



Transfers and Gender – A mixed methods study of the effect of cash, vouchers and food transfers on intra-household relations and intimate partner violence

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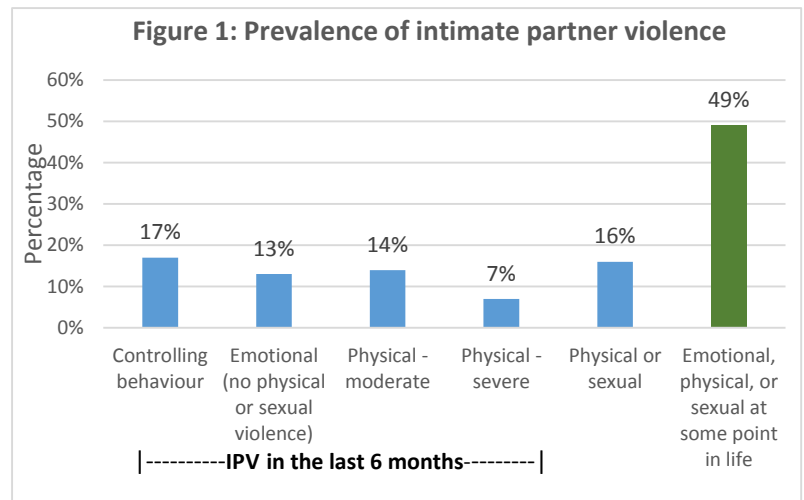
Background

In 2011, the World Food Programme (WFP) implemented the “Food, Cash, and Voucher Program” in Ecuador with the objective of improving food security and determining which modality of food assistance was the most cost effective. The intervention took place from April to September 2011 in seven urban centers in provinces of Carchi and Sucumbíos. The program consisted of six monthly transfers equivalent to \$40 and mandatory monthly nutrition trainings. To promote the role of women in household decision-making on food consumption and nutrition, the program prioritized women in the targeting of the transfers. Studies in Latin America reveal that cash transfers directed at women can have an impact on intra-household dynamics, reducing physical and psychological violence, but may also increase instances of threats and verbal abuse.¹ However, economic models and empirical studies have not come to a clear conclusion on the linkages between women’s income and intimate partner violence (IPV). Given the program’s focus on women’s empowerment and existing evidence on the impact of cash transfers on IPV, IFPRI and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine conducted a study on the impact of transfers on intra-household relationships, with a focus on IPV. The study was conducted in two stages: first a quantitative impact evaluation, and second a qualitative study.

Results of the quantitative study

Baseline and endline surveys were conducted in collaboration with the “*Centro de Estudios de Población y Desarrollo Social (CEPAR)*.” The results of the impact evaluation utilize the two rounds of survey data. The randomized design of the program allows for a rigorous methodology which estimates impacts as the difference between beneficiary and comparison households. The sample for the analysis of IPV was composed of 1,231 women between the ages of 15 and 69, all of whom were engaged in recent or current partnerships.

The results demonstrate high levels of IPV among the sample, with 49 percent of women reporting they had experienced IPV at some point in their lifetime. In the six months before the baseline survey, approximately 17 percent of the women had been victims of controlling behavior, 14 percent were victims of emotional violence without any physical or sexual abuse, and 16 percent were victims of physical or sexual violence. Based on these results, the program had a significant impact on IPV, reducing the probability of controlling behavior by 41 percent, moderate physical violence by 43 percent, and severe physical or sexual violence by 38 percent. There was no significant difference in impacts between the three transfer modalities (cash, vouchers, or food transfers) on reducing rates of



¹ Bobonis, G., Gonzalez-Brenes, M., & Castro, R. (2013). Public Transfers and Domestic Violence: The Roles of Private Information and Spousal Control. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 5(1), 179-205.
Hidrobo, M., & Fernald, L. (2013). Cash transfers and domestic violence. *Journal of Health Economics*, 32(1), 304-319.

IPV. This suggests that the cash modality was not more likely to cause conflicts in partnerships as compared to the other modalities.

Additionally, the study found that the program had the greatest impact on women who had the least amount of household decision-making power before receiving the transfers.

Results of the qualitative study

In September 2013, 42 in-depth interviews were conducted with women, and six focus groups were conducted with women and men from the cities of Tulcán in Carchi and Lago Agrio in Sucumbíos. The participants were purposefully chosen, based on IPV results from the quantitative surveys. The audio-recordings from these interviews were transcribed and analyzed according to theme. In

general, women and men reported the period when transfers were received as happy and peaceful, knowing that the household's food source was secure. Women reported increased knowledge about how to prepare nutritious food and how to improve household well-being at the end of the program. Men reported feeling content with their spouses and partners, who had learned which ingredients were most nutritious and how they could use them more efficiently. The transfers appeared to reduce household stress and fights about how to use income. Many women mentioned that there were fewer fights with spouses or partners, because when the man did not have money for daily food, she could use the transfer to buy or acquire the food that they needed. Additionally, some men and women highlighted that they were able to save up some money during the time they were receiving transfers. Some women, however, mentioned that the husband or partner, feeling less responsible for feeding the family, spent money on "other women."

Many women mentioned feeling more empowered as a result of their independence to choose when and which food to buy. Many women mentioned that, during the time of the transfers, they considered themselves to also be "heads of household," since they managed the vouchers or money for food. However, these positive effects seemed to dissipate when the transfers ended. In terms of the impact of transfers on intra-household dynamics, transfers did not appear to cause problems among partnerships. When asked about this aspect specifically, both women and men emphasized that the transfers were perceived as a benefit for the entire family.

Conclusions and recommendations

- The prevalence of IPV in the sample is high. One in two women has been a victim of emotional, physical, or sexual violence at some point in her life.
- The participation in the program decreased different types of IPV, including controlling behavior, moderate physical violence, and severe physical or sexual violence by 38 to 43 percent, regardless of transfer modality (cash, vouchers, or food).
- Effects on IPV were greater for women who had lower household decision-making power before receiving transfers.
- One mechanism through which transfers affected IPV was that they helped relieve tension that would arise when a woman would ask her spouse for daily money to purchase food.
- The transfers appeared to improve women's capacity to make decisions about food consumption and household nutrition, which in turn affected women's self-perception as heads of their households.
- The effect of the transfers on IPV did not appear to be permanent, since women reported that tension within partnerships began again when the program ended.
- Framing the transfers as a program to improve nutrition might have reduced the possibility of violent reactions by men to increases in women's empowerment.

