "this further contributes toward their exposure". This sentence needs further explanation or should be tied into the next paragraph discussing the link between education and vulnerability to IPV.

5. In the introduction after the authors begin to discuss the case of Zimbabwe they mention that IPV rates are 'very high', this should be quantified. If rates are around 35%, in reality this is not much higher than the global prevalence of ~30%.

6. The authors second objective of the research around media exposure is not fully justified in the introduction. I would suggest either removing it from this analysis or incorporating prior research and research gaps around the topic of media exposure and IPV in both global and context specific studies. This second research question is also not mentioned anywhere in the abstract.

Methods

1. It is likely that the question around IPV was limited to only asking women who are cohabitating or married, however this limits the ability to assess any experiences of IPV that women in intimate relationships not living with or married to their partners. In some contexts where marriage is not common (e.g. South Africa) this is a major limitation. It would be helpful to know a bit more about marriage patterns in Zimbabwe and I would also suggest that the authors add a statement about this limitation in the discussion.

2. In the description of the outcome variable the authors mention that responses were dichotomized, could the authors indicate what the response options were prior to dichotomizing the score?

3. In the description for the independent variable (which should be listed as independent variables) they describe that a wealth index was used as a covariate. Is there a reference for where this index came from? What was the criteria for determining the different levels of wealth?

4. There are some instances where the authors mention the inclusion to be cohabitating and married and others where they mention cohabitating or married. Please review manuscript carefully for consistency.

5. In the methods section it is a bit unclear how the data was combined for analysis. Please provide additional details in the statistical analyses process for how data was pooled across time periods in order to conduct the analysis. Also, I believe that the year of the data collection should be controlled for in the multivariate analyses.
Results

1. Your results state that IPV increased marginally however in the abstract you mention that IPV is rising. I feel that a statistical test should be conducted in order to confirm this statement?

2. The authors mention a couple areas where they discuss trends (e.g. pg. 9 line 13- "The trend analysis showed..."), however there is no description in the statistical methods section detailing how trend analyses were conducted.

3. Regarding the third model conducted in the study, the authors need to include additional details in the introduction regarding the justification for conducting this specific model

Discussion

1. The authors discuss that younger women had rates of IPV because "they are likely to engage in aggressive and violent behaviours." I think a discussion around increased vulnerability among younger aged women who experience violence in married and when cohabitating. It is likely that these young women face increased vulnerability as they may be less likely to be pursuing educational opportunities and are likely more dependent on their partners than women of older age who may have delayed marriage or cohabitating with partners. This could be tied into the discussion around children and poverty, where women who are more dependent and have children with their abusers are less able to leave violent partners.

2. The authors discuss the finding around number of children and IPV. There has been numerous studies looking at IPV and pregnancy. I would suggest that the authors discuss their findings in relation to existing literature on IPV and pregnancy.

3. Moreover, findings regarding higher IPV in rural areas due to higher levels of traditionalist could be supplemented by discussions around different forms of femininities and how different constructions of femininities influence experiences of violence and HIV-risk


4. Pg.12 second paragraph the authors discuss how men who may feel threatened by their female partners empowerment may exercise increased risk for IPV. There are a number of papers among men in South Africa showing an associations between the gender role strain scale and perpetration of IPV. The authors could consider discussing this evidence alongside their results.
5. Often in national survey data, data is analyzed using survey weights was this done in this analysis?

6. The authors should cite the WHO's regulations and guidelines for collection of data related to domestic violence

7. In the conclusion, the authors state that women of reproductive age are at high and increasing risk of IPV. Without a statistical trend test showing a significant increase in IPV over the time periods, I don't think that the results can warrant concluding that there is an increasing risk. The authors are also not assessing IPV incidence

References:

In the reference list there are at least two instances where the same reference is listed (16 and 17) the authors should double check to ensure that there are no duplicated references and that references are formatted to the Journal's requirements.

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.

Unable to assess

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 am able to assess the statistics

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

Needs some language corrections before being published
Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal