

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

INCORPORATING BEHAVIOURAL ADD-ONS INTO CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMMES

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With heightened risk to all groups due to the economic and health related stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, thinking about the implications of any social protection programme for already high-risk populations is crucial. In this document, we focus on how governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) can incorporate evidence on the impact of cash transfers on violence against women into the design of cash transfers programmes in order to prevent gender-based violence.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The majority of the studies on conditional cash transfers (CCTs) find a decrease in violence against women as a result of the transfer, while those on unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) find no change.

Studies in Ecuador, Kenya, and Mexico have found evidence that even when there is no change in violence on average, some groups of women experience an increase in violence as a result of both CCTs and UCTs. Though the characteristics of the groups of women who experience an increase in violence differ across studies, they can all be categorised as ‘vulnerable’.¹

There is limited but promising evidence from Bangladesh and Kenya that boosting self-beliefs can reduce violence against women when added to cash transfers as compared to giving transfers alone. However, there is no evidence yet on delivering these without in-person contact.

More research is needed to better understand whether targeting women as the main recipient for a cash transfer programme will improve gender-based violence, as compared to giving it to the man or splitting it.

Policymakers considering cash transfer programmes should be particularly mindful of the potential negative effects cash transfers have on vulnerable women. To better understand the impact a cash transfer programme has on domestic violence within this sub-population of women, implementers delivering cash should consider incorporating standardised questions on domestic violence in monitoring and evaluation plans. Surveys should ensure to guard respondent privacy. This might necessitate in person surveys as per UN Women [recommendations](#), or might be achieved through adapting in-person techniques such as Audio Computer Assisted Interviewing for use on the phone (see [here](#) for how to implement it in-person).

1. These studies have found an increase in violence for women with “little or no education” and whose husbands were “drinkers”, when women had less schooling than their partners, or for those with predicted high levels of violence against them at baseline. See table for full details.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Economic security and emotional well-being are understood to be a key pathway to violence ([Buller et al., 2018](#)). The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to affect both, with declines in income as people, particularly daily wage earners, face a dramatic loss in income. This in turn increases stress levels, adding to the health related worries caused by such a health crisis. These are further compounded by the nature of the lockdowns in response to the pandemic requiring isolation and greater time spent at home.

Women and girls, an already vulnerable group, will face worsened conditions in the home and are at an increased risk of violence.¹ Globally, one in three ever-partnered women report at least one incident of experiencing physical or sexual violence in their lifetime ([WHO, 2013](#)). In addition, across the developing world, rates of intimate partner violence are higher, in the range of 25-60% in a 6-12 month period (Mahmud, Orkin & Riley, 2020; [Hidrobo and Fernald \(2013\)](#); [Roy et al., 2018](#)).

There is already some evidence of an increase in violence due to the pandemic: according to [United Nations reports](#), in Lebanon and Malaysia, calls to helplines have doubled and in China tripled, as compared to the same month last year. In South Africa,² there is a 37% increase in the weekly average of cases being reported to the police as compared to last year. This adverse consequence of the pandemic and the ensuing lockdown is being highlighted in the media globally.³ On 5 April, the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called on governments to prioritise prevention tactics in their COVID-19 response plans to combat the rise of violence against women and girls.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM EXISTING EVIDENCE?

In a recent working paper, [Peterman et al., 2020](#) present a comprehensive review on the pathways linking pandemics and violence against women and ideas for specific strategies to avoid additional detrimental impacts, such as bolstering violence-related response and expanding social safety nets.⁴ Given that a choice social protection tool in response to the pandemic appears to be cash transfers, we focus here on what we can learn from existing evidence on the impact of transfers on violence against women to inform potential behavioural add-ons to reduce the risk of increasing violence against women.

1. GENDER OF RECIPIENT

Many cash transfer programmes by governments and NGOs tend to target women as recipients even if the transfer is for the household ([Almaas et al., 2018](#); [Roy et al., 2015](#)). Of currently available evidence, the only study to vary experimentally whether the primary male or female in the household receives the transfer is [Haushofer et al., 2019](#). They show that targeting women as the main recipient of a cash transfer reduces both physical and sexual violence compared to no transfer. The same study also finds that targeting men results in a smaller decrease in physical violence than targeting women but has no effect on sexual violence nine months after

2 UNFPA. March 2020. "Covid-19: A Gender Lens: Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Promoting Gender Equality."

3 *Dailymaverick*. April 2020. "How might COVID-19 Lockdown Affect Public Safety."

4 *Guardian*. March 2020. "Call for Fund Domestic Violence Victims During Covid-19." *New York Times*. April 2020. "A New COVID-19 Crisis: Domestic Abuse Rises Worldwide."

5 The World Health Organisation has also released recommendations for the health sector. March 2020. "[COVID-19 and Violence Against Women](#)."

the transfers. This suggests that targeting women might be more effective in reducing violence against women. However, there appears to be considerable differences in these effects within certain populations who received cash transfers (see below for further discussion). There may be a case for policymakers to split the transfer between spouses potentially to help mitigate any conflict as a result of the transfers. This strategy has however not been empirically tested and more research is needed to understand if it works.

2. CASH TRANSFERS INCREASE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN VULNERABLE GROUPS

The impact of cash transfers on violence against women is generally that it reduces violence ([Buller et al., 2018](#)) but this is primarily due to studies on conditional cash transfers. As highlighted by [Baranov et al. \(2019\)](#) in a review article, two-thirds of the studies on unconditional cash transfers, which have recently gained popularity, especially in Africa, do not find a reduction in violence. This is consistent with very recent evidence (not covered in the review) that there is no effect, on average, on violence in study analysing large unconditional cash transfers in Kenya ([Egger et al., 2019](#)). More worryingly, there is some evidence that there may actually be an increase in violence of a cash transfer on some groups of women, particularly those who are vulnerable (see Table 1). With heightened risk to all groups due to the pandemic, identifying and thinking about the implications of any social protection programme on high risk groups is crucial.

Table 1: Increase in violence against women due to cash transfers in vulnerable groups ⁶

Study	Target population (men/women/both)	Finding on average	Finding for vulnerable groups	Vulnerable group definition
Angelucci, 2008 Mexico CCT	Women	No effect	30% increase	Husbands were drinkers and had a low level of education or no education and the transfers were large
Hidrobo and Fernald (2013) Ecuador UCT (designed as CCT)	Women	No effect	0.13 increase ⁷	Women with less schooling than partner

3. SELF-BELIEFS BOOSTING MESSAGES

A recent study in Bangladesh was able to isolate the effects on violence against women of 1) a cash transfer alone compared to 2) a bundled programme⁸ that include cash transfers and complementary activities like group based training with the transfer. [Roy et al., 2018](#) show that

⁶ Early evidence from two studies in Kenya ([Mahmud, Orkin & Riley, 2020](#) and [Haushofer, Mudida & Shapiro, 2019](#)) also find similar results. Women with predicted or actual high levels of violence at baseline experienced an increase in violence as a result of a UCT. Since the working paper for these studies is not publicly available yet, we do not include them in the table.

⁷ This effect is on emotional violence while the other reported effects are on physical and/or sexual violence.

⁸ Most studies evaluate bundled cash transfer programmes that include complementary activities and so are unable to isolate the effect of the cash transfer from that of accompanying features.

the decrease in violence persists after a cash transfer ends in the group who also received a behaviour change communication intervention⁹ but not in the group that only received the cash transfer. Early evidence from another study in Kenya also finds that adding a one time video-based intervention to an unconditional cash transfer significantly reduced violence, as compared to giving cash alone (Mahmud, Orkin & Riley, 2020). While the two interventions are quite different, both studies hypothesise that a key pathway for impact is self-beliefs, which helps by increasing the woman's perceived ability to change her situation (Brody et al., 2017). There is potential to include messaging that aims to boost women's self-efficacy using IVR or phone calls, though this has not been tested yet.

WHAT ELSE CAN HELP

Finally, those implementing cash transfer programmes should consider incorporating the standardised Demographic and Health Surveys domestic violence module¹⁰ questions in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plans. UN Women recommends not directly collecting data on violence experienced by women unless this is done in person (see [here](#)). Given the sensitive nature of the questions, respondent privacy is crucial. However, it might be possible to ensure this using Audio Computer Assisted Interviewing (see [here](#) for how to implement it), which could be implemented over the phones provided they have touch buttons, although this has not yet been tested. Questions will allow implementers to better track the scope of IPV as well as understand the effectiveness of prevention tactics.

⁹ This is a group based intervention covering basic nutrition, control and prevention of micronutrient deficiencies, infant and young child feeding practices, health care, maternal nutrition, and hygiene and is believed to have improved the social ties and social capital of the women since they met weekly.

¹⁰ The latest DHS Questionnaire Modules for domestic violence can be found here: <https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-dhsqm-dhs-questionnaires-and-manuals.cfm>

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