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Intimate Partner Violence in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Insights from Economic Research

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ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a pervasive global issue, with approximately one in three women experiencing IPV over their lifetime. IPV prevalence is higher in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), and costs of IPV are also considerably larger as a percentage of GDP in LMICs. We present the economic theory behind IPV and highlight some important determinants such as poverty and societal norms. We then synthesize the causal evidence on the impact of a range of policies and interventions, highlighting approaches which have been effective in reducing IPV. We identify key insights from the existing literature and outline areas where further theoretical and empirical research is needed.

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1 Introduction

Violence against women remains a pervasive global issue, with especially high prevalence in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Gunarathne et al., 2023). Among the various forms of violence, intimate partner violence (IPV)—which includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as controlling behaviors by a current or former intimate partner—is one of the most widespread (World Health Organization, 2012). Women disproportionately bear the burden of IPV worldwide. While IPV is often discussed interchangeably with domestic violence, it is distinct, referring specifically to violence between intimate partners, whereas domestic violence more broadly encompasses violence within familial settings, also including child or elder abuse (American Psychological Association, 1996). Domestic violence typically involves individuals living in the same household, whereas IPV can occur regardless of whether the partners share a household.

Globally, approximately one in three ever-partnered women aged 15–49 has experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in her lifetime. It can start young, with twenty-four percent of females aged 15–19 report having faced such violence since the age of 15 (Sardinha et al., 2022). Prevalence rates are even higher in LMICs, with estimates reaching 45 percent in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and 35 percent in South Asia (World Health Organization, 2018). Emotional or psychological abuse is even more widespread, with up to 58 percent of women reporting some form of emotional abuse in the past year (World Health Organization, 2005). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these trends, as lockdowns and mobility restrictions intensified household stress, poverty, and exposure to abusers, leading to what has been termed the "Shadow Pandemic" of increased IPV (United Nations Women, 2020).

Estimating the economic costs of IPV presents significant methodological challenges. Underreporting, stigma, and cross-cultural differences in how violence is perceived and discussed hinder reliable measurement (Waters et al., 2005). Nevertheless, available estimates suggest the costs of IPV are substantial. Across nine countries, the economic burden of IPV has been estimated at 1–2 percent of GDP, roughly the same level as public spending on primary education in similar settings (Duvvury et al., 2013). As a percentage of GDP, estimates of

the costs of IPV are considerably higher in LMICs than in high-income countries (HICs) (Waters et al., 2005).

Consistent with the broader literature, this paper adopts a framework that refers to women as survivors and men as perpetrators, reflecting the asymmetry in both incidence and severity of IPV (Morse, 1995).[1] Globally, over half (56 percent) of all female homicides are committed by intimate partners or family members, compared to 11 percent for male victims (United Nations Women, 2022). While we acknowledge that IPV can be bidirectional and that women may also perpetrate violence, the evidence suggests this occurs at lower rates and with less severe consequences.

Recently research on IPV has expanded in the economics literature, as IPV has been linked to a host of adverse economic outcomes, including reduced female labor force participation (Bhattacharyya et al., 2011; Heath, 2014), lower household consumption (Tauchen et al., 1991), and negative intergenerational impacts on children's health and well-being (Pollak, 2004; Aizer, 2011; Heise, 2011). It is also associated with heightened exposure to risky sexual behaviors, lower use of reproductive and maternal health services, and poorer educational and nutritional outcomes for children (Raj et al., 2006; Decker et al., 2013, 2014; Leight and Wilson, 2021).

Despite these well-documented consequences, economics has only recently begun to engage systematically with research on IPV. More than half of the theoretical work reviewed in this paper has been published since 2015. Strong empirical work on the topic is even more recent. Of the fifty-nine empirical papers analyzed across Table 2 - Table 4, fifty-four (or 92 percent) are from 2015 or later. This surge in interest reflects a broader shift in the economics discipline toward addressing questions at the intersection of gender, violence, and economic development.

This article reviews the emerging economics literature on IPV, with a focus on LMICs, where prevalence rates are higher and institutional support systems for women are weaker relative to HICs. We begin by providing insight into one of the greatest challenges to quantifying and analyzing IPV, its measurement. We compare various methodological approaches

[1]We use the terms victim and survivor interchangeably, recognizing that some individuals self-identify as victims and others as survivors.

that researchers take in measuring IPV. In Section 3, we outline key economic models of violence against women that have been proposed to understand the causes and persistence of IPV. The models largely center around household bargaining and game theoretic models. Section 4 begins reviewing the causal evidence on interventions and policy changes that influence IPV. Given that poverty is a major determinant, we first focus on cash transfers, a commonly-used tool to alleviate poverty in LMICs, to explore whether cash transfers decrease IPV. Next, in Section 5, we focus on the impacts of other policies and programs that are meant to reduce poverty through income, employment, or both. This also includes entrepreneurship and lifeskills training programs that aim to increase economic stability and foster empowerment. In Section 6, we examine laws, institutions, and norms, as these structural factors both reflect and reinforce the underlying determinants of IPV. We broaden the lens in Section 7 by integrating some seminal work from outside of the economics literature.

Section 8 delves deeper into the central but understudied phenomenon of backlash, wherein some interventions aimed at empowering women may provoke increased violence by disrupting traditional gender roles or household power dynamics. This is an area where findings remain mixed and mechanisms are not well understood. While most economic interventions tend to reduce or have no effect on IPV, backlash emerges in a subset of studies, often in response to shifts perceived as status-threatening to men. Section 9 shifts to a cost perspective, attempting to highlight the cost-effectiveness of various interventions aimed at reducing IPV. In the final section we identify open questions for future research, including the long-term sustainability of intervention effects, the role of male engagement, the interaction of IPV with mental health and identity, and the need for more inclusive models that reflect diverse relationship structures and motivations for violence. The goal is to provide a comprehensive and critical overview of what economics has learned about IPV to date, while charting a path forward for theoretical innovation and empirical inquiry. Understanding the causes and consequences of IPV and designing effective, evidence-based strategies to reduce it, remains an urgent and vital frontier for the discipline.

2 Measuring IPV

Measuring IPV presents well-known empirical challenges. Most studies rely on self-reported data, which can understate the true incidence of violence due to stigma and/or fear of retaliation (Ellsberg et al., 2001). In addition to underreporting, changes in reporting behavior over time or across contexts can complicate interpretation. For instance, observed increases in IPV reports may reflect improved outside options or reduced stigma, rather than a rise in actual incidence. Conversely, women embedded in environments where IPV is socially normalized may fail to perceive or report such behavior as abusive (Perova and Reynolds, 2017). These dynamics imply that shifts in self-reported IPV may reflect both real changes in behavior and changes in the perceived or actual cost of disclosure, complicating causal inference and policy evaluation.

A key challenge in measuring IPV through self-reported surveys is the presence of social desirability bias, when respondents feel inclined to give socially desirable responses rather than fully "truthful" ones (Edwards, 1957). This bias can lead to systematic under-reporting of abuse in settings where IPV is stigmatized (Saunders, 1991). In the context of interventions aimed at raising awareness about IPV, social desirability bias may differentially affect treatment and control groups. In contrast to systematic under-reporting, women exposed to an intervention may in fact become more aware of what constitutes IPV and thus become more likely to report it, potentially confounding estimates of the intervention's impact. Recent research underscores that social desirability bias can systematically distort self-reports in sensitive domains, and that many standard mitigation tools such as indirect formats or anonymity guarantees face tradeoffs in precision, complexity, and interpretability (Bursztyn et al., 2025).

To address these challenges, leading surveys such as the World Health Organization (WHO) Multi-Country Study and the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) follow best practices by avoiding abstract or subjective definitions of violence. Instead, they employ a set of behaviorally specific and validated questions that aim to elicit more accurate disclosures. For example, physical violence is assessed through various yes/no questions such as: "Has your current or former husband/intimate partner ever hit, slapped, kicked, or other-

wise physically hurt you?" Sexual violence is measured by asking whether a partner has ever physically forced the respondent to have sexual intercourse against her will. Psychological abuse is captured through questions regarding threats, intimidation, or controlling behavior. Respondents answer these items with a "yes" or "no," often followed by questions on frequency. These types of yes/no questions are designed to help reduce ambiguity and subjectivity in the reporting process.

An active area of research focuses on improving methods for accurately measuring IPV, given the sensitivity and potential risks involved in disclosure. For instance, Theiss (2024) documents that women surveyed in the evening as part of the DHS in Sub-Saharan Africa are 2.8 percentage points less likely to report IPV than those surveyed in the morning—a pattern likely driven by the fear of retaliation from partners, particularly those who consume alcohol later in the day. These findings underscore the importance of conducting IPV modules in private settings, away from other household members, to ensure both respondent safety and data integrity. In contexts where abusive partners exert control over the household environment, creating the necessary privacy for accurate disclosure can be particularly difficult.

To mitigate these challenges, researchers have explored alternative modes of data collection. One such method is Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing (ACASI), which allows respondents to listen to survey questions and privately enter their answers without interacting with an enumerator. Emerging evidence suggests that ACASI yields higher reported prevalence rates of IPV compared to face-to-face interviews (Bates-Jefferys and Phillips, 2021; Peterman et al., 2024). However, recent work by Park et al. (2024) finds that while self-administered surveys produce higher IPV disclosures in Malawi and Liberia, the authors cannot conclusively rule out the possibility that these increases are spurious, either reflecting over-reporting or other forms of response bias.

The COVID-19 pandemic further expanded the use of remote data collection methods. Online and phone-based surveys have been employed in various settings to monitor IPV when in-person data collection is not feasible (Beland et al., 2020; Arenas-Arroyo et al., 2021; Agüero et al., 2024; Peterman et al., 2024). These methods may enhance respondent anonymity and reduce fear of retaliation, thereby improving reporting. At the same

time, virtual formats tend to be less engaging and may compromise the depth and nuance of information collected. In addition, indirect measures such as internet search behavior have been used as proxies for IPV incidence (Berniell and Facchini, 2021; Anderberg et al., 2022). For example, studies show that Google search activity for domestic violence services spiked during lockdown periods (Riddell et al., 2022; Ravindran and Shah, 2023). However, such approaches risk excluding women in LMICs who lack reliable access to mobile phones, computers, or the internet—precisely those who may be most vulnerable to violence.

In addition to survey-based measures, researchers also draw on administrative data sources to study IPV, including police crime reports, health and hospitalization records, forensic evidence, and other medical data. Information from emergency calls for service (Leslie and Wilson, 2020) and domestic violence hotlines (Perez-Vincent and Carreras, 2022; Ravindran and Shah, 2023) can also serve as valuable proxies. However, all of these sources capture only cases that come to the attention of formal institutions, introducing potential selection bias. Less severe, yet still harmful, incidents are often left out, as victims may not seek help from law enforcement or medical professionals.

Indeed, women experiencing IPV are far more likely to disclose incidents to friends or family than to formal institutions. Palermo et al. (2014) find that only seven percent of women who self-report experiences of physical or sexual violence during a DHS interview report the incident to police, medical personnel, or social services. Underreporting is a well-documented issue in crime statistics and may be especially acute in LMICs, where weak state capacity and prevailing social norms can discourage formal reporting of gender-based violence.

The list experiment is a survey methodology designed to reduce social desirability bias and other forms of measurement problems when eliciting information on sensitive topics (Peterman et al., 2018; Bulte and Lensink, 2019). Rather than asking respondents directly about the sensitive behavior, the technique randomly assigns individuals to one of two groups. One group receives a list of non-sensitive items, while the treatment group receives the same list with one additional sensitive item. Respondents are asked to report only the total number of items that apply to them, without specifying which ones. The difference in the average number of affirmed items between the two groups provides an estimate of the prevalence of

the sensitive behavior.

Empirical findings on the effectiveness of the list experiment in measuring IPV are mixed. Some studies report higher IPV prevalence using list experiments relative to direct questioning (Lépine et al., 2020; Cullen, 2023), while others find no such difference. Agüero and Frisancho (2022), for example, compare standard IPV questions from the DHS with list experiment results in Peru and find no statistically significant differences in reported rates of physical or sexual violence. Similarly, Chuang et al. (2021) do not find that list experiments yield less biased estimates than direct elicitation. In some cases, the method appears to understate prevalence: Gilligan et al. (2024) report that IPV estimates derived from list experiments are not only lower than those from direct questions but are sometimes implausibly negative. Additional concerns include methodological issues such as non-compliance, which can undermine validity (Zigerell, 2011). Taken together, the current evidence does not support the conclusion that list experiments outperform direct elicitation methods in measuring IPV.

Accurate and reliable measurement of IPV remains a critical area for future research. All existing measurement approaches involve trade-offs, and where possible, triangulating across multiple data sources can enhance validity and credibility. A key priority for future work is the development of methods that minimize risks to respondents and strengthen privacy and safety protocols, which is particularly important when dealing with sensitive topics such as IPV. Underreporting remains a pervasive challenge, and gaining a deeper understanding of how to reduce it is essential for improving data quality. Another concern is the frequent spousal disagreement in reported IPV incidence, documented in various studies (Yount and Li, 2012; Halim et al., 2018; Haushofer et al., 2020). These discrepancies may pose a serious threat to measurement validity but are not yet well understood. Unpacking the underlying mechanisms—whether they stem from recall bias, social desirability, fear of repercussions, or divergent perceptions of violence—represents an important avenue for future research. Lastly, as we move on to theoretical and empirical contributions in the economics literature, we note that the scope of IPV measurement varies widely across studies—some include only physical violence, while others incorporate sexual, psychological, and economic abuse, or combinations thereof (see column 5, Table 2 - Table 5). This variability complicates cross-

study comparisons and raises an important question for the field: should future research work toward greater consistency in the breadth and measurement of IPV indicators examined, in order to improve comparability and interpretation of results across contexts?

3 Economic Models of Violence Against Women

A foundational strand of economic theory on IPV builds on models of intra-household bargaining, in which IPV is conceptualized either as a bargaining instrument or as an outcome of household dynamics. In these models, violence can have instrumental or expressive motivations, or both. Instrumental violence arises when perpetrators use violence strategically to assert control over household resources, decision-making, or childrearing. In contrast, expressive violence reflects cases in which perpetrators derive direct utility from the act of violence itself, independent of strategic objectives. Some theoretical models also introduce the concept of backlash, wherein violence is triggered by shifts in household power—particularly female empowerment—that challenge established gender hierarchies. In such cases, IPV may be employed as a means of reasserting allocative control (instrumental) or as an emotional response to perceived threats to male identity or status (expressive).

Table 1 describes the major theoretical contributions from economics to the study of IPV and is ordered chronologically. Column 2 describes the agents involved, column 3 the model type, and columns 4-5 document the motivation for violence (instrumental, expressive, or both). Column 6 illustrates that much of this theory started in HICs but over time more of the theory has focused on LMICs. We now discuss the contributions of this theoretical literature which have focused primarily on domestic violence.

The first formal economic model to incorporate domestic violence in a household bargaining framework is presented by Tauchen et al. (1991), who extend the non-cooperative model of the household to explicitly account for intimate partner violence. This marked a significant departure from earlier theoretical treatments of the family, such as those by Manser and Brown (1980) and McElroy and Horney (1981), which primarily relied on cooperative bargaining frameworks and did not consider violence as a household outcome. By modeling the household as a non-cooperative unit and introducing violence as a potential equilibrium strategy, Tauchen et al. (1991) laid the groundwork for a more nuanced understanding of

intra-household conflict. Subsequent research began to include domestic violence in addition to the commonly-used threat point at that time, divorce (Lundberg and Pollak, 1993, 1994). Interestingly, six out of the 18 theories in Table 1 mention divorce as a threat point. Yet, divorce as a credible exit option is often limited or socially constrained in many LMICs where the practice has been rare and "impossible" in the words of Bloch and Rao (2002). Not long after, Farmer and Tiefenthaler (1997) developed the first model to explicitly include alternative exit options for women—such as shelters, welfare, and legal entitlements—that influence her bargaining position by increasing the credibility of leaving. While these institutional supports are central in high-income contexts, many remain absent or inaccessible in much of the low-income world, often limiting their empirical relevance in LMIC settings.

Bloch and Rao (2002) provide the first formal economic model of intimate partner violence situated in an LMIC context, focusing on dowry-related violence in India. In their model, a husband may use violence strategically to extract additional transfers from his wife's natal family, framing IPV as an instrumentally motivated behavior within a broader bargaining process. Building on this framework, Calvi and Keskar (2023) extend the dowry-bargaining model by examining how the gains from marriage are divided under the influence of social norms that discourage separation, thereby reinforcing women's limited outside options. Other theoretical models similarly conceptualize IPV as a means of enforcing household control, particularly in settings where women's increasing autonomy threatens traditional power structures. For example, violence may be used to prevent women from pursuing education or employment, or from engaging in broader forms of empowerment (Eswaran and Malhotra, 2011; Anderberg and Rainer, 2013; Anderson and Genicot, 2015; Bulte and Lensink, 2021). Additional models highlight IPV as a mechanism to assert control over financial resources, such as cash transfers (Bobonis et al., 2013; Haushofer et al., 2019; Baranov et al., 2021), or to regulate women's sexual behavior and reproductive autonomy (Shah et al., 2023).

Very few economics papers rely solely on the expressive motivation for IPV. While Card and Dahl (2011) use an expressive motivation for violence, their model is also notable for being the first in the economics literature to formalize a 'loss of control' mechanism: violence is triggered by emotional cues, in this case, unexpected losses in professional American football games. Building on this, behavioral economics has begun to enrich models of IPV

by incorporating psychological realism into economic frameworks. These include mechanisms such as limited self-control, projection bias, and hyperbolic discounting, offering a broader set of tools to explain when and why violence may occur. These additions offer insight into phenomena that standard models struggle to explain, such as why victims may return repeatedly to abusive relationships despite prior intentions to leave, or why perpetrators may express remorse yet continue abusive behavior over time. Such behavioral frameworks expand the scope of IPV modeling by accounting for time-inconsistent preferences and emotionally driven responses within household decision-making.

While many IPV models assume monotonic relationships between female bargaining power and income and violence, Anderson and Bidner (2021) investigate the U-shaped relationship between a wife's relative decision making power and IPV in their theoretical model. Their model is notable for treating backlash as a central mechanism and integrating behavioral insights into a household bargaining framework. IPV is modeled as the unintended consequence of family conflict where conflict arises when agents feel aggrieved by the allocation, particularly when decision-making deviates from expectations. This approach offers a nuanced explanation for empirical findings suggesting non-monotonic effects of women's empowerment on IPV. Adams et al. (2024) show that the relationship between income and abuse is non-monotonic. Abusive partners strategically suppress their partner's earnings, yet suppression is most severe for women whose outside options are strong enough to be threatening, but not strong enough to guarantee an exit.

Despite the high global prevalence of IPV, the theoretical literature in economics on this topic remains relatively limited. Important conceptual gaps remain, presenting several promising avenues for future research. First, with the exception of Anderberg et al. (2023), few models account for the dynamic nature of relationships and IPV. There is little theoretical understanding of what drives the persistence of IPV over time within relationships or how the risk of violence evolves over the life course. Capturing such dynamics could illuminate patterns of escalation, desistance, or cyclical abuse observed in empirical settings.

Second, although recent contributions have begun to incorporate elements from behavioral economics and sociology, this integration remains underdeveloped. A key distinction from sociology is that economic models typically ground behavior in individual preferences

and constraints, whereas sociological approaches often conceptualize IPV as structurally embedded and emerging from norms, institutions, and power relations. Future economic models could better incorporate the influence of social norms, reference groups, and identity-based preferences on IPV. For example, the identity framework of Akerlof and Kranton (2000) could help explain how deviations from traditional gender roles or status hierarchies provoke violence when male partners perceive threats to masculinity. Social identity may also shape how violence is interpreted and internalized by both perpetrators and victims.

Third, while empirical research increasingly disaggregates IPV into forms such as psychological, sexual, financial, and physical behaviors, theoretical models typically abstract from these distinctions. Most models treat IPV as a homogenous outcome or restrict to equilibria solely concerned with physical violence, rather than theorizing whether different forms of violence arise from distinct motivations or mechanisms. For instance, does the use of psychological abuse follow different strategic or expressive logic than sexual or physical violence? Formalizing these distinctions could yield richer and more targeted theoretical predictions.

Finally, the existing theoretical literature overwhelmingly centers on a canonical household: a heterosexual, married or cohabiting couple in which the male is the perpetrator and the female is the victim. Few models consider female-perpetrated violence—whether proactive or retaliatory—or the possibility of bidirectional abuse, despite empirical evidence suggesting its occurrence. Moreover, there is a complete absence of theoretical models addressing IPV in same-sex relationships. Most frameworks also emphasize domestic settings, whereas many instances of IPV, particularly among adolescents or dating partners, occur outside of marriage or cohabitation. While some exceptions include Card and Dahl (2011) and Shah et al. (2023), the latter of which is the only model to focus explicitly on adolescent IPV, more can be done. The dominance of household-based frameworks may help explain this limited scope, but expanding beyond traditional household models could enhance the relevance of economic theory to a broader range of IPV contexts.

Moving from Theory to Empirics

In the sections that follow, we review empirical studies examining the impact of cash transfers, other economic initiatives, and changes in laws, institutions, and social norms on IPV. These research areas are selected due to their close connection with key determinants of IPV such as poverty and social/cultural norms. They also play an important role in the theoretical literature just discussed. Given the breadth of the literature and the plethora of factors correlated with IPV, we focus on causal empirical studies. Associations may be misleading, and causal studies are better positioned to isolate the effects of interventions aimed at reducing IPV and, in turn, to guide the design and scaling of effective policies.

4 Cash Transfers and IPV

Poverty is considered to be a key determinant of IPV (Jewkes, 2002; Gibbs et al., 2018). It results in lower investments in health and education, may result in fewer employment opportunities, and has been shown to increase stress (Haushofer and Fehr, 2014), another determinant of IPV. Stress may also affect IPV through the loss-of-control models explored in Section 3 (Card and Dahl, 2011; Anderberg et al., 2023) or directly (Anderson and Bidner, 2021) as stress causes heightened reactions to the emotional cues causing violence. One of the most prominent policy tools employed to alleviate poverty in LMICs has been the use of cash transfers, including both conditional and unconditional variants. The scale of cash transfer programs has grown dramatically in recent years. During 2020–2021, largely in response to the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, cash transfers reached approximately 1.36 billion individuals—roughly one in six people globally (Gentilini, 2022). Even prior to the pandemic, over 100 cash transfer programs had been implemented across LMICs over the past two decades (Richterman et al., 2023). These programs, which serve as targeted income supplements to poor households, have demonstrated positive impacts on a range of outcomes including education, health, food security, and mental well-being (Saavedra et al., 2012; Owusu-Addo and Cross, 2014).

The theoretical relationship between cash transfers and IPV is ambiguous. On one hand, by easing financial constraints, reducing poverty, and lowering stress, cash transfers may

reduce IPV. If targeted to women, they may also strengthen women's bargaining power and improve outside options, thereby deterring violence. On the other hand, transfers that enhance women's economic resources could provoke backlash if male partners perceive a threat to traditional gender roles or seek to assert control over the new resources through violence, either as a reactionary (expressive) or strategic (instrumental) response. Baranov et al. (2021) model IPV in the presence of cash transfers with instrumental, expressive, backlash/status inconsistency, and stress motivations for intimate partner violence. Their model explicitly incorporates assumptions of previous theoretical literature discussed here (see for example, Tauchen et al. (1991); Farmer and Tiefenthaler (1997)) and attempts to reconcile that while cash transfers largely either have a null or decreasing effect on IPV, there is heterogeneity showing increases for some subgroups. The model makes the important distinction about how violence is affected by who receives the cash transfer. Female recipients of cash transfers might feel more empowered which could decrease IPV but it could increase IPV if there is a backlash. This is explored empirically in Table 2.

Table 2 displays results from studies that estimate the impact of cash transfers on intimate partner violence, including both conditional cash transfers as well as unconditional cash transfers, ordered chronologically. Column 2 shows the country, column 3 the intervention type, column 4 the study type, column 5 the type of IPV examined, and column 6 the direction of the average treatment effect. In column 6, we classify estimates as "null" when the average treatment effect is not statistically significant at the 10 percent level. Column 7 documents whether the authors explore any heterogeneity in the IPV results, and column 8 denotes whether the transfer is explicitly directed to the female in the household.

Table 2 (as well as Tables 3-4) employ the following inclusion criteria. First, we restrict attention to studies conducted using data from LMICs. Second, we include only studies that examine IPV behaviors as primary outcomes, rather than focusing solely on attitudes or beliefs surrounding IPV. Third, we limit the core empirical tables (Tables 2-4) to studies published within the economics literature, while drawing attention to some influential work from other disciplines in Table 5. Finally, we include only studies that employ causal identification strategies—either randomized controlled trials (RCTs) or quasi-experimental designs—excluding correlational studies from these tables.

Table 2 (column 6) largely shows that cash transfers on average either decrease or have no impact on IPV. Of the fifteen studies highlighted in Table 2, twelve estimate decreases in at least one measure of IPV. This is consistent with Baranov et al. (2021) whose meta-analysis of the effect of cash transfers on IPV in LMICs shows either a decrease in IPV or no effect overall. Buller et al. (2018) use a mixed-methods review of cash transfers on IPV in LMICs and also find little evidence that cash transfers may increase IPV. The majority of these cash transfer programs transfer the funds to the woman in the household (see column 8). Very few studies have experimentally varied the gender of the cash transfer recipient except for Haushofer et al. (2019) in Kenya. They find that unconditional cash transfers to women reduce both physical and sexual violence, whereas transfers to men only reduce physical violence with no impact on sexual violence. They argue men may use physical violence instrumentally but dislike doing so, yet find pleasure in sexual violence and thus use it expressively.

Some of the null results in Table 2 remain economically meaningful despite not being statistically significant at conventional levels. For example, Hidrobo et al. (2016) show a potential reduction of over 50 percent in physical and/or sexual violence from a conditional cash transfer, with the upper bound of the confidence interval implying an increase of less than 5 percent. Angelucci (2008) find a potential reduction of over 30 percent in aggressive behavior, with potential increases of 8 percent.

Roy et al. (2019) study the post-program impacts of a transfer (food or an unconditional cash transfer) with or without a nutrition behavior change communication in Bangladesh. They show that six to ten months post-program, IPV does not differ between women receiving only transfers and the control group; however, women receiving transfers plus a behavior change communication about nutrition experience 26 percent less physical violence. Moreover, either type of transfer (food or unconditional cash transfer) combined with a behavior change communication reduces physical IPV relative to the control group at this time. Four years post-program, Roy et al. (2024) show that reductions in physical IPV persist from the combination of cash and behavior change communication, but no longer from food plus behavior change communication. Lokot et al. (2024) conduct a mixed-method study nine years post-program on the evolution of program impacts and find that cash plus the nu-

trition behavior change communication continues to sustain reductions in violence. Their results suggest that sustained impacts on economic security can drive sustained reductions in violence.

There remains limited evidence on the long-term impacts of cash transfers alone, especially after the cash ends. Most existing studies follow participants for relatively short durations. Among those with longer time horizons, results are inconclusive. For example, Bobonis et al. (2013) document short-run reductions in IPV following the introduction of a conditional cash transfer program. The authors' later work examines the impact of conditional cash transfers and a law reform codifying IPV as legal grounds for unilateral divorce and finds that in the long-run, the impacts on IPV are no longer statistically significant (Bobonis et al., 2025). Similarly, Roy et al. (2024), evaluate an intervention that combines transfers with a behavior change communication. As a result, it is difficult to disentangle whether sustained reductions in IPV are due to the transfer itself or the behavior change communication. More research is needed to assess whether cash alone can generate long lasting decreases in IPV after cash transfers end, or whether complementary programming is necessary to maintain reductions in IPV over time.

While none of the studies in Table 2 show that cash transfers increase IPV for the average treatment effect, there are some instances where we observe an increase in IPV for sub-groups. As column 8 highlights, the majority of cash transfer programs in LMICs target women as the primary recipient of the cash transfer. Some exceptions include Sahay et al. (2023), who examine a conditional cash transfer in the Philippines that went to both females and males, Heath et al. (2020), who study an unconditional cash transfer in Mali given to household heads who are primarily male, and Haushofer et al. (2019) who explicitly vary the gender of the recipient to better understand if gender of the recipient matters for IPV outcomes. Governments give transfers to women based on beliefs that women are more likely to spend on household and child welfare and to promote gender equality and empowerment. However, when women are recipients of transfers, this can change power dynamics within the household causing men to feel threatened and potentially engage in violence. This is the backlash effect described in Section 3.

Panel A of Table A1 highlights subgroups where heterogeneity is notable in the studies

highlighted in column 7 of Table 2. Angelucci (2008) shows that larger transfers to women increase the aggressive behavior of husbands, probably because their wife's entitlement to a large transfer threatens their male identity. Bobonis et al. (2013) similarly show that while beneficiary women are 40 percent less likely to be victims of physical abuse, they are more likely to receive violent threats (with no associated abuse), which husbands most likely make use of to extract rents from their wives.

Both Heath et al. (2020) and Peterman et al. (2022) study the impact of unconditional cash transfers on IPV in West Africa and find that the average treatment effect on IPV is negative. However, the heterogeneity in Table A1 tells a different story; Heath et al. (2020) find the decrease in violence is driven by polygamous households, while monogamous households see no reduction in violence. Peterman et al. (2022) estimate negative impacts for monogamous households and no reduction in violence for polygamous households. It is worth noting that a major dimension where these two studies differ is the gender of the recipient. The government run program in Heath et al. (2020) gives transfers to men and the authors argue this might decrease male stress which may be exacerbated when men have multiple wives, while the government run program in Peterman et al. (2022) gives cash transfers to women.

Ultimately many of the studies on cash transfers highlighted in Table 2 show that transfers to households can lower the incidence of IPV whether that be through poverty reduction, stress reduction, or other mechanisms. However, cash transfer programs are largely scheduled and expected financial transfers to families; how does IPV prevalence change in the face of an income shock? Camacho and Rodríguez (2020) explore this idea by studying a conditional cash transfer in Colombia whose transfer timing deviated greatly from its expected bi-monthly schedule. The authors find that while violence is weakly decreasing in months that households receive an unexpected payment (i.e. a positive income shock), IPV increases in months when a payment is missed (a negative income shock). We explore the impact of various economic initiatives in the next section, delving deeper past cash transfers into an array of other economic initiatives that have the potential to affect IPV.

5 Economic Initiatives and IPV

Beyond cash transfer programs, numerous other policies and interventions in LMICs aim to alleviate poverty through economic initiatives that affect income, employment, or both. Table 3 summarizes the empirical evidence on how such economic initiatives influence IPV, abstracting from cash transfers discussed earlier. The interventions reviewed fall into three broad categories: non-cash transfer income, employment initiatives, and life skills or vocational training. Table 3 presents causal studies from the economics literature, ordered chronologically. For each study, column 2 reports the country context, column 3 the intervention type, column 4 the study design, column 5 the form of IPV measured, column 6 the direction of the average treatment effect (where null means the result is not statistically significant at the 10 percent level), and column 7 whether the study investigates heterogeneity. Additional heterogeneity findings from select studies are summarized in Panel B of Table A1.

Non-Cash Transfer Income

We begin with income-related interventions (excluding cash transfer programs), as income is a well-established determinant of IPV. Much of the empirical literature examines income shocks—both positive and negative—which are common in LMIC contexts. IPV is positively associated with poverty, economic risk, and household stress, suggesting that increases in income may reduce IPV by alleviating these pressures. However, when income gains accrue primarily to women, they may disrupt intra-household power dynamics, potentially triggering backlash and increasing IPV.

Several studies summarized in Table 3 use rainfall variation as an exogenous source of household income shocks. These studies consistently find that negative shocks, namely droughts, lead to increases in IPV, plausibly due to reduced household income (Sekhri and Storeygard, 2014; Abiona and Koppensteiner, 2018; Díaz and Saldarriaga, 2023). Notably, none of these studies detect significant declines in IPV due to a positive rainfall shock. However, some report meaningful heterogeneity, as detailed in Panel B of Table A1. For example, Sekhri and Storeygard (2014) find that IPV increases following negative rainfall shocks are smaller in regions with larger Muslim populations. Abiona and Koppensteiner

(2018) show that inheritance rights for women and children can reverse the adverse effects of negative income shocks on IPV.

Other studies examine targeted interventions to increase income. For example, Mobarak and Ramos (2019) study a program offering interest-free loans to men for seasonal migration. While the incentive does not have a statistically significant effect on IPV, it increases IPV in nearby spillover villages. The authors attribute this to exposure reduction: when incentivized men migrate, women in non-participating villages where migration rates fall, spend more time with potential perpetrators, thereby increasing IPV. Finally, Perova et al. (2023) find that increases in the gender wage ratio in favor of women are associated with a reduction in female homicide, underscoring the importance of broader labor market dynamics.

Employment

We next examine policies and interventions related to employment, a central economic determinant of IPV. Increases in male employment are generally expected to reduce IPV by easing financial stress and reducing the time couples spend together, both of which can lower the risk of IPV. Conversely, male unemployment may intensify economic hardship and increase time spent at home, potentially heightening tensions and increasing IPV risk.

The relationship between female employment and IPV is theoretically more complex and ambiguous. On one hand, increased female employment may reduce IPV by raising household income and reducing exposure to violent partners. On the other hand, shifts in women's employment status may provoke backlash if they challenge prevailing gender norms or perceived male authority, particularly in settings where men are unemployed. In such contexts, IPV may function either expressively, as retaliation for perceived status loss, or instrumentally, as a means of restricting female autonomy or earnings (Eswaran and Malhotra, 2011; Anderberg and Rainer, 2013). The effect of female unemployment is likewise unclear: it may heighten IPV through increased economic stress and exposure to violent partners or reduce it if male partners actively seek to restrict women's labor force participation and resort to violence when they are employed.

A growing body of research examines shocks to female employment and their consequences for IPV. Using variation in female labor force participation in India, one of the

earliest empirical papers is Chin (2012) that finds that female employment reduces IPV, primarily through reduced exposure to violent partners. Kotsadam and Villanger (2022) study randomly assigned job offers to women and find either null or negative effects on IPV. Similarly, Molina and Tanaka (2023) show that women living near exporting garment factories in Myanmar, beneficiaries of a trade-induced employment boom, are more likely to work and less likely to experience IPV, suggesting that the strength of women's outside options influences their exposure to violence. In Rwanda, Sanin (2023) finds that seasonal increases in female employment due to coffee mill expansion reduce IPV, not through income effects, but by increasing the opportunity cost of violence: incapacitating women limits their labor productivity during the high-demand season. Taken together, these studies provide consistent evidence that increases in female employment tend to reduce IPV on average.

Additional evidence comes from studies of workfare programs. Sarma (2022) analyzes India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and finds that this workfare program mitigates the effects of negative income shocks (e.g., droughts) on IPV. In Egypt and Tunisia, Blair and Mvukiyehe (2024) examine similar public works programs. In Egypt, where the program disproportionately benefits women and offers more stable employment, IPV increases, consistent with backlash from shifts in household bargaining power. In Tunisia, where job allocation is more gender-balanced, no significant effects on IPV are found. Erten and Keskin (2021) find that declines in female employment reduce IPV, aligning with instrumental theories of violence, where men use IPV as a tool to extract rents from working women.

Turning to male employment, several studies highlight the effects of negative shocks. Clerici and Tripodi (2023) show that COVID-19-induced male unemployment increases the likelihood of sexual violence. Similarly, Agüero et al. (2024) find that pandemic-related employment losses in male-dominated sectors increase IPV risk. In Peru, Chong and Velásquez (2024) find that trade liberalization increases IPV in districts where male employment falls due to tariff reductions. Likewise, Erten and Keskin (2024) show that following Cambodia's WTO accession, tariff reductions reduced male employment and increased female labor force participation, triggering backlash effects and increasing IPV. Panel B in Table A1 highlights interesting heterogeneity: Chong and Velásquez (2024) show that increases are less severe

for women who are older and more educated. Somewhat surprisingly, there is a very little literature examining the causal link between education and IPV outcomes. Erten and Keskin (2018) and Akyol and Kırdar (2022) reach differing conclusions on the impact of compulsory schooling reforms on IPV in Turkey. Together with evidence on spousal education gaps (Angelucci, 2008; Hidrobo and Fernald, 2013), these studies suggest that education may affect IPV risk either by selection into the match or later by altering household bargaining dynamics. However, this remains relatively under-studied in a causal manner, and a key priority for future research.

Entrepreneurship and Lifeskills training

The last set of papers explored in the economics initiatives section is related to the impact of entrepreneurship and lifeskills training opportunities on IPV. These are often interventions targeted at females in LMICs and the first group of papers we discuss provide traditional business and entrepreneurship training. Bulte and Lensink (2019) study the impact of an intervention to help female micro-entrepreneurs in Vietnam. The program combines training modules devoted to gender equity with standard business skills such as financial literacy and marketing. The authors find mixed results: decreases in IPV when females are asked directly but increases when surveyed via list experiment. Casabianca et al. (2023) provide multiple versions of a business training intervention to women in Uganda: an opt-in intervention where women can attend mentoring sessions at a training venue, or an intensive intervention where mentors visit women at their homes or businesses. The authors find that while the intensive intervention decreases IPV, female beneficiaries prefer the more private, opt-in intervention that has a null effect on IPV. Park and Kumar (2022) provide a combination of business training and cognitive behavioral training to women in Liberia and find decreases across multiple types of IPV. Lastly, Green et al. (2015) provide a training program, both to women, as well to women and their partners. When examining the training provided to women and their partners, the authors find no effect on IPV. However, they do find increases in marital control when women receive the training alone.

The second set of papers study the impact of lifeskills trainings on IPV. Lifeskills trainings include what economists call 'soft skills'; these are skills that educate girls and young

women on sexual and reproductive health, build confidence, and improve negotiation or other skills, with the ultimate goal of empowerment. Sessions may also include 'hard skills,' such as vocational instruction towards income-generating activities. Bandiera et al. (2020) examine an adolescent empowerment program targeting young women and girls in Uganda, and find that by endline, the share who report having sex unwillingly falls by 30 percent. Chatterjee and Poddar (2024) study the effect of a similar program in India five years after the intervention, and also find decreases across multiple IPV types. Rather than solely targeting female adolescents, Shah et al. (2023) include male adolescents as well in lifeskills training, using a curriculum that focuses on reshaping male attitudes surrounding masculinity through sports-based pedagogy. The authors document that IPV decreases in communities where boys and young men engage in soccer-based lifeskills training. Angelucci et al. (2023) study a multifaceted intervention that combines holistic service provision and financial support to women with a cross-randomized men's engagement program focused on IPV and gender norms targeting spouses and men who live in these households. The overall program yields no average effect on IPV. But the authors document heterogeneity by baseline risk: IPV declines among women with above-average risk but increases among those initially at low risk for IPV (see Panel B, Table A1). These findings are consistent with theoretical predictions that female empowerment can reduce IPV in high-risk settings by improving bargaining power or outside options, but may provoke backlash in lower risk contexts where shifts in household power dynamics threaten male status or control.

The work outlined here provides a number of relevant findings. First, IPV increases when households experience negative income shocks. Policies like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme or other policies which increase income during these negative economic shocks can mitigate this increase in IPV. Second, female employment on average tends to decrease IPV (Chin, 2012; Kotsadam and Villanger, 2022; Sarma, 2022; Molina and Tanaka, 2023; Sanin, 2023). While we do observe some instances of male backlash, some of this might be due to increased female employment while male employment is decreasing (Blair and Mvukiyehe, 2024; Erten and Keskin, 2024). Kotsadam and Villanger (2022) suggest we might not observe backlash due to selection in that women who apply for jobs might do so precisely as they do not expect violence to increase. Third, male unem-

ployment increases IPV (Clerici and Tripodi, 2023; Chong and Velásquez, 2024; Erten and Keskin, 2024), which is notable for policy especially during times of economic downturn. Lastly, entrepreneurship coupled with lifeskills training generally decrease instances of IPV for both women and girls, which indicates that interventions of this type could be a viable empowerment tool to reduce violence.

Another area of economic interest is the role that transfers of illiquid assets (e.g. real estate, jewelry, etc.) to women, as opposed to income or gainful employment, can have on IPV. Theoretically, this type of economic initiative could reduce IPV, as illiquid assets are not easily extractible and thus men using violence instrumentally may be discouraged. Menon (2020) shows that higher gold prices at the time of marriage results in greater instances of IPV. The author argues this is because higher prices reduce the share of gold in the dowry basket, thus reducing the value of assets the bride has control over and, in turn, her bargaining power. Menon (2020) goes on to note that an alternative could be non-extractable assets that stay under a woman's control (e.g. bequests), improving her position in the household. However, illiquid assets may also increase backlash in cases where men feel the asset transfer threatens their household status. Lagomarsino and Rossi (2023) examine this phenomenon in Argentina. The authors study a housing initiative from the Argentine government to provide highly-subsidized mortgages to women, either alone or in a joint contract with their partner. Women holding joint contracts are more likely to experience IPV, whereas women holding sole contracts see decreases. The authors note that the results for joint ownership are consistent with status inconsistency and backlash, and the results for sole ownership are consistent with stress/poverty reduction, in which a positive economic shock alleviates financial stress. While this shows that there is potential for illiquid assets to reduce IPV, the mechanisms and these types of interventions require further study.

6 Laws, Institutions, and Norms and IPV

At the societal level, social norms—as well as the laws and institutions that influence and reflect them—are likely to play a central role in shaping the prevalence of IPV. Figure 1 presents data from the World Values Survey illustrating the share of individuals, by region

and gender, who report that it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife (World Values Survey, 2014, 2021). These are unweighted regional averages across all countries available in Wave 6 and 7 of the survey data. Restricting to a balanced panel across both waves yields qualitatively similar results. Interestingly, regions with the highest norms of acceptability for a man to beat his wife also tend to exhibit the highest prevalence rates. Moreover, male and female responses are highly correlated within region, suggesting that these norms are broadly internalized across gender lines. A growing body of empirical research documents a positive association between the social acceptability of IPV and its incidence (Cools and Kotsadam, 2017; González and Rodríguez-Planas, 2020; Dhanaraj and Mahambare, 2022), underscoring the importance of understanding how norms, and the institutional and legal frameworks that sustain them, contribute to the persistence of IPV. Masculinity norms can result in IPV (Matavelli et al., 2025). These norms of male dominance, control, and social image often legitimize violence as a means of asserting authority, and thus reinforce the broader social acceptance of IPV.

Laws and institutions play a critical role in shaping the prevalence, persistence, and dynamics of IPV. Institutions, broadly defined, encompass both formal rules—such as legal statutes and enforcement mechanisms—and informal constraints, including social conventions and norms that govern behavior without legal backing (North, 1991). Legal reforms can influence IPV by directly altering incentives and constraints or indirectly by shifting social norms, either by changing what individuals believe others view as acceptable or by catalyzing broader cultural change through state action. However, in many LMICs, the mere existence of laws may be insufficient to protect women's rights in practice. Weak institutional capacity and limited enforcement, combined with prevailing gender norms that restrict female autonomy, can hinder the effectiveness of formal legal reforms. In such contexts, the de jure expansion of women's rights may not translate into de facto protections, and in some cases may provoke backlash if they challenge entrenched power structures.

Table 4 presents empirical evidence on the impact of legal and institutional changes on IPV outcomes. As with Table 2 and Table 3, the columns are organized to highlight key dimensions of study design and findings. However, papers are grouped thematically rather than chronologically, to reflect common interventions, policy approaches, and possible

mechanisms. Panel C of Table A1 presents heterogeneity results from select papers.

Laws and Legal Changes

We begin by reviewing legal reforms related to domestic violence and divorce. Divorce law reform has been shown to reduce domestic violence, spousal homicide, and even female suicide in high income countries (Stevenson and Wolfers, 2006). Legal reforms can influence IPV through two main channels. Unilateral divorce laws may lower the cost of exiting abusive relationships for victims (changing threat points) while laws criminalizing domestic violence or IPV can increase the costs of perpetration. Several studies investigate the effects of such legal changes across different LMIC contexts.

In Mexico, multiple recent reforms have codified domestic violence as grounds for divorce, criminalized domestic violence, and introduced prevention and assistance programs. Beleche (2019) finds that while criminalization leads to a reduction in reported IPV, the inclusion of domestic violence as grounds for divorce and victim-assistance policies have no measurable impact on IPV. The author attributes this to implementation frictions as proving domestic violence in court remains costly, likely deterring victims from pursuing legal separation. Bobonis et al. (2025) focus on the interaction between this legal reform and a Mexican conditional cash transfer program. They find that the reform, by strengthening women's exit options, increases the threat point in bargaining and amplifies the violence-reducing effects of the transfer. However, this effect is short-lived, and in the longer run, impacts on IPV are null.

Sanin (2024) studies a legal reform in Rwanda that not only grants women unilateral divorce rights in cases of domestic violence but also broadly criminalizes all forms of IPV. Using variation in genocide exposure and marriage timing, the author finds that the reform significantly reduces IPV in post-genocide marriages in regions heavily affected by genocide. The decline is attributed to both increased divorce rates and a deterrent effect within intact marriages. Notably, younger women in these same regions—who entered the marriage market after the genocide—also report lower rates of IPV, greater decision-making power, and weaker acceptance of wife-beating, despite no change in their own divorce rates. These patterns suggest that the law shifted prevailing social norms, increasing the credibility of exit and

reducing the social acceptability of violence, even among women who were not directly exposed to the original marriage market shock.

Other studies examine the impacts of unilateral divorce laws that do not specifically target IPV, but may nonetheless improve women's bargaining positions. Corradini and Buccione (2023) examine Egypt's 2000 reform that allowed women to unilaterally divorce without needing to prove harm. Although Egyptian women technically had the right to divorce on grounds of "injury," the authors document that some forms of IPV were culturally sanctioned and thus rarely met the legal threshold. They find that the reform led to a decrease in IPV and increased investment in children's education. The heterogeneity explored in Panel C of Table A1 suggests that proximity to the legal system may be protective as decreases in IPV are greater in magnitude for women who live less than five kilometers from a family court.

García-Ramos (2021) studies a similar reform in Mexico. Domestic violence was a legitimate grounds for divorce in Mexico, as explored in work above, and both parties could also apply for a mutual consent divorce. This process remained in place after the implementation of no-fault unilateral divorce, implying that those who used this option did so because a mutual divorce was not an option. While the reform initially yields no impact on IPV, long-run increases emerge among women who remained married, consistent with the idea that IPV may be used strategically to prevent marital dissolution, and that increasing women's exit options can eventually alter the strategic use of violence.

Ferraz and Schiavon (2022) study the effect of a law in Brazil which punishes IPV against women through a number of mechanisms: harsher penalties, emergency protective measures and social assistance for victims, and specialized institutions. Following the implementation of this law, the authors find that female homicide due to household aggression falls by 9 percent.

Beyond laws directly targeting domestic violence or divorce, broader legal reforms—particularly those aimed at equalizing inheritance or property rights across genders—may also influence IPV. These reforms can enhance women's bargaining power by improving their economic security and exit options, thereby potentially reducing IPV. However, as with other forms of female empowerment, such reforms may also provoke a backlash if they are perceived to threaten traditional gender roles. A few studies document the effects of inheritance

and property rights reform on IPV outcomes. Harari (2019) and Amaral (2017) examine legal changes in Kenya and India that equalized inheritance rights for daughters and find significant reductions in IPV following the reforms. In addition to the decline in violence, the authors document broader improvements in women's well-being. Harari (2019) reports decreases in female genital mutilation, delayed age at marriage and childbirth, and increases in women's decision-making power within the household. Amaral (2017) proposes that improvements in women's bargaining positions in the marriage market drive the reduction in IPV. Specifically, following the reform, women are less likely to marry alcohol-consuming partners and more likely to reside near their natal families—factors that may provide additional protection against IPV.

Anderson (2021) studies variation in marital property regimes across former colonial legal traditions in Sub-Saharan Africa and finds that more equitable marital property rights are associated with lower IPV. The author argues that these effects are consistent with models in which women's weaker property rights reduce their fallback position in marriage and increase their vulnerability to violence.

Institutions and Norms

We next consider institutional reforms that extend beyond legal change to the mechanisms responsible for law enforcement and creation. Institutions such as women's police stations, which do not alter existing legislation but rather enhance enforcement, offer one such example. These stations, typically staffed predominantly by women, may shift institutional priorities toward the implementation of laws that have historically been under-enforced, particularly those concerning gender-based violence. In addition, women might be more likely to report crimes when a police station is staffed primarily by women.

Amaral et al. (2021) evaluate the introduction of women's police stations in India and find that while these stations increase the reporting of domestic violence, they do not reduce the underlying incidence of violence. Similarly, Perova and Reynolds (2017) study the expansion of women's police stations in Brazil and estimate no significant effect on female homicides overall. However the impact is economically meaningful showing a potential reduction of up to 25% in female homicides, with an upper bound of a roughly 3% increase in the 95 percent

confidence interval. In addition, they do find declines in female homicides in capital cities and metropolitan areas, suggesting that enforcement effectiveness may be context-dependent (see Table A1).

Interestingly, evidence from the United States indicates more promising outcomes. Increasing the share of female police officers led to a decline in both intimate partner homicide and non-fatal domestic abuse (Miller and Segal, 2019). Sviatschi and Trako (2024) analyze the introduction of women's justice centers in Peru. These are comprehensive institutions that integrate police, medical, and legal services. The authors find that their presence reduces violence, increases reporting and prosecution of gender-specific crimes, and improves child human capital outcomes. These findings underscore the importance of institutional design, suggesting that multi-dimensional support structures may be more effective than police enforcement alone.

Another important institutional channel operates through political representation. Increased participation of women in formal political roles may influence legislative agendas, as female politicians often prioritize different policy issues than their male counterparts. Beyond these direct effects, institutional reforms that elevate women's political visibility may also catalyze broader normative shifts. By increasing women's presence and authority in the public sphere, such reforms can potentially reshape societal perceptions of gender roles, enhance women's collective bargaining power, and shift prevailing gender norms.

Recent empirical studies explore the relationship between female political leadership and IPV. Bochenkova et al. (2023) and Delaporte and Pino (2022) examine the impact of female mayors in Brazil and find that their presence is associated with reductions in female homicides. Delaporte and Pino (2022) further show that these effects are amplified in municipalities with a higher share of female councilors, suggesting that gender composition of local governments shapes policy priorities. The authors posit that these outcomes reflect differences in the types of policies adopted by female versus male politicians. In contrast, Anukriti et al. (2022) find that exposure to female political leaders in India is associated with increases in physical IPV. They argue that female leaders are more likely to prioritize public health infrastructure, particularly in the area of sexual and reproductive health. As a result, there is greater uptake of modern contraception and a decline in fertility, which

can spark conflict in households where spouses hold divergent preferences over childbearing. Importantly, the authors find no increase in violence in households where husbands do not desire more children. These findings contrast with those of Dupas et al. (2025), who document reductions in IPV following increased access to contraception. The divergence may stem from differing levels of spousal agreement over fertility, with Dupas et al. (2025) studying couples with more aligned preferences.

Other studies highlight the complex and context-dependent effects of empowerment-oriented interventions. Tumen and Ulucan (2024) evaluate a program in Turkey that introduced "panic buttons"—portable devices that alert the police when activated—and launched a corresponding public awareness campaign. While designed to improve protection for women and deter violence, the intervention led to increased IPV among less educated and more financially constrained women. The authors suggest that this outcome reflects unintended consequences: the program enhanced economic independence and employment among vulnerable women, which may have provoked male backlash. The authors show that backlash is heightened among the most vulnerable women, those with lower education, those with less education than their partner, and those facing financial constraints (see Panel C of Table A1).

Historical legacies and institutions also play a critical role in shaping contemporary patterns of IPV. Lowes (2022) examines the matrilineal belt in Sub-Saharan Africa, a region in which lineage and inheritance pass through the female line, and finds that women in matrilineal societies experience lower IPV and greater autonomy in decision-making, especially regarding health care and mobility. Children in these households also show improved health and educational outcomes. These findings suggest that matrilineal kinship systems support women through stronger kin-based networks and constraints on male authority. Similarly, Guarnieri and Rainer (2021) investigate how colonial institutions shaped gender outcomes in Cameroon. They compare regions governed by British versus French colonial administrations, showing that British areas, which emphasized universal education and broader employment access, have higher rates of female labor force participation today. However, these same regions also exhibit higher IPV rates—women are 30 percent more likely to be victims of domestic violence than their counterparts in former French territories. The au-

thors interpret these findings through the lens of male backlash, where women's economic gains may generate conflict in settings with persistent patriarchal norms.

The legal reforms discussed here show that laws aimed at reducing IPV tend to be effective (Beleche, 2019; Ferraz and Schiavon, 2022) and laws reducing barriers to divorce can be effective (Corradini and Buccione, 2023) but can also isolate the most vulnerable (García-Ramos, 2021). Women's police stations alone do not seem to reduce violence though they increase reporting (Perova and Reynolds, 2017; Amaral et al., 2021), but women's justice centers have the potential to reduce IPV (Sviatschi and Trako, 2024). Since women's justice centers are more robust versions of women's police centers, this underlines the necessity of additional social support to reduce IPV, as increased ease of reporting may not reduce it alone.

While high-income countries differ markedly from LMICs in their capacity to enforce laws and provide social services, certain legal and institutional strategies that have proven effective in HICs may offer guidance for future policy in LMIC settings. For instance, mandatory arrest policies have shown promise as a deterrent to IPV (Berk and Sherman, 1988; Angrist, 2006; Cook and Taylor, 2019). Additionally, targeted interventions for individuals identified as high-risk victims—such as enhanced outreach, prosecutorial attention, and advocacy services—have been found to significantly reduce the likelihood of IPV-related homicide in the United States (Arora et al., 2024; Koppa, 2024). These approaches suggest that carefully designed and enforced legal mechanisms, particularly when coupled with support services, may hold potential for effective IPV reduction in a broader range of institutional contexts.

7 Causal Research Outside of Economics

While this paper largely examines the economics literature surrounding IPV, in this section we highlight research outside of economics that also causally examines interventions to decrease IPV in LMIC settings. The research included in Table 5 is not exhaustive, but a subset of some seminal, non-economics work on IPV. The previous exclusion criteria apply: the data must come from an LMIC setting, relate to IPV behavior, and employ causal analysis. While not a part of the selection criteria, most of the research highlighted here comes from public health. This is perhaps unsurprising since IPV is a major public health issue.

We also highlight a few economics papers that apply intervention approaches more typical to some of the public health literature but methods in line with economics research.

While much of the economics literature has focused on economic (and institutional) initiatives to reduce IPV, public health's primary focus has been attitude and behavioral change through community mobilization (Abramsky et al., 2014; Wagman et al., 2015; Sharma et al., 2020), couples counseling (Gupta et al., 2013; Doyle et al., 2018; Dunkle et al., 2020), men's discussion groups (Hossain et al., 2014), life skills interventions (Pronyk et al., 2006; Jewkes et al., 2008; Kapiga et al., 2019; Gibbs et al., 2020), and faith-based leadership counseling (Boyer et al., 2022). Many of these interventions ultimately aim to shift social norms around IPV.

Some of these interventions also include an economic component. For example, the South African program, IMAGE (Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equality), couples microcredit loans to women, with a year-long training curriculum that covers topics such as gender roles, relationship, intimate partner violence, and HIV. This intervention reduces IPV (Pronyk et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2007, 2009). Gupta et al. (2013) combine savings with gender dialogue groups that target women and their partners, underscoring the importance of non-violence and respect within the home. They find null results for physical and sexual violence, but report significant IPV reductions among couples attending over 75 percent of sessions (though attendance is endogenous). Drawing from the IMAGE curriculum, Kapiga et al. (2019) provide a social empowerment intervention to women in Tanzania already participating in a microfinance program and document that physical IPV decreases. In a meta-analysis analyzing the effectiveness of community mobilization and group-based interventions in preventing IPV, Leight et al. (2023) largely find these methods are effective in reducing the likelihood of a woman experiencing IPV in the last year.

The public health literature has focused on community-based behavioral interventions, particularly those focused on transforming gender norms and promoting non-violent conflict resolution. For example, the SASA! program in Uganda—a community mobilization intervention aimed at shifting power dynamics between men and women—has been rigorously evaluated using RCTs. However, Abramsky et al. (2014) do not find SASA! decreases IPV incidence due to large confidence intervals. Abramsky et al. (2014) only have eight clus-

ters (four treatment, four control) which may produce null results due to limited statistical power.

Another distinction is that public health interventions have invited men to take steps towards the prevention and reduction of violence earlier than other social sciences. Jewkes et al. (2008) study a South African intervention targeting both men and women using a participatory learning approach to deliver sessions on personal behavior, sex and love, and taking risks and sexual problems. Gibbs et al. (2020) target young adult men (and women) individually, by encouraging them to partake in a livelihoods training focused on gender, relationships, violence and sexual health. Sharma et al. (2020) study a gender-transformative intervention in Ethiopia, that promotes skill-building sessions within the context of a traditional coffee ceremony, given to men, women, or couples together. Hossain et al. (2014) employ men's discussion groups that educate and increase awareness regarding gender-based violence, gender inequitable beliefs, and provide conflict training. While none of these studies find statistically significant reductions in women's experience of IPV, most of these studies do show that men report lower incidence of perpetration. Interestingly, a few of the economics studies that include men (Angelucci et al., 2023; Shah et al., 2023) have found reductions in female reports of IPV.

Boyer et al. (2025) implement a men's discussion group similar to Hossain et al. (2014) but in Peru. Trained male facilitators lead a virtual support group over WhatsApp, where participants receive and practice weekly skill-building challenges aimed at helping men identify and regulate emotions. In contrast to similar public health initiatives, the authors find statistically significant decreases in sexual and physical violence for partners of men in their thirties. The authors argue that the success of the program is due to the recruitment strategy, which frames participation as an opportunity to strengthen relationships, potentially reducing resistance among higher-risk men.

Other interventions in Table 5 include themes related to gender non-violence and preparing men for fatherhood (Doyle et al., 2018) or premarital or couples counseling in which religious figures motivate men to share household power (Boyer et al., 2022). Dunkle et al. (2020) study the impacts of a couples intervention in Rwanda focused on power usage, personal reflection, and aspirations for healthy relationships. All three of these studies doc-

ument decreases in IPV. Interestingly, Cullen et al. (2025) examine a couples intervention similar to Dunkle et al. (2020), but find increased IPV. Couples are invited to partake in weekly group discussions focused on marital communication skills, changing conservative gender attitudes, and promoting new progressive norms in the community. Cullen et al. (2025) suggest that the positive impacts might be due to backlash stemming from a loss of identity and power among male participants, potentially compounded by feelings of shame.

8 A Deeper Look into Backlash

Concerns about backlash, where efforts to empower women provoke adverse reactions including increased IPV, feature prominently in discussions of IPV intervention design. These concerns are especially salient for interventions that expand women's economic, social, or legal agency. While some programs appear to trigger backlash, the conditions under which empowerment leads to violence rather than protection remain insufficiently understood. This section revisits the empirical literature to shed light on these dynamics.

To better understand when backlash arises, we systematically reviewed all studies in Tables 2–4 that considered it as a mechanism behind increases in IPV. For each, we recorded the total number of IPV outcomes tested, the number of IPV outcomes showing increases, and their significance levels, allowing us to assess the distribution and strength of the underlying estimates. Among the fifty-nine empirical studies reviewed in Table 2 – Table 4, twenty-five (42 percent) report increases in IPV for at least one subgroup, context, or IPV subtype. Of these twenty-five studies, eleven consider backlash as a potential mechanism, accounting for nineteen percent of the total sample. In the cash transfer literature, the proportion of observed increases in IPV is relatively small given the number of studies and outcomes tested. In contrast, economic empowerment programs and institutional reforms in Tables 3 and 4 show relatively more increases in IPV with smaller confidence intervals on the results.

Two broad patterns emerge from this exercise. First, backlash appears linked to male economic displacement that alters intra-household power dynamics. For example, Clerici and Tripodi (2023) document increased IPV following COVID-19-related job loss among husbands. In Peru, Chong and Velásquez (2024) find that trade liberalization, which dis-

proportionately reduces male employment, leads to higher IPV. Similarly, Erten and Keskin (2024) show that Cambodia's WTO accession, characterized by declining male and rising female employment, is associated with greater IPV. In each case, men appear to respond to perceived status loss by reasserting control through violence.

Second, backlash can emerge even in the absence of male displacement. Several studies identify increased IPV following programs that expand women's agency such as through employment, training, or financial autonomy, without reducing male labor market opportunities. These effects are interpreted as reactions to perceived challenges to traditional gender roles. IPV increases have been observed following expanded female employment opportunities (Guarnieri and Rainer, 2021; Blair and Mvukiyehe, 2024) participation in female-focused training programs (Bulte and Lensink, 2019; Angelucci et al., 2023), and asset transfers to women (Lagomarsino and Rossi, 2023). Erten and Keskin (2021) observe IPV declines when female employment contracts—consistent with backlash dynamics rooted in shifting gender norms rather than resource competition per se. In contrast, most cash transfer programs, even those directed to women, do not increase IPV on average. A few studies note backlash in specific subgroups, such as larger households with more children, or those with wide spousal age or education gaps (Hidrobo and Fernald, 2013; Angelucci et al., 2023).

This pattern—where empowerment programs sometimes provoke backlash, while cash transfers on average do not—is striking. In principle, cash transfers to women could incite backlash if they shift perceived control over household resources or reduce women's economic dependence on male partners. In many LMICs, where financial control is normatively vested in men, the reallocation of resources to women, especially when transfers are regular, sizable, or explicitly targeted may be seen as a status threat. However, backlash seems more common with programs that are publicly framed as empowering, such as training or employment initiatives. These may carry greater symbolic weight, even when their material benefits are similar or modest. Backlash, in this view, may reflect the social meaning and visibility of agency gains, rather than their economic magnitude. Cash transfers may avoid backlash not because they are economically insignificant, but because they often reinforce rather than challenge traditional roles such as targeting "mothers" to support their "children." In this framing, resource flows may be less likely to signal autonomy or threat. This perspective

offers a potential reconciliation of mixed findings in the literature: interventions that increase resources can have divergent IPV effects depending on how agency is introduced and perceived.

9 Estimating Costs of Reducing IPV

While we have reviewed many types of policies and interventions, we still know very little about which types of policies and interventions are most cost-effective in reducing IPV. This is often due to data constraints as cost data is either not shared or unknown in these types of studies. In Table A2 we calculate the cost per IPV case averted from a subset of the empirical work presented in Table 2, Table 3, and Table 5. These studies are generally selected due to the availability of cost data. For the cash transfer studies from Table 2, we display the size of the transfer to the household in column 5. For the interventions from Table 3 and Table 5, we display costs per participant in column 5. All treatment effects are converted to percentage point (in column 4) such that for a 6 percentage point reduction in IPV, we assert that six cases of IPV would be averted per 100 individuals. We compute the number of individuals needed to treat to avert one case of IPV and multiply by per-person (or per household) cost to estimate the cost per IPV case averted in column 7. Though these are rough estimates, they reveal some thought-provoking trends.

Within the cash transfer literature explored in Panel A, the number of people needed to reach in order to avert one case of IPV ranges from 8 - 34 (see column 6) and the cost of one IPV case averted ranges from $3,000 - $10,812 USD. It is clear that cash transfers are an expensive method to reduce IPV. However, they are generally not a violence-sector specific intervention, in that they are usually meant to affect other outcomes too. Much of the literature in economics has studied the impact of cash transfers on IPV as secondary outcomes. Thus, any cost-effectiveness metric for IPV and cash transfer programs likely needs to account for other primary objectives as well (which we do not in Table A2). The only long-term follow-up of a cash transfer program suggests that cost-effectiveness may improve over time. Roy et al. (2019) estimate the cost per case of physical IPV averted at $6,514, while four years later, Roy et al. (2024) report a lower figure of $3,257. The cost of one case decreases in the long run due to larger reductions in violence over time. According to

the authors, this may reflect persistent gains in women's bargaining power and/or increases in the perceived costs to men of perpetrating violence.

Panels B and C of Table A2 show that the number of people needed to reach to avert one case of IPV ranges from 5 - 20, and the cost of one case averted ranges from $85 - $1,820 USD in non-cash transfer interventions (e.g. lifeskills, counseling, microfinance+lifeskills). In fact, several of these interventions appear substantially more cost-effective than cash transfers. We also note that we know very little about the cost-effectiveness of legal and institutional changes discussed in Table 4. Ultimately more consistent cost reporting across studies is needed to understand cost-effectiveness of IPV interventions. Without better estimates, it is challenging to compare interventions or draw clear conclusions about which approaches are the most cost-effective in reducing IPV.

10 Discussion and Conclusion

Despite significant advances, critical gaps remain in our understanding of IPV. This section outlines several priority areas for future theoretical and empirical research. First, economic theory on IPV remains relatively underdeveloped. Dynamic models that account for the complexities of bi-directional violence, including both male-to-female and female-to-male aggression would be a contribution to the literature. Theoretical frameworks that explore whether women's engagement in IPV arises from retaliation or other mechanisms, and how empowerment affects the prevalence of such dynamics, remain largely absent. Incorporating intra-household information asymmetries and communication dynamics between partners could also yield valuable insights into IPV occurrence and persistence. Lastly, most existing models and empirical work focus on conventional household structures, leaving underexplored forms such as same-sex partnerships, polygamous households, adolescent relationships, and non-cohabiting unions. IPV occurs across these diverse relationship forms, and future research should aim to capture this broader range of experiences and contexts.

On the empirical side, first, there is limited empirical evidence on the long-term impacts of most types of IPV interventions. For example, it remains unclear whether gains from programs such as cash transfers are sustained once the intervention ends. Some studies suggest that pairing cash with behavioral change components may be necessary for lasting

reductions in IPV. Similarly, more work is needed to examine whether the gender of the transfer recipient matters, and which IPV subtypes are most responsive to gender-specific designs.

Second, measurement challenges persist. Improving the accuracy and reliability of IPV data remains a central concern. Advances in technology may offer new tools to increase respondent anonymity and reduce reporting stigma, provided that respondent safety and privacy are strictly safeguarded (Alderman et al., 2013). It is also essential to have the data to distinguish between the intensive and extensive margins of IPV. What factors drive individuals to perpetrate and enter into IPV initially, and what leads to an escalation in violence severity? For instance, the increase in IPV during COVID-19 lockdowns in certain places raises important questions about whether this reflected new incidence or intensification of existing abuse. In addition, more cost measurements are needed to generate an agenda of cost-effective interventions and/or policies that reduce IPV.

Third, the links between IPV, mental health, and addiction—well-documented associations in the public health literature—remain understudied in economics (some exceptions include Dave et al. (2023), Murphy et al. (2024), and Baranov et al. (2025)). A better understanding of the causal mechanisms connecting depression, substance use, and IPV could inform the design of more effective, targeted interventions.

A recurring theme in the literature is that observed increases in IPV are often attributed to backlash, particularly when interventions threaten traditional gender roles or male status. However, empowerment programs do not uniformly increase IPV, and identifying the conditions under which it leads to protection rather than harm remains an open empirical question (Anderson and Bidner, 2021). A promising direction for future research is to disentangle whether backlash arises primarily from the economic value of resources transferred to women, or from the symbolic implications of these transfers for male status and control. How men perceive these interventions—either as supportive to the household or as redistributive shifts in power—may be critical to understanding their effects. If men also stand to benefit from gender-equal policies, the likelihood of backlash may be reduced (Cullen et al., 2024). These distinctions have direct implications for program design: the same material transfer may lead to protective or adverse outcomes depending on how it is framed.

More broadly, there is a pressing need to integrate men and communities into efforts aimed at shifting gender norms, an area that remains underexplored in economics. Conceptually, female empowerment should not be treated as a zero-sum game.

Marriage market dynamics represent another promising research avenue. Empowerment interventions and legal reforms may alter women's marriage decisions or enable exit from abusive relationships. As such, existing studies may underestimate the full effects of these interventions if they focus solely on current partnerships without accounting for selection into safer unions over time.

Legal and institutional reforms have also shown promise in reducing IPV. Studies find that unilateral divorce laws, land inheritance rights for women, and domestic violence legislation are associated with reductions in IPV (Amaral, 2017; Beleche, 2019; Harari, 2019; Ferraz and Schiavon, 2022; Corradini and Buccione, 2023; Sanin, 2024). Women's police stations, while increasing reporting, do not appear to reduce violence on their own (Perova and Reynolds, 2017; Amaral et al., 2021), though more comprehensive models such as women's justice centers show greater potential (Sviatschi and Trako, 2024). However, the role of broader political institutions, politics, and governance structures in shaping IPV outcomes remains poorly understood.

Intimate partner violence is embedded in everyday life and sustained by social approval. It is reproduced through norms that define violence as acceptable and institutions that fail to sanction it. Far from episodic, IPV operates as a structural feature of gender relations, shaping health, labor, and political participation, and it is precisely these norms of acceptability that further entrench its prevalence. Thus, social norms and attitudes about the acceptability of IPV—highlighted in Figure 1—represent a central domain for future work. Changing societal beliefs may have powerful effects on IPV prevalence, but the channels through which gender norms evolve—whether via education, media, peer networks, or other mechanisms—are not well established. Further exploration of identity and identity threats, particularly in contexts where shifting gender norms challenge traditional male roles, could help explain why some men respond with violence. Research on male and female social networks may also shed light on whether these networks reinforce or mitigate IPV, and whether they offer support or enable silence.

Finally, greater attention should be paid to statistical power in empirical IPV research. Because IPV can be a relatively rare event, well-intentioned studies may lack sufficient power to detect meaningful changes, especially when disaggregating by subgroup or outcome type. This creates two challenges: true effects may go undetected and spurious effects may appear by chance. Future work should prioritize study designs that are adequately powered to detect both protective and harmful impacts.

In sum, IPV is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that intersects with economic conditions, gender dynamics, institutions, and social norms. Continued theoretical innovation and empirical rigor are needed to understand the causes and consequences of IPV, as well as to design effective policies and interventions to reduce it. Addressing these gaps will be critical for developing more comprehensive strategies to reduce IPV and improve well-being.

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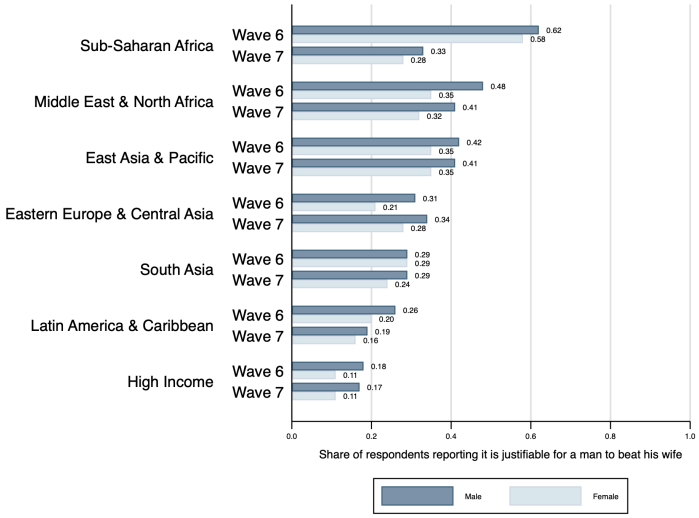
Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Attitudes Towards IPV by Region and Sex



Notes. This figure presents data from Wave 6 (2010-2014) and Wave 7 (2017-2022) of the World Values Survey, drawing on the most recent releases available, version 20201117 (Wave 6, N = 89,474) and version v6 (Wave 7, N=93,094). Respondents rate on a scale from 1–10 the degree to which they think it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife. The data refer to the proportion of those who responded it can be somewhat or always justifiable (2–10). These are unweighted regional averages across all countries available in Waves 6 and 7.

Table 1: Economic Theories of IPV

Paper	Agents (2)	Model Type (3)	Motivation		LMIC (6)
			Instrumental (4)	Expressive (5)	
Tauchen et al. (1991)	Married/ Cohabiting couple	Household bargaining	X	X	N
Farmer and Tiefenthaler (1996)	Married couple	Household bargaining, Game theory		X	N
Farmer and Tiefenthaler (1997)	Married couple	Household bargaining, Game theory	X	X	N
Bloch and Rao (2002)	Married couple	Household bargaining	X		Y
Pollak (2004)	Married couple	Inter-generational transmission of violence			N
Aizer and Dal Bó (2009)	Married/ Cohabiting couple	Game theory			N
Card and Dahl (2011)	Intimate partners	Loss-of-control, Household bargaining		X	N
Eswaran and Malhotra (2011)	Married couple	Household bargaining	X		Y
Anderberg and Rainer (2013)	Married couple	Household bargaining	X		N
Anderson and Genicot (2015)	Married couple	Household bargaining	X		Y
Haushofer et al. (2019)	Married couple	Household bargaining	X	X	Y
Anderson and Bidner (2021)	Married couple	Household bargaining			Y
Baranov et al. (2021)	Married/ Cohabiting couple	Household bargaining	X	X	Y
Bulte and Lensink (2021)	Married couple	Household bargaining	X		Y
Anderberg et al. (2023)	Married couple	Loss-of-control, Matching			N
Calvi and Keskar (2023)	Married couple	Household bargaining, Game theory	X		Y
Shah et al. (2023)	Adolescents	Game theory	X		Y
Sviatschi and Trako (2024)	Married couple	Household bargaining, Game theory			Y

Notes. This table highlights formal economic models of IPV in chronological order. 'Agents' refer to the partner structure modeled and 'Model Type' describes the core theoretical framework. Columns 4 and 5 indicate whether the model motivates IPV as instrumental or expressive; some models involve both. 'LMIC' indicates whether the model is explicitly written for low- and middle-income country contexts.

Table 2: How do Cash Transfers Impact IPV?

	Country (2)	Intervention (3)	Study Type (4)	IPV Type (5)	Average effect (6)	Heterogeneity explored (7)	Female recipient (8)
Angelucci (2008)	Mexico	CCT	RCT	Aggressive Behavior	Null	X	X
Bobonis et al. (2013)	Mexico	CCT	Quasi-Experimental	Sexual	Decreases		X
				Physical	Decreases		
				Emotional	Null	X	
				Threat of violence	Null	X	
Hidrobo and Fernald (2013)	Ecuador	UCT	RCT	Emotional	Null	X	X
				Controlling Behaviors	Decreases		
				Physical	Null		
				Psychological	Decreases	X	
Hidrobo et al. (2016)	Ecuador	Any	RCT	Emotional	Null		X
				Controlling Behaviors	Decreases		
				Physical and/or Sexual	Decreases		
		CCT		Controlling Behaviors	Decreases		
				Emotional	Null		
				Physical and/or Sexual	Null		
		Food		Controlling Behaviors	Null		
				Emotional	Null		
				Physical and/or Sexual	Decreases		
		Vouchers		Controlling Behaviors	Decreases		
				Emotional	Null		
				Physical and/or Sexual	Decreases		
Haushofer et al. (2019)	Kenya	UCT	RCT	Physical	Decreases	X	
				Sexual	Decreases	X	
Litwin et al. (2019)	Brazil	CCT	Quasi-Experimental	Female homicide	Null	X	X
Roy et al. (2019)	Bangladesh	Transfer is UCT or Food	RCT	Emotional	Null		X
				Physical	Null		
		UCT+BCC		Emotional	Null		
				Physical	Decreases		
		Food+BCC		Emotional	Null		
				Physical	Decreases		
Borraz and Munyo (2020)	Uruguay	CCT	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Decreases		X
Camacho and Rodríguez (2020)	Colombia	CCT	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Decreases	X	X
					Increases (when late)		
Heath et al. (2020)	Mali	UCT	RCT	Physical	Decreases	X	
				Emotional	Decreases	X	
				Controlling Behaviors	Decreases	X	
Díaz and Saldarriaga (2022)	Peru	CCT	Quasi-Experimental	Physical	Decreases		X
Peterman et al. (2022)	Ghana	UCT	Quasi-Experimental	Emotional, Physical, or Sexual	Decreases	X	X
Sahay et al. (2023)	Philippines	CCT	Quasi-Experimental	Physical	Null		
				Sexual	Null		
				Emotional	Null		
				Economic	Null		
Sara and Priyanka (2023)	Bangladesh	CCT	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Decreases		X
Roy et al. (2024)	Bangladesh	Transfer is UCT or Food	RCT	Emotional	Null		X
				Physical	Null		
		UCT+BCC		Emotional	Decreases		
				Physical	Decreases		
		Food+BCC		Emotional	Null		
				Physical	Null		

Notes. This table summarizes empirical studies estimating the causal impact of cash transfer programs on IPV chronologically. Column 2 displays the country of the study setting, column 3 is the type of intervention: CCT = conditional cash transfer; UCT = unconditional cash transfer; BCC = behavioral change communication around nutrition. Column 4 refers to whether the analysis is an RCT or quasi-experimental, column 5 is the type of IPV outcome measured. Column 6 displays the main reported direction of the impact on IPV for each outcome, where "null" implies the result is not statistically significant at the 10 percent level. 'Heterogeneity explored' in column 7 indicates whether the study presents subgroup analyses, which is further explored in Panel A of Table A1. Column 8 reports whether the transfer is directed explicitly to the female in the household.

Table 3: Impact of Economic Initiatives on IPV

	Country (2)	Intervention (3)	Study Type (4)	IPV Type (5)	Average effect (6)	Heterogeneity explored (7)
Chin (2012)	India	Female employment	Quasi-Experimental	Physical	Decreases	X
Sekhri and Storeygard (2014)	India	Dry rainfall shock	Quasi-Experimental	Dowry deaths	Increases	X
				Other IPV	Increases	
		Wet rainfall shock		Dowry deaths	Null	
				Other IPV	Null	
Green et al. (2015)	Uganda	Female only training intervention	RCT	Physical/Emotional abuse	Null	
				Marital control	Increases	
		Female with partner training intervention		Physical/Emotional abuse	Null	
				Marital control	Null	
Abiona and Koppensteiner (2018)	Tanzania	Dry rainfall shock	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Increases	X
		Wet rainfall shock		Any	Null	
Bulte and Lensink (2019)	Vietnam	Female training intervention	RCT	Any	Increases (list)	X
				Any	Decreases (direct)	
Mobarak and Ramos (2019)	Bangladesh	Interest-free migration loans	RCT	Emotional	Null	X
				Physical	Null	X
				Sexual	Null	X
Bandiera et al. (2020)	Uganda	Lifeskills (Adolescent females)	RCT	Forced sex	Decreases	
Menon (2020)	India	Price of gold at time of marriage	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Increases	X
Erten and Keskin (2021)	Turkey	Female unemployment	Quasi-Experimental	Physical	Decreases	X
				Sexual	Decreases	X
				Psychological	Decreases	X
Kotsadam and Villanger (2022)	Ethiopia	Job offers to females	RCT	Physical (SR, LR)	Null	X
				Emotional (SR, LR)	Decreases	X
Park and Kumar (2022)	Liberia	Female training intervention	RCT	Controlling Behaviors	Null	
				Emotional	Decreases	
				Physical	Decreases	
				Sexual	Null	
Sarma (2022)	India	Workfare as buffer for drought	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Decreases	
Angelucci et al. (2023)	Democratic Republic of Congo	Financial and support services + Male engagement	RCT	Any	Null	X
Casabianca et al. (2023)	Uganda	Intensive female mentoring intervention	RCT	Abuse index	Decreases	X
		Opt-in female mentoring intervention		Abuse index	Null	X
Clerici and Tripodi (2023)	Uganda	Husband unemployment shock	Quasi-Experimental	Emotional	Null	X
				Physical	Null	X
				Sexual	Increases	
Díaz and Saldarriaga (2023)	Peru	Dry rainfall shock	Quasi-Experimental	Physical	Increases	X
				Sexual	Increases	
				Emotional	Null	
		Wet rainfall shock		Physical	Null	
				Sexual	Null	
				Emotional	Null	
Lagomarsino and Rossi (2023)	Argentina	Joint home ownership	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Increases	
		Female home ownership		Any	Decreases	
Molina and Tanaka (2023)	Myanmar	Trade liberalization (Female employment)	Quasi-Experimental	Physical	Decreases	
Perova et al. (2023)	Brazil	Gender wage gap narrows	Quasi-Experimental	Female homicide	Decreases	X
Sanin (2023)	Rwanda	Female employment	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Decreases	
Shah et al. (2023)	Tanzania	Sports lifeskills intervention (Adolescent males)	RCT	Any	Decreases	
		Goal-setting intervention (Adolescent females)		Any	Decreases	X
Agüero et al. (2024)	Peru	Breadwinner unemployment shock	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Increases	
Blair and Mvukiyehe (2024)	Egypt	Public works program	RCT	Physical	Null	
				Psychological	Increases	
				Economic	Increases	
	Tunisia	Public works program	RCT	Physical	Null	
				Psychological	Null	
				Economic	Null	
Chatterjee and Poddar (2024)	India	Lifeskills (Adolescent females)	Quasi-Experimental	IPV Index	Decreases	X
				Emotional	Decreases	X
				Sexual	Null	X
				Physical	Decreases	X
				Controlling Behaviors	Decreases	X
Chong and Velásquez (2024)	Peru	Trade liberalization (Male unemployment)	Quasi-Experimental	Physical	Increases	X
				Emotional	Increases	
Erten and Keskin (2024)	Cambodia	Trade liberalization (Male unemployment and female employment)	Quasi-Experimental	Physical	Increases	X
				Sexual	Increases	X
				Psychological	Increases	X

Notes. This table summarizes research estimating the causal impact of economic shocks and/or economic initiatives on IPV, chronologically. Column 2 displays the country of the study setting, column 3 specifies the relevant economic shock or initiative. Column 4 refers to whether the analysis is an RCT or quasi-experimental, column 5 is the type of IPV outcome measured. Column 6 displays the main reported direction of the impact on IPV for each outcome, where "null" implies the result is not statistically significant at the 10 percent level. 'Heterogeneity explored' in column 7 indicates whether the study presents subgroup analyses, which is further explored in Panel B of Table A1.

Table 4: Impact of Laws, Institutions, and Social Norms on IPV

	Country (2)	**Intervention (3)**	**Study Type (4)**	**IPV Type (5)**	**Average effect (6)**	**Heterogeneity explored (7)**
Ferraz and Schiavon (2022)	Brazil	Domestic violence laws	Quasi-Experimental	Female homicide	Decreases	X
Beleche (2019)	Mexico	Domestic violence laws / Divorce laws, Social support	Quasi-Experimental	Physical and Sexual Threat of violence Emotional	Decreases Null Null	
Bobonis et al. (2025)	Mexico	Domestic violence laws / Divorce laws, CCT	Quasi-Experimental	Physical or Sexual	Decreases (SR) Null (LR)	X
Sanin (2024)	Rwanda	Domestic violence laws / Divorce laws	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Decreases	
García-Ramos (2021)	Mexico	Divorce laws	Quasi-Experimental	Any Any	Null (SR) Increases (LR)	X
Corradini and Buccione (2023)	Egypt	Divorce laws	Quasi-Experimental	Physical	Decreases	X
Amaral (2017)	India	Female property rights	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Decreases	X
Harari (2019)	Kenya	Female property inheritance reform	Quasi-Experimental	Physical Sexual	Null Decreases	
Anderson (2021)	Sub-Saharan Africa	Female property rights	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Decreases	
Perova and Reynolds (2017)	Brazil	Women's police stations	Quasi-Experimental	Female homicide	Null	X
Amaral et al. (2021)	India	Women's police stations	Quasi-Experimental	Any (Reports) Any (Survey)	Increases Null	
Sviatschi and Trako (2024)	Peru	Women's justice center	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Decreases	
Tumen and Ulucan (2024)	Turkey	Panic button intervention	Quasi-Experimental	Physical Psychological Sexual	Increases Null Null	X
Anukriti et al. (2022)	India	Female political representation	Quasi-Experimental	Physical Psychological Sexual	Increases Null Null	X
Delaporte and Pino (2022)	Brazil	Female political representation	Quasi-Experimental	Female homicide	Decreases	
Bochenkova et al. (2023)	Brazil	Female political representation	Quasi-Experimental	Homicide Physical Sexual Psychological	Decreases Decreases Decreases Decreases	
Guarnieri and Rainer (2021)	Cameroon	British institutions (relative to French)	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Increases	
Lowes (2022)	Sub-Saharan Africa	Matrilineal kinship	Quasi-Experimental	Any	Decreases	

Notes. This table summarizes empirical studies that estimate the causal effects of legal reforms and/or institutional interventions on IPV, ordered thematically. Column 2 displays the country of the study setting, column 3 specifies the relevant reform or institution. Column 4 refers to whether the analysis is an RCT or quasi-experimental, column 5 is the type of IPV outcome measured. Column 6 displays the main reported direction of the impact on IPV for each outcome, where "null" implies the result is not statistically significant at the 10 percent level. 'Heterogeneity explored' in column 7 indicates whether the study presents subgroup analyses, which is further explored in Panel C of Table A1.

Table 5: Causal Studies on IPV from Journals Outside of Economics

Paper	**Country (2)**	**Intervention (3)**	**Study Type (4)**	**IPV Type (5)**	**Average effect (6)**
Pronyk et al. (2006)	South Africa	Microfinance + Gender/HIV training	RCT	Physical and/or Sexual	Decreases
Jewkes et al. (2008)	South Africa	Gender/HIV training	RCT	Physical and/or Sexual	Null
Gupta et al. (2013)	Côte d'Ivoire	Groups savings + Gender dialogue with partner	RCT	Physical Sexual Economic	Null Null Decreases
Abramsky et al. (2014)	Uganda	SASA! community mobilization	RCT	Physical Sexual	Null Null
Hossain et al. (2014)	Côte d'Ivoire	Men's discussion groups	RCT	Physical Sexual	Null Null
Wagman et al. (2015)	Uganda	Community mobilization intervention, HIV screening	RCT	Physical Sexual Emotional	Decreases Decreases Decreases
Doyle et al. (2018)	Rwanda	Couple's intervention engaging men	RCT	Physical Sexual	Decreases Decreases
Kapiga et al. (2019)	Tanzania	Microfinance +violence prevention intervention	RCT	Physical Emotional Sexual	Decreases Null Null
Dunkle et al. (2020)	Rwanda	Couple's training	RCT	Physical and/or Sexual	Decreases
Gibbs et al. (2020)	South Africa	Life skills training	RCT	Physical Sexual Emotional	Null Null Null
Sharma et al. (2020)	Ethiopia	Gender-transformative intervention	RCT	Physical Sexual	Null Null
Boyer et al. (2022)	Uganda	Faith-based marital counseling	RCT	Any	Decreases

Notes. This table summarizes some influential causal work outside of economics, primarily from the public health literature. It is organized chronologically. Column 2 displays the country of the study setting, column 3 specifies the relevant intervention. Column 4 refers to whether the analysis is an RCT or quasi-experimental, column 5 is the type of IPV outcome measured. Column 6 displays the main reported direction of impact on IPV for each outcome, where "null" implies the result is not statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

Appendix

Table A1: Heterogeneity from Tables 2–4

	IPV Type (2)	Average effect (3)	Heteogeneity in effects (4)	Conditions and/or Subgroup affected (5)
Panel A: Cash Transfers				
Angelucci (2008)	Aggressive Behavior	Null	Increases	Larger husband-wife age gap; Size of transfer to wife; 5+ children
		Null	Decreases	Educated husband; No children
Bobonis et al. (2013)	Emotional	Null	Increases	Female partners with high decision-making; When conditioned on no accompanying physical and/or sexual violence
	Threat of violence	Null	Increases	Female partners with high decision-making; When conditioned on no accompanying physical and/or sexual violence; Cohabiting couples
Hidrobo and Fernald (2013)	Emotional	Null	Increases	Mothers with <6 years of schooling
			Decreases	Mother with less education than their partner and >6 years of school
	Psychological	Decreases	Decreases	Mothers with >6 years of schooling
Haushofer et al. (2019)	Sexual	Decreases	Null	Male recipient
		Decreases	Decreases	Female recipient
	Physical	Decreases	Decreases	Female recipient
Heath et al. (2020)	Physical, Emotional, Controlling Behaviors	Decreases	Null	Monogamous households
			Decreases	Polygamous households; 2+ wives in polygamous households
Peterman et al. (2022)	Emotional, Physical, or Sexual	Decreases	Increases	Polygamous households
Panel B: Economic Initiatives				
Sekhri and Storeygard (2014)	Dowry deaths	Increases	Decreases	Areas with high Muslim population shares
Abiona and Koppensteiner (2018)	Any	Increases	Increases	Poorest households, Male household head
	Any	Increases	Decreases	Wives and children have inheritance rights
Mobarak and Ramos (2019)	Any	Null	Increases	Nearby, non-incentivized villages
Erten and Keskin (2021)	Physical, Sexual	Decreases	Null	Women with more than 8 years of education
	Psychological	Decreases	Decreases	Women with less than or equal to 8 years of education
Angelucci et al. (2023)	Any	Null	Increases	Women with low IPV risk
		Null	Decreases	Women with high IPV risk
Casabianca et al. (2023)	Abuse Index	Decreases	Increases	Women with above-median social desirability bias scores
Perova et al. (2023)	Homicides	Decreases	Null	Above-median human development index municipality
Chatterjee and Poddar (2024)	IPV Index	Decreases	Null	Urban women
		Decreases	Decreases	Rural women
Chong and Velásquez (2024)	Physical	Increases	Decreases	Female older, educated
Panel C: Laws, Institutions, and Norms				
Perova and Reynolds (2017)	Homicide	Null	Decreases	Women in capital cities and large metropolitan areas
Anukriti et al. (2022)	Physical	Increases	Null	Urban; Rural women whose husbands do not desire more sons / desire fewer than or equal to wife's ideal
		Increases	Increases	Rural women whose husbands desire more sons / desire more than wife's ideal
Corradini and Buccione (2023)	Physical	Decreases	Null	Mothers whose last child was a daughter; Rural; Women who lived further than 5km from a family court; Women with more than high school education; Women below the top two wealth quintiles; Women who moved after marriage
		Decreases	Decreases	Mothers whose last child was a son; Urban; Women who lived less than 5km from a family court; Women with less than a high school education; Women within the top two wealth quintiles; Women who did not move after marriage
Tumen and Ulucan (2024)	Physical	Increases	Null	Women with greater than or equal to high school education; Women whose partners have less than high school education; Women who have greater than or equal education to her partner
	Physical	Increases	Increases	Women with less than high school education; Women whose partners have greater than or equal to high school education; Women who have less education than her partner; Women who are financially constrained

Notes. This table summarizes reported heterogeneity from select studies in Tables 2–4. Column 2 refers to the type of IPV outcome measured. Column 3 displays the main reported direction of impact on IPV for each outcome, where "null" implies the result is not statistically significant at the 10 percent level. Heterogeneity in effects in column 4 denotes whether the study reports statistically significant variation across subgroups. 'Conditions and/or Subgroup affected' describes the characteristics or contexts under which effects differ. When the average effect and heterogeneity point in the same direction, heterogeneity indicates that the effect is stronger for the subgroup. The table is organized chronologically within each subsection.

Table A2: Cost of IPV Case Averted

	Intervention (2)	IPV Type (3)	Estimate of treatment effect (4)	Cost of transfer† (5)	Number of people needed to reach to avert one case* (6)	Cost of one case averted** (7)
Panel A: Select studies from Table 2						
Hidrobo and Fernald (2013)	UCT	Controlling Behaviors	-6pp	$233	17	$3,875
Hidrobo et al. (2016)	CCT	Controlling Behaviors	-8pp	$240	13	$3,000
Roy et al. (2019)	UCT+BCC	Physical	-7pp	$456	15	$6,514
Heath et al. (2020)	UCT	Emotional	-6.1pp	$649	17	$10,635
		Controlling Behaviors	-6pp		17	$10,812
Peterman et al. (2022)	UCT	Emotional, Physical, or Sexual	-3pp	$284	34	$9,472
Roy et al. (2024)	UCT+BCC	Emotional	-7pp	$456	15	$6,514
		Physical	-14pp		8	$3,257
Panel B: Select studies from Table 4						
Bandiera et al. (2020)	Lifeskills (Adolescent females)	Forced sex	-5.3pp	$18	19	$338
Shah et al. (2023)	Sports lifeskills (Adolescent males)	IPV often	-5.1pp	$41	20	$804
	Goal setting (Adolescent females)	IPV often	-8.7pp	$38	12	$437
Panel C: Select studies from Table 5						
Pronyk et al. (2006)	Microfinance + Gender/HIV training	Physical and/or Sexual	0.45 (aRR) $\approx$ -6.6pp	$43	16	$650
Dunkle et al. (2020)	Couple's training	Physical and/or Sexual	0.44 (aRR) $\approx$ -23.4pp	$20	5	$85
Boyer et al. (2022)	Faith-based marital counseling	Any	-5pp	$91	20	$1,820

Notes. This table presents cost estimates for averting one case of IPV. For each study, we show the authors' reported treatment effect size, as well as our own estimates when conversion to percentage points is necessary. We then calculate the number of people who would need to be reached by the intervention to prevent one case of IPV as well as the corresponding cost per case averted. CCT = conditional cash transfer; UCT = unconditional cash transfer; BCC = behavioral change communication around nutrition. † Rounded to the nearest dollar. * Rounded up to the nearest integer. ** Rounded to the nearest dollar.