Income, Power, and Intimate Partner Violence at the Transition to Parenthood

by

Lauren Matheson

B.A., Acadia University, 2016

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University of Victoria

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“We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.”
Abstract

In relationships between men and women, women are still more likely than men to take family leave and reduce work hours after the birth of their first child. This results in economic changes between partners at the transition to parenthood. Gendered changes in income may impact relationship dynamics within couples and contribute to the elevated risk of intimate partner violence (IPV) seen at this time. Previous research has linked both relative and absolute income to IPV; however, it is unlikely that income directly impacts IPV. For this reason, the current study explored potential mediators of the relationship between income and IPV such as decision-making power (i.e., the ability to influence another person’s opinions and decisions) and quality of alternatives (i.e., the availability of options outside of the current relationship) by following 196 first time parents across four timepoints (the third trimester of pregnancy, one year, two years, and four years postpartum). Multilevel modelling was used to test whether decision-making power mediates the relationship between relative income and IPV and whether quality of alternatives mediates the relationship between absolute income and IPV. Despite low base rates of physical IPV, findings indicated that at times when the gender wage gap within couples was smaller, overall levels of physical violence within the relationship were reduced. However, at times when the gender wage gap was smaller women’s psychological IPV perpetration increased. There were mixed findings regarding decision-making power and quality of alternatives as mediators of the relationship between income and IPV. Implications for the current conceptualization of the link between income and power are discussed.