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Groundbreaking Rigorous Evidence on Violence against Women

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→ Groundbreaking Rigorous Evidence on Violence Against Women

Violence against women (VAW) remains a pervasive and deeply entrenched issue, posing significant challenges to policymakers, researchers, and practitioners worldwide. **This policy brief contributes to advancing the field by presenting new evidence on innovative approaches to VAW prevention and response.** Despite increasing global attention, VAW prevention remains an evolving area of research, with critical gaps in understanding what interventions work, under what circumstances, and for whom ([Araujo et al., 2024](#)). The studies discussed in this document aim to address some of these gaps, focusing on key interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

In LAC, VAW persists at alarming levels. Twenty-five percent of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives, a figure that mirrors the global average of 27%. Furthermore, 11% of women in the region have faced sexual violence by non-partners, nearly double the global average of 6% (WHO, 2021). Psychological violence is even more widespread, with 64% of women in Colombia and 57% in Ecuador reporting such experiences ([Araujo et al., 2024](#); Pispira et al., 2022).

The region also faces the devastating toll of femicidal violence—the most extreme form of VAW. In 2022 alone, 4,050 women were victims of femicide across 26 LAC countries, with intimate partners or family members perpetrating a significant proportion of these crimes (ECLAC, 2023). Younger women are particularly vulnerable, with over 70% of femicide victims aged 15 to 44. These figures underline the critical need for comprehensive, evidence-based strategies to address the multifaceted nature of VAW

Effective prevention and intervention strategies require a nuanced understanding of VAW's scope and complexity and the structural and cultural factors that sustain it. Rigorous analytical knowledge is essential to uncovering these dynamics, providing the evidence base needed to design targeted policies and programs.

offering limited insight into what specifically reduces violence itself. Bridging this gap is critical for developing impactful policies and programs.

This policy brief presents findings from new studies supported by [GDLab](#), the Gender and Diversity Knowledge Initiative of the Inter-American Development Bank. These studies explore innovative interventions in Colombia and Mexico, providing valuable insights that help lay the foundation for scalable and effective strategies. By building a stronger evidence base, these findings aim to inform the design of policies and programs capable of fostering a future free of violence for women across LAC.

Effective prevention and intervention strategies require a nuanced understanding of VAW's scope and complexity and the structural and cultural factors that sustain it. **Rigorous analytical knowledge is essential to uncovering these dynamics, providing the evidence base needed to design targeted policies and programs.** This includes addressing immediate needs while also tackling root causes, ensuring resources are allocated efficiently, and continuously improving interventions through robust impact evaluations.

However, current evidence disproportionately focuses on programs that address intermediate outcomes, such as raising awareness of services or enhancing psychological well-being, while

→ New Insights on Violence Against Women

Addressing VAW requires strategies that not only respond to its immediate manifestations but also tackle the underlying social, economic, and institutional drivers that sustain it. While VAW is pervasive, its manifestations vary widely across contexts, influenced by factors such as economic inequality, cultural norms, and state capacity. This complexity necessitates context-sensitive interventions that go beyond addressing individual cases to implement systemic changes aimed at long-term prevention.

The studies featured in this section explore dimensions of VAW that are often underrepresented in traditional analyses, such as the unintended consequences of economic empowerment programs and the ways climate-related stressors exacerbate violence. These findings highlight the interconnectedness of individual behaviors and structural conditions, revealing the need for holistic approaches that integrate economic, social, and environmental considerations.

Additionally, the research delves into innovative interventions that focus on improving judicial systems to ensure accountability, and building relationship skills among youth. By examining these interventions, the studies provide a nuanced view of the opportunities and limitations inherent in different approaches, emphasizing the importance of tailoring strategies to specific regional and cultural contexts.

→ Economic Empowerment and Its Complexities: Lessons from Pension Reforms in Mexico

Economic empowerment is a cornerstone of reducing the risk of VAW, as it aims to increase women's autonomy and reduce dependency on abusive partners. However, as a [study](#) conducted in Mexico on the *Programa de Adultos Mayores* (PAM)—a **non-contributory pension program** aimed at reducing poverty among the elderly—reveals, empowerment initiatives can inadvertently affect intimate partner violence against older women if they overlook the specific challenges and risks that they face ([Bellés-Obrero, La Mattina & Ye, 2024](#)).

The study leveraged the 2013 PAM expansion, which lowered the eligibility age from 70 to 65, to assess how increased financial independence might affect intimate partner violence (IPV) among older women. Using a difference-in-differences (DID) methodology, researchers compared newly eligible women aged 66-69 to those not yet eligible (ages 61-64). Findings revealed that women aged 66-67 experienced significant short-term increases in economic, psychological, and physical IPV (5.8, 6.1, and 2.8 percentage points, respectively). Inter-

estingly, no similar effect was observed among women aged 68-69, suggesting that IPV may initially rise as male partners perceive shifts in household financial power, with effects stabilizing over time.

These effects were more pronounced among women in lower-income brackets and households with a history of violence. Furthermore, households, where men received pensions, did not exhibit parallel increases in IPV, underscoring the gendered nature of financial empowerment's impact on household dynamics. These findings highlight that economic empowerment alone is insufficient; programs must be accompanied by IPV-specific support, including safety planning and access to services, to mitigate unintended risks.

Beyond the PAM intervention, the study offers critical insights into the pervasive nature of IPV across all life stages. Traditional data collection tools, such as Demographic and Health Surveys, often exclude women over the age of 45 based on the assumption that IPV diminishes with age. By leveraging the *Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares* (ENDIREH)—which collects IPV data for women aged 15 and older—this research challenges that narrative.

The results are striking: **women aged 50-80 face comparable risks of IPV to younger women.** In Mexico, 8.6% of women aged 50-80 reported experiencing physical or sexual IPV in the past 12 months, a rate nearly on par with the 10.2% reported by women aged 15-49. Psychological IPV is even more pervasive among older women, with 22.7% reporting psychological abuse and 13.1% experiencing economic abuse. These findings underscore the necessity of inclusive data frameworks that capture IPV as a life-long issue, enabling the design of interventions that address violence across all stages of life.

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POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- **Empowerment and Safety:** Economic empowerment programs must incorporate IPV-specific support mechanisms. These could include safe spaces, community-based resources, and coordinated access to IPV awareness and support services, ensuring that financial independence does not inadvertently increase women's vulnerability to violence.
- **Expand Data Collection:** Policymakers and researchers should prioritize collecting IPV data across all age groups, including women post-reproductive age. Expanding national and international survey frameworks to include older women is critical for understanding and addressing the full scope of IPV.
- **Sustained Engagement and Monitoring:** Longitudinal monitoring of empowerment programs is essential to understanding the temporal dynamics of IPV and designing interventions that adapt to evolving household power dynamics.



Climate Shocks and VAW: Exploring the Climate-Gender Nexus in Mexico

The climate crisis is not “gender neutral.” Women and girls bear the brunt of climate change, which exacerbates existing gender inequalities and poses unique threats to their livelihoods, health, and safety ([Bustelo et al., 2023](#)). While research on the climate-gender nexus is growing, much of it remains qualitative and context-specific, with limited causal evidence linking climate-related disasters to gendered outcomes in the region.

A novel [study](#) in Mexico addresses this gap by providing causal evidence on the relationship between climate shocks and violence against women (VAW), focusing on droughts—a particularly severe and pervasive climate-related disaster ([Aguilar-Gómez & Salazar-Díaz, 2025](#)). Droughts exert profound social and economic pressure, particularly in agricultural regions. Motivated by evidence that climate-related financial strain can intensify household tensions and potentially lead to IPV, the study combines high-resolution precipitation data from NASA's Daymet repository with hospital records, police reports, and emergency hotline data to analyze IPV trends during drought periods.

Female hospitalizations due to IPV increased by up to 9% during droughts, particularly in agriculturally intensive areas, highlighting the link between climate-induced stress and violence.

The results are striking. Female hospitalizations due to IPV increased by up to 9% during droughts, with impacts most pronounced in agriculturally intensive areas and during the growing season when economic strain peaks. Broader violence-related effects were also observed, with non-domestic violence hospitalizations increasing by 7.4% for women and 14% for men during severe droughts. These findings align with theories of "male backlash" and "extractive violence," wherein income loss and economic insecurity drive men to exert control within households through aggression.

The study further reveals the exacerbating role of weak institutional capacity. In municipalities with low enforcement mechanisms, IPV-related incidents rose more sharply, underscoring the interplay between economic vulnerability, environmental stress, and institutional inadequacy in fueling violence. This evidence highlights the urgent need for climate-sensitive gender-based violence (GBV) policies tailored to regions facing climate-induced economic stress.



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- **Integrate IPV Prevention into Climate Adaptation Programs:** Governments should embed IPV prevention measures within broader climate adaptation strategies, particularly in agricultural regions prone to drought. These measures could include funding for shelters, psychological counseling, legal aid, and emergency financial assistance to mitigate violence during periods of environmental stress.
- **Invest in Data Collection and Early Warning Systems:** Building robust systems to monitor and analyze the intersection of climate stress and GBV is essential for informed policymaking. Improved data collection at the intersection of climate events, economic vulnerability, and IPV can inform proactive interventions, including early warning systems for at-risk communities.

→ Gender and Judicial Outcomes: The Role of Prosecutor Gender in GBV Cases in Colombia

In Colombia, a study investigated the handling of GBV cases in a context where impunity is a pervasive issue: only 7% of domestic violence cases advance to formal charges and less than 1% result in convictions. This study assessed prosecutorial outcomes by examining the impact of prosecutor gender and experience on case progression and outcomes (Abril et al., 2025). The findings reveal that female prosecutors are less likely to file formal charges in GBV cases and are more inclined to archive cases compared to their male counterparts. However, when female prosecutors do advance cases, they are more likely to secure convictions, particularly in domestic violence cases, reflecting a more selective but effective approach to case resolution.

Despite higher conviction rates under female prosecutors, the study found no significant reduction in recidivism, as prosecutor gender did not influence the likelihood of reoffending in cases of domestic or sexual violence. Interestingly, in cases unrelated to GBV, such as theft or homicide, female prosecutors demonstrated a greater likelihood of filing charges and achieving convictions compared to their handling of GBV cases. This suggests that contextual factors unique to GBV influence prosecutorial behavior and judicial outcomes.



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- **Judicial Gender-Sensitivity Training:** Incorporating gender-sensitive training and protocols within judicial systems could improve outcomes for GBV cases by equipping prosecutors to address these cases with greater efficacy and survivor support.



→ **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Gender Violence Prevention: A Proactive Approach in Adolescents**

Early interventions targeting youth relationship skills are essential for preventing GBV by fostering healthy behaviors and promoting non-violent norms. In Mexico, a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) program for adolescents was implemented as a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in seven public high schools in Ecatepec, a municipality with high levels of violence. The program targeted first-year high school students and aimed to build emotional regulation, empathy, and conflict resolution skills over the course of a school year. Each participant attended 14 CBT sessions, each lasting approximately 50 minutes (Magaloni-Kerpel et al., 2025).

CBT is a structured, evidence-based psychological intervention traditionally used to address mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. In this context, the program was adapted to focus on adolescents, emphasizing the prevention of GBV by targeting the development of emotional and cognitive skills essential for healthy interpersonal relationships. Sessions were designed to address common triggers for conflict, teach strategies for self-regulation, and challenge harmful gender norms that contribute to violence.

The implementation of the program faced several challenges. High levels of violence in Ecatepec meant that many participants had already been exposed to traumatic experiences, which complicated efforts to introduce prevention-focused content. Additionally, engaging adolescents in regular CBT sessions required a significant investment in logistical coordination within the school environment, where academic demands often competed for time and attention. Another key challenge was training school counselors and teachers to facilitate CBT sessions effectively, as their familiarity with psychological interventions varied widely. These factors underscored the importance of integrating interventions seamlessly into the school curriculum and ensuring adequate resources and support for facilitators.



Despite these challenges, the program yielded valuable lessons for future implementation in similar contexts. First, the importance of tailoring interventions to the specific needs of high-risk populations became evident. Adjustments, such as additional trauma-informed content and more flexible session structures, could enhance program impact. Second, building strong partnerships with school administrators and local stakeholders was crucial to securing buy-in and logistical support. Finally, sustained engagement and follow-up were identified as critical elements for translating skill-building into long-term behavioral change.

To evaluate the program's impact, researchers employed a mix of self-reported questionnaires and neuropsychological assessments. Results showed a 4-percentage-point improvement in emotional recognition abilities, measured using the Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RMET). However, no statistically significant impacts were found on other outcomes, including gender beliefs, risk of violence, inhibitory control, emotional regulation, and cognitive flexibility. These findings suggest that while CBT-based interventions can improve specific emotional skills, achieving broader behavioral change may require sustained engagement or program adaptations tailored to high-risk settings.

This intervention demonstrates a novel application of CBT, targeting adolescents during their formative years to disrupt cycles of violence before they begin



This intervention demonstrates a novel application of CBT, which is traditionally used reactively to address perpetrator behaviors or support survivors ([Araujo et al., 2024](#)). Instead, this program employs CBT proactively, targeting adolescents during their formative years to disrupt cycles of violence before they begin. While immediate reductions in self-reported violence were not observed, the gains in emotional recognition suggest a foundation for long-term change. By equipping adolescents with critical skills for emotional regulation and healthier relationships, this approach highlights the potential of CBT as a preventative tool, complementing traditional GBV interventions.



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- **Youth-Centered Violence Prevention through CBT Integration in Schools:** Integrating CBT into secondary school curricula is a promising approach to preventing GBV. Policymakers should prioritize embedding these programs in public education systems, ensuring regular and sustained engagement to promote healthy relationships and emotional regulation among adolescents. Effective implementation requires robust investments in teacher and counselor training, along with adequate resources to support delivery. Collaboration among schools, local authorities, and community organizations is essential to provide logistical and operational support, fostering a sustainable and impactful intervention framework. Further research is needed to evaluate scalability and behavioral impact to optimize program effectiveness.



How to move forward? The Need for Rigorous Research

The academic field of VAW is still in its early stages, with significant progress over the past decade but many critical questions remaining unanswered. As highlighted by distinguished professor [Amber Peterman](#), the second wave of VAW research has started to uncover which interventions are effective, which are not, and under what conditions. However, there remains an urgent need for more rigorous, large-scale research to provide definitive answers on effective prevention and response strategies. Advancing this field requires not only high-quality analysis to understand the mechanisms driving VAW but also stronger connections between research and policymaking to ensure findings are actionable and impactful.

Efforts must focus on generating evidence that informs both immediate interventions and long-term strategies. Evaluating the effectiveness of cash transfers and social protection programs, understanding their influence on IPV, and identifying mechanisms to mitigate unintended consequences are critical priorities. Addressing economic vulnerabilities while integrating IPV support services into financial programs will enhance their success.

Improving measurement and data collection is another pressing need. Expanding the inclusion of older women and marginalized groups often omitted from surveys is essential to build a comprehensive understanding of

VAW across diverse populations. Standardized indicators and methodologies will facilitate comparative studies and inform targeted interventions, while longitudinal studies and rigorous evaluations can provide insights into the sustained impact of policies and programs.

Future research must be guided by an intersectional lens. Marginalized groups—such as LGBTQ+ individuals, indigenous populations, and persons with disabilities—face unique vulnerabilities that require tailored approaches. Disaggregating data and analyzing experiences across diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts will help inform inclusive solutions. Additionally, addressing the intersection between VAW and environmental stressors like droughts and floods is vital, as these factors exacerbate violence. Integrating gender-sensitive approaches into climate resilience programs is essential to mitigate these risks.

Judicial systems and policy responses demand focused attention. Reducing impunity and providing gender-sensitive training for legal professionals can improve case outcomes and survivor support. Technology also offers significant potential, from digital platforms for reporting abuse to innovative tools for support services. At the same time, it is crucial to combat the growing prevalence of online violence to ensure safe digital spaces for women and girls.

Youth-focused prevention strategies represent a cornerstone of proactive measures. Programs such as CBT in schools can teach relationship skills and disrupt cycles of violence before they begin. Scaling these interventions and adapting them to high-risk contexts will be critical to maximizing their effectiveness.

Finally, multi-sectoral approaches are essential to address the complex interplay of factors contributing to VAW. Collaboration across health, education, justice, and social services can create holistic interventions that tackle root causes while providing immediate support to survivors. Interdisciplinary research involving economists, sociologists, public health experts, and others will enhance understanding and drive innovative solutions.

The road ahead requires prioritizing rigorous evaluation, enhancing data inclusion, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and aligning research with pressing policy needs. A greater emphasis on prevention and adaptation of interventions to specific cultural, economic, and social contexts will ensure efforts are effective and sustainable. To achieve this, it is vital to make sustained investments in research, grounding policies in solid evidence and ensuring their long-term success. This commitment to advancing the evidence base will pave the way for actionable policies and create a safer, more equitable future for women and girls.

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