Communication changes and intimate partner violence: A longitudinal study in Mwanza, Tanzania

Sabrina Page, Gerry Mshana, Neema Mosha, Sarah Meyer, Grace Mtolela, Sheila Harvey, Philip Ayieko, Heidi Stöckl
• IPV is a highly prevalent human rights and health issue
• Communication is a risk and protective factor that is not well understood
• Understanding if communication predicts IPV can help inform future interventions

Our aim is to investigate if negative in-person communication predicts physical and/or sexual IPV in a longitudinal sample of women
Conceptual framing

Bateson’s relational communication theory

Discusses the differences between dominance and submission in communication within a relationship

Relational dialectics theory

Explores three types of dialectical tensions: autonomy versus connection, openness versus closedness and novelty versus predictability

Belsky’s ecological model

Arguments that risk factors operate at multiple levels: individual, relationship, and community
Methods

MAISHA longitudinal - Mwanza, Tanzania

MAISHA Randomised Control Trial

Baseline Control group

24 months Control group
892 women

36 months Control group
867 women

48 months Control group
836 women

Longitudinal study

Quantitative follow up: 1004 women

- Participants: women aged 18 years or older.
- The analysis focused on women who currently were in a relationship or in the last 12 months.
- Interviews conducted face-to-face by specially trained female interviewers.
- Topics included relationships, economic situation, Mental health, communication and experiences of IPV.
- IPV and communication questions adapted from WHO VAW scale, Conflict Tactic Scale, and Communication Pattern Questionnaire.
IPV outcomes

Questions adapted from WHO WAV instrument

Physical IPV

- Example: Has your partner slapped you or thrown something at you that could hurt you?

- ‘Yes’ to any question/6 = experienced physical IPV

Sexual IPV

- Example: Has your partner forced you to have sexual intercourse by threatening you, holding you down, or hurting you in some way?

- ‘Yes’ to any question/3 = experienced sexual IPV

Asked if experienced in past 12 months
Communication exposure

Questions adapted from CPQ/CTS

Confictual communication

Example: Have you quarrelled about accusations that you are not fulfilling your responsibilities as wife and mother?

‘Yes’ to four or more questions/10= conflictual communication

Avoidant communication

Example: Did you and your partner discuss things that happened to you during the day?

‘Yes’ to four or more questions/10= avoidant communication

Asked if experienced in past 12 months
Covariates

- Age of women, Partner age
- Education status of women and Partner
- Marital status
- Partner’s drinking
- Number of children
- HH Socio-Economic Status
- Relationship duration
- Avoidant communication
- Conflictual communication
- Physical and/or sexual IPV
Participants characteristics

- Mean age of women = 35
- 59% completed education up to primary level
- 74% have been in a relationship for five or more years
- 86% live with their partner

Communication prevalence by wave:
- **Baseline:** 43% avoidant, 31% conflictual
- **Wave 2:** 38% avoidant, 29% conflictual
- **Wave 3:** 25% avoidant, 28% conflictual
- **Wave 4:** 25% avoidant, 22% conflictual

IPV prevalence by wave:
- **Baseline:** = 34%
- **Wave 2:** = 33%
- **Wave 3:** = 24%
- **Wave 4:** = 22%
IPV and Communication

Baseline: 337 (34%)
Wave: 297 (33%)
Wave 3: 212 (24%)
Wave 4: 181 (22%)

- Avoidant Comm
- Conflictual Comm
## Multivariable logistic regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflictual Communication</th>
<th>Avoidant Communication</th>
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<tr>
<td>Physical and/or sexual violence</td>
<td>OR=10.2; 95% CI (8.11-12.95)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aOR=8.9; 95% CI (7.06-11.37)</td>
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**Adjusted for:** Marital status, woman’s age, partner’s age, duration in the relationship, avoidant communication, conflictual communication, and time.

**Protective factors for IPV:** Woman’s age, Partner’s age, Socioeconomic status, Duration in relationship
• Our analysis shows communication was a predictor for IPV in our study, showing that those engaging in negative communication habits had higher risk of experiencing physical and/or sexual IPV.

• Our analysis compares to other similar findings that dysfunctional communication between partners appears to be associated with various problems in relationships, including IPV (Mirgain & Cordova, 2007; Simpson, Doss, Wheeler, & Christensen, 2007). However, these studies were cross-sectional in nature and came from high-income countries.
Discussion
Implications for future research/programming

• Further focus on longitudinal studies to assess communication between partners is needed to help better form our understanding of its role in IPV

• A validated and more widely used tool for specifically measuring communication between partners is needed

• A better understanding of the pathways between communication and IPV could influence and improve intervention programmes aimed at reducing IPV

• Interventions can be shaped to target partners in younger age groups and those in less long-term relationships. Considering communication as a predictor of relationship quality, communication can be targeted through interventions that address discussing difficult topics or encouraging partners to speak more often/positively to one another