

Can Greater Privacy Yield More Accurate Measurements of Violence Against Women?



The private nature of intimate partner violence (IPV) introduces very large costs to self-identifying as a victim, leading to a large potential for misreporting.



When women in Peru were provided greater levels of privacy, their report did not yield differences in the prevalence rates of physical and sexual violence relative to that obtained from standard surveys.



However, more educated women report *higher* rates of IPV under greater privacy than through face-to-face methods, while there is no significant difference among the least educated women.

CONTEXT

High-quality data on intimate partner violence (IPV) is crucial to identify the most vulnerable sub-groups, monitor the evolution of violence over time, and facilitate the design of effective policies to prevent and reduce IPV. Most of the data used to measure the prevalence of IPV rely on self-reports from victims. Although specialized face-to-face surveys have achieved great progress in the development of instruments and protocols, the private nature of IPV imposes costs to truthful reporting. These costs range from fear to retaliation and loss of economic support to stigma, which even the most rigorous safety and privacy protocols may not completely overcome.

THE PROJECT

Focusing on a sample in impoverished urban areas in Peru, we replicate direct measures from the widely used Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and compare them with list experiments, a method providing full anonymity. Under list experiments, the respondent is provided with a list of items and is required to report how many hold true, though not which ones are true. The survey module on physical and sexual IPV varied to compare prevalence rates across direct and indirect methods: while the control group reveals exposure to IPV through direct DHS questions, the treatment group does so indirectly, through list experiments.

Key Concept



MISREPORTING

Bias in reporting which can be either explained by random measurement error or systematic patterns in the answers of the respondent.

Key Concept



LIST EXPERIMENTS

They are often used to gather opinions and record behaviors related to sensitive issues that are prone to misreporting.

RESULTS

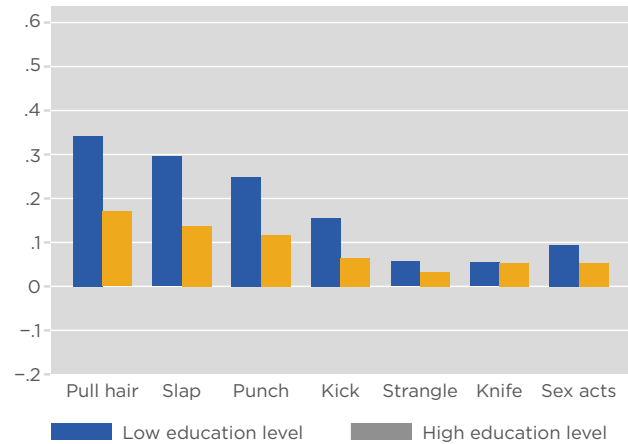
On average, IPV rates obtained with direct questions do not differ when compared to experimental methods that provide more privacy to the respondent (“Difference in Estimated Prevalence Rates of Physical and Sexual IPV”). For six out of seven acts of physical violence, the prevalence rates obtained through list experiments do not significantly differ from those measured using direct DHS-type questions.

Since more vulnerable groups could be less likely to truthfully report violence under direct methods, we focus on eight characteristics that may be correlated with respondents’ costs of being exposed as a victim and look at the differences in prevalence rates across methods by sub-groups. There are no reporting differences between direct and indirect method by age, marital status, mother tongue, household head status, or employment status.

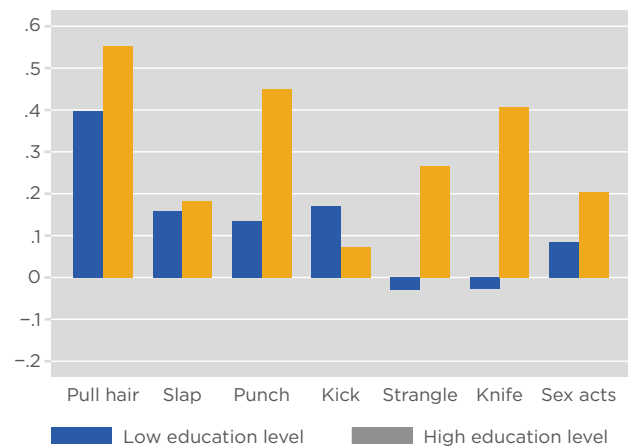
However, there is differential reporting across DHS-type and list experiments methods among women with tertiary education. IPV rates under full anonymity are large enough to reverse the education gradient in violence. Panel (a) of “Physical Violence Prevalence Rates by Reporting Method and Education Level” shows that direct reporting produces a negative correlation between education level and prevalence rates: less educated women report more violence than those with more years of schooling. However, the provision of greater privacy under the list experiment reverses the direction of this relationship, as shown in Panel (b).

Physical Violence Prevalence Rates by Reporting Method and Education Level

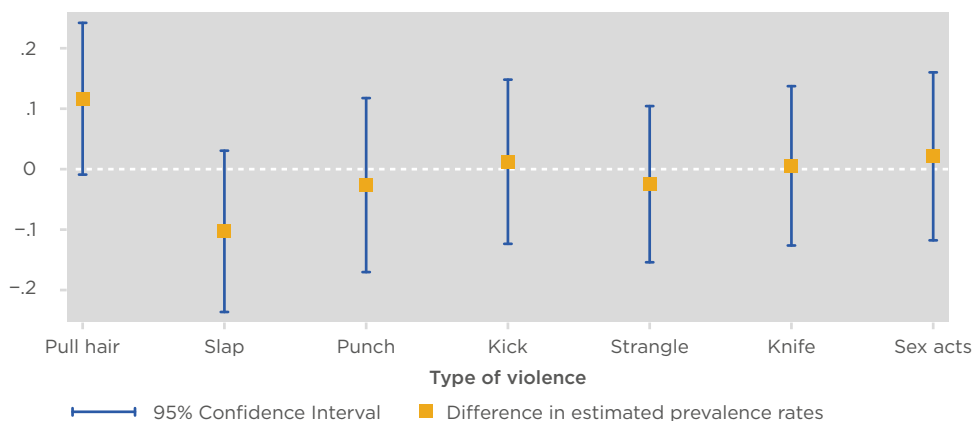
a) Direct reporting



b) Indirect reporting



Difference in Estimated Prevalence Rates of Physical and Sexual IPV



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. This study validates the quality of IPV data collected under United Nations recommended guidelines for producing statistics on violence against women and supports the reliability of population-based surveys.
2. However, the differences identified by education level highlight the possibility of context-specific heterogeneous effects that should be further explored to avoid misdiagnosis and targeting issues.

GDLab: KNOWLEDGE INITIATIVE ON GENDER AND DIVERSITY

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FULL STUDY

[Agüero, J. M., y V. Frisancho. 2017. Misreporting in Sensitive Health Behaviors and Its Impact on Treatment Effects: An Application to Intimate Partner Violence.](#)

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