

## **Violence against women: What does the research tell us?**

The authors review research on partner-perpetrated violence against pregnant women. The review usefully surveys research in the US and beyond. The authors review the various empirical and theoretical questions researchers have sought to answer, and put their cross-nationally comparative focus to work in order to summarize and assess this field. The focus on public health and legal practice in the last section is particularly strong. The manuscript is written in the requisite accessible style.

The authors could strengthen the review in several ways.

First, the review could provide more critical commentary on the questions that have driven this research. The authors are good on the methodological issues, but could bolster their critique of the “prevalence” or “extent of the problem/phenomenon” question, and the two issues implicit therein: (1) the implicit comparison between partner-perpetrated violence directed toward pregnant women and non-pregnant women, and (2) the implicit (epidemiological rather than sociological) “the higher the prevalence, the more significant the social problem” approach. Readers would especially appreciate learning about specifically sociological perspectives on a literature that has its deepest roots in public health and criminology. For example, the authors could usefully problematize the “How often does this form of violence occur?” question that dominates the literature, and the “numbers game” – largely irresolvable with empirically incommensurable approaches to research – approach implicit in the public health/social problems approach to partner-perpetrated violence. A more explicitly critical approach would support the authors’ implicit argument (in the last section) that what we need are more sociological understandings of the dynamics and meanings of partner-perpetrated abuse of pregnant women (rather than more sophisticated assessments of the magnitude of the problem).

Second, the authors have to clarify what the section headed “Women’s Experiences of Violence During Pregnancy” is actually about. As written, it is difficult for readers to see what empirical evidence there is about “women’s experiences” in this section or the research it summarizes; it does not appear to be based on significantly different data or questions from the “prevalence” section. The heading leads readers to expect a survey of ethnographic or other research on the subjective qualities of partner-perpetrated violence during pregnancy, from the point of view of the pregnant women, but this is not in fact the content of this section.

Third, the authors could discuss the impact of recent efforts to reconceptualize partner-perpetrated violence in terms of coercive control (i.e., Stark’s 2007 book *Coercive Control*) and note changes in feminist theories of gender and partner-perpetrated violence (i.e., Anderson’s last article in *Gender & Society* and in the special issue of *Sex Roles* from 2005). Such a discussion would contribute to the authors’ efforts to point to the specifically sociological issues in an area of research dominated by public health and criminology.