

A Narrative Review of the Proposed Policy Solutions for Each Stage of Intimate Partner Violence in Abusive Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence (IPV) describes acts of violence committed by one member of an intimate relationship against another. This paper discusses IPV experienced by women in abusive relationships, broken down into three phases: before, during, and after the relationship. Before the relationship, policy solutions center on increasing awareness and education to mitigate the chances of women ever experiencing abuse. During the relationship, proposals focus on increasing financial security and independence. After women leave the relationship, the focus shifts to maintaining their financial stability so that they are less likely to return to abuse. This paper addresses which solutions are most effective and durable at mitigating IPV for women in abusive relationships. This review suggests that a multi-pronged approach, including education, awareness, and economic opportunities, is most successful in reaching this goal. Ultimately, providing women with such opportunities would decrease rates of IPV by increasing accessibility of separation from their husbands, decreasing financial stress in the home, and increasing stability. This makes violent incidents less likely to occur and decreases the chances of women entering, reentering, or continuing to be involved in abusive relationships.

Keywords: Intimate partner violence; abuse; economic empowerment; randomized controlled trial; domestic violence policy; cash grants

INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a phenomenon where one partner in a romantic relationship commits violent acts against another (1). The abusive partner often holds a disproportionate amount of physical or financial power. Thus, they can take advantage of their victims who are unable to defend themselves or lack the independence to leave them (1). This leaves victims trapped in a cycle where they are subject to violence repeatedly but are too emotionally or financially unstable

to leave their partner, and thus continue to experience violence regularly (2).

This paper discusses violence committed by men in heterosexual relationships against their female intimate partners. There are three stages to IPV: pre-relationship, during relationship, and post-relationship. Before women enter marriages with abusive partners, there are systemic issues that make them more susceptible to violence and more likely to engage in relationships with toxic partners (2). For example, women's education is oftentimes sacrificed, and their economic opportunities are restricted, which makes them less likely to challenge existing authority structures, including patriarchy within the household (3).

During the relationship, female victims are often manipulated by their partners and thus unable to leave them (4). Their financial dependence continues to hold

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them back, exacerbated by their exclusion from financial discussions and their limited economic standing (4). Furthermore, they are subject to physical and emotional abuse, which weakens them and their ability to leave (5).

If victims survive the relationship, they still must face further struggles. Oftentimes, it is difficult for them to seek legal repercussions against their abusers because of the emotional damage and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that they face (5). Additionally, they may still find difficulty achieving economic independence and thus are likely to return to their abusers (2). When developing policy solutions to IPV, all three phases of toxic relationships must be considered.

EDUCATION BEFORE THE RELATIONSHIP

The framework for IPV begins to develop when girls are young. Young women, especially in regions where their education is deemed unimportant, may not be incentivized or encouraged by society to achieve strong academic qualifications (3). Women's education is limited in many parts of the world due to a lack of academic opportunities. By preempting abusive relationships, the following proposal provides a comprehensive solution to abuse.

IPV Awareness. Education increases young women's awareness about IPV and the politics that affect it. It also drives a desire for autonomy and reduces their acceptance of domestic violence and control (3). However, this shift did not apply to political efficacy (3). Ultimately, awareness is one of the key benefits of increased education targeted towards women. It decreases acceptance of violence, though this may not translate into empowerment to act (3).

Financial Independence. Limited resources on healthy relationships leave women engaging with unsafe partners as they age (2). Increased awareness on abuse and education will limit the likelihood of women accepting it (3).

Friedman *et al.* (3) contribute to the literature on the importance of education in preempting abusive relationships by describing it as a system of liberation for the oppressed. The experiment conducted in this paper was a merit-based scholarship competition for girls in Kenya, which was found to increase the women's incentive to do well in school and subsequently made them less likely to accept domestic violence. Educational opportunities are also important for women because they increase their prevalence in the workforce (7). A study on education reform in Turkey conducted by Erten &

Keskin found that education reform increased women's empowerment in the labor market, as well as their personal income and access to social security benefits (7).

Education as a Threat to Abusers. While Friedman *et al.* found that education reduced justification of domestic violence, Erten & Keskin (7) found that education, while important for women's economic autonomy, had no significant impact on the physical or sexual violence they experienced and actually increased psychological violence and financial control behavior. In fact, an increase in women's education levels may increase their husbands' incentives to commit violent acts against them because they may be seen as more threatening (7). However, these findings are not directly comparable because Friedman *et al.* analyzed education reform as a strategy to avoid abusive marriages, whereas Erten & Keskin discussed it as a metric used during abuse.

Thus, it can be concluded that education reform is ineffective as a reactive strategy once women are already involved with abusive partners. However, it is effective as a preemptive strategy, granting women sufficient economic autonomy to avoid abusive relationships altogether.

Education may reduce the acceptance of domestic violence, though its effect on women's actual experience of physical or sexual violence remains uncertain (3). Preemptive programs, such as the one evaluated by Friedman *et al.*, increase school participation and thus shift attitudes towards autonomy (3). Another possible solution to this is merit-based scholarships for girls, which ensure accessibility to proper education. This education will empower women and increase their autonomy, decreasing their likelihood of entering abusive relationships (3).

ECONOMIC STABILITY DURING THE RELATIONSHIP

Women become trapped in cycles of abuse because of a lack of economic independence (3). It is very difficult for women to leave violent relationships because they do not have the financial stability necessary to support themselves without their abusive partners (2). There have been myriad potential policy solutions proposed to increase women's financial empowerment and, in turn, reduce IPV rates (Table 1).

Financial resources. First, cash vouchers, food transfers, and other mechanisms of providing women with financial resources are one potential solution to

their lack of financial independence (5, 9). Hidrobo *et al.* find that, in the context of a cash transfer program in Ecuador, these transfers improve food security and economic conditions for women, thereby decreasing their likelihood of experiencing IPV (10). Government-provided assistance is one example of how women can strengthen their economic independence, which may serve as a long-term solution to domestic violence, though further research following victims decades after their relationship is necessary to determine this.

Employment. Second, it is crucial to understand how job loss disrupts income streams and may, in turn,

increase violence. Male unemployment has been shown to increase rates of IPV, as a result of higher rates of financial and psychological stress (11). This is especially prevalent in countries where women lack equal rights to divorce because they are unable to access stronger options outside of the relationship (11). Contrary to Bhalotra *et al.*, the Center for Global Development finds that increasing paid sick leave, unemployment insurance, and other social safety nets limit violent incidents (5). However, this study was conducted specifically in the context of pandemics, whereas the sample size in Bhalotra *et al.* (11) tracks women across 31 developing

Table 1. Proposed IPV Interventions, Populations Studied, and Principal Findings

Number	Study	Intervention	Population	Principal findings
1	Tur-Prats	N/A	1000s of respondents from Spain	Living with a mother-in-law decreases a wife's participation in domestic labor and thus reduces violence
2	Payne	Education & early advocacy	IPV survivors and community advocates in the US	Healthy communication and early education prevent children from repeating cycles of abuse
3	Friedman	Merit-based scholarship	Unmarried schoolgirls in rural Kenya	Girls' scholarship program reduces young women's acceptance of domestic violence
4	Anderberg	Theoretical model of unemployment insurance	Couples in the United Kingdom	Abusive men sabotage their partner's career efforts to limit economic independence
5	Center for Global Development	IPV prevention integrated into pandemic planning	Women and children worldwide during pandemics	Economic insecurity as a result of pandemics increases violence against women
6	J-PAL	Vocational training program for women	1,200 disadvantaged women in Monrovia	N/A
7	Erten	Education expansion policy	Adult women in Turkey born close to the cutoff date for compulsory education	Increased women's schooling improved labor market outcomes but had minimal impact on physical or sexual violence
8	Aizer	No-drop prosecution policy	IPV victims and perpetrators in the United States	"No-drop" prosecution policies increased reporting of IPV
9	Buller	Targeted cash transfers to women	IPV in low and middle-income countries	Cash transfers decrease IPV by increasing economic security and emotional wellbeing
10	Hidrobo	Cash vouchers, food vouchers, direct food transfers	Low-income urban households in Northern Ecuador	Cash transfers decreased physical and sexual violence
11	Bhalotra	Gender-specific employment opportunities	Women aged 15-49 across 31 developing countries	An increase in male unemployment correlates with higher rates of physical violence against women
12	Luca	Alcohol prohibition policies	Married women in India	Alcohol prohibition policies decreased rates of male drinking and domestic violence

nations outside of the scope of pandemics. Thus, they may not be directly comparable.

Anderberg & Rainer (4) agree that female unemployment increases rates of IPV because it increases women's dependence on their husbands. They emphasize this because abusers may purposefully sabotage their partner's job interviews, work reputation, or other factors pertaining to their employment status (4).

There is a disagreement on whether employment opportunities for women mitigate IPV in the long term. Hidrobo *et al.* (10) tracked low-income households in Northern Ecuador to find that employment and cash transfers reduce violence. Bhalotra *et al.* (11) followed women across multiple developing nations and concluded that female unemployment rates increase the probability of IPV.

Vocational training. A policy solution to address this and minimize the risk of unemployment is job training and labor-market preparedness. Vocational training in Liberia is crucial to women's economic independence, despite the civil war occurring there that raised rates of IPV (6). J-PAL has proposed conducting a randomized trial on disadvantaged women in Liberia to find if empowerment programs, including vocational training, business capital grants, and psychological support, reduce emotional and physical abuse against women (6).

Ultimately, minimizing financial conflicts is crucial to reducing violent incidents, namely by eliminating the need for women to negotiate with their husbands for cash to buy food for the family (9). This may provide short-term relief for women in abusive relationships. Another important driver of these conflicts is alcohol consumption (12).

Taxation of alcohol. A third proposed solution would be alcohol prohibition, as its consumption is one of the main drivers of IPV because it clouds judgment and increases violent tendencies (12). Prohibiting the sale of alcohol decreases its casual consumption, thus leading to fewer violent incidents for victims of abuse. By minimizing arguments, women experiencing IPV may have short-term relief. However, when arguments start nonetheless, it is important that victims have access to safety.

Alternate safety options. Fourth, interventions working to improve hotlines and safety options for victims of abuse may decrease rates of IPV (5). Additionally, the Center for Global Development (5) proposes increasing staff for violence prevention hotlines, providing virtual options for one-stop centers, and encouraging virtual support networks. Since financial instability may be

a barrier to receiving support from these hotlines and centers, it is also proposed that these virtual options could be reimbursed by credit or insurance. Finally, considering IPV in long-term pandemic preparedness planning would limit the rise in violence during pandemics and other disasters (5). This could manifest as business continuity plans that include violence shelters, sharing informational resources with victims' friends and family, and communicating information to boost morale and mitigate health harms (5).

Ultimately, reducing financial stress is a crucial means of limiting IPV. This can be achieved through cash transfers and training women for labor markets. Minimizing stress in relationships reduces violent incidents (10). This would be further supported by a decrease in alcohol consumption, as illustrated by the tax increases proposed by Luca *et al.* (12). Finally, when violent incidents occur, the Center for Global Development proposes strategies to reform shelters and hotlines to make them more accessible and better support survivors. These make it easier for women to find and pay for the support that they need (5).

There is insufficient literature examining how these solutions address violence in the long term. While cash grants can be effective for a few months or years, they may be insufficient to permanently stop violence. Similarly, vocational training may backfire decades down the line, as there is no research on its longevity. Before implementing any of the proposed solutions, we must fill the gap in our understanding of how these will impact women in the long term.

SUPPORT AFTER THE RELATIONSHIP

As a preliminary note, there has been minimal research conducted on how to mitigate the lasting mental health and financial consequences women face after leaving abusive relationships. More analysis must be done to learn how to limit women from returning to abusive partners, but also how to mitigate the long-term consequences they may experience as a result of the violence they endured. However, some solutions have been proposed (**Table 1**). These solutions are long-term and are intended to prevent women from returning to abusive relationships.

Support networks. Following abusive relationships, women oftentimes experience poor mental health (5). Increasing support networks for women, empowerment, and awareness about healthcare and psychological service options can help women recover from the psychological

damage that comes with abuse (5). This reduces the risk of women returning to abusive relationships. However, the harm that women face following abusive relationships goes beyond the mental battle.

Legal protection. Legal security is oftentimes a concern following abusive relationships. Victims of abuse who seek help from police often return to their abusers and request police drop charges against them (8). However, this leaves women trapped in cycles of abuse and allows perpetrators to get away with violence without facing consequences (8). Thus, Aizer & Dal Bó propose no-drop policies, which compel prosecutors to continue pressing charges even if the victim expresses a desire to drop them (8). In addition to legal challenges, IPV victims, especially those who lacked financial independence, may struggle with money after leaving abusive partners (5).

Temporary housing. Finally, expanding temporary housing can ensure women stay out of abusive relationships and provide necessary post-separation support. Oftentimes, women return to their abusers because they feel they have nowhere else to go (5). Thus, these housing options can be critical to them maintaining their independence (5).

Ultimately, ensuring women are physically safe and psychologically stable enough to avoid returning to abusive relationships is the key priority following leaving (5). Thus, expanding resources to support survivors is crucial to their safety.

LIMITATIONS

More research is needed to demonstrate the longevity of the proposed solutions, as many have not been tested over decades to ensure their effectiveness. These would determine both the long-term impact of IPV on women's mental health and the rate of developing PTSD, as well as how each proposed solution may alter these adverse impacts. Moreover, it is crucial to understand which solutions provide the lowest likelihood of women returning to abusive partners in the future, as a result of economic instability or other factors.

The papers used to conduct this narrative review are economic randomized controlled trials, which randomly assign participants to treatment and control groups and thus are the gold standard for causality in economic research. Several sources were selected from the American Economic Association's RCT Registry to identify randomized controlled trials. Additionally, some sources are observational studies, mixed-method reviews,

institutional reports, policy analyses, webpages, and non-randomized research. Keywords searched in the registry include domestic abuse, intimate partner violence, and financial manipulation. The literature reviewed thus generally focused on economic solutions, such as cash grants, employment opportunities, and taxes, with a few exceptions. The majority of these papers were released within the last ten years, making their findings relevant. Papers outside of this scope were not included in the review.

Moreover, as these papers cover various locations around the world and study households with varying income levels, some of them do not directly contradict or support one another. Rather, they work together to illustrate how policy solutions to IPV may differ globally.

Finally, the scope of the papers reviewed is specific to the impacts of IPV on women in heterosexual relationships. Thus, it may not discuss policy solutions that would be uniquely effective in other situations, such as when the victim of violence is male, in homosexual relationships, or when the perpetrator and victim are not involved in a romantic relationship.

CONCLUSION

At each stage of an abusive relationship, proposed solutions must achieve a different purpose. Before the relationship, proposals are focused on mitigating the likelihood of a woman entering an abusive relationship in the first place. Thus, there is an emphasis on education to improve women's access to labor markets and thus drive their financial independence. Additionally, awareness is crucial to increase women's autonomy and prevent them from entering abusive relationships. These proposals, while difficult, will be the most effective at mitigating violence. Once a woman enters an abusive relationship, solutions shift to focus on minimizing violent incidents. Thus, there is an emphasis on economic stability to mitigate stress. The most important solution is to improve employment opportunities for women, so they have financial independence, which allows for an easier exit from the relationship. Thus, vocational training and cash grants directly to women are the most effective at both mitigating violent incidents in the moment as well as setting them up to survive abuse. Finally, after the relationship has ended, the solutions focus on ensuring that the survivor will not return to her abuser. Thus, expansion of resources is heavily prioritized, as is taking definitive legal action. When these solutions work together in tandem, they can help minimize the chance

of a woman entering an abusive relationship, limit the violence she experiences if she is involved in one, and stop her from returning upon escape.

Moreover, these solutions may offer unique benefits when used together. There is a research gap here that must be filled regarding how multiple different solutions affect one another while working in tandem. For instance, awareness about IPV for young girls, coupled with vocational training for women currently involved in abusive relationships, may be more effective than either of these solutions would be in a vacuum, as the awareness could inspire women to pursue the training. Overall, more research is required to demonstrate how these various policy solutions could intersect.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to this work.

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