

Economic empowerment interventions to reduce gender-based violence



Poverty is a risk factor associated with gender-based violence; it also often intersects with and reinforces gender inequality. Various microfinance and other economic empowerment approaches have been implemented to try to address this intersection. These approaches typically aim to empower women by increasing their economic resources and reducing gender inequalities in their intimate relationships. Several economic interventions that show promise in targeting individuals and risk factors associated with violence are outlined below.



COMMUNITY-BASED MICROFINANCE PROGRAMMES

"Pigs for Peace"¹ and "Rabbits for Resilience"² are two community-based microfinance and transfer programmes that provide loans in the form of animals to rural families in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

The rural families have experienced prolonged insecurity, conflict and economic instability. Pigs for Peace targets adults, while Rabbits for Resilience targets youth between 10 and 15 years old. The programmes aim to improve health, economic stability, and family and community relationships, and advance gender equality by reducing intimate partner

violence. By targeting multiple risk factors (such as poverty, trauma and social norms) associated with violence perpetration, these programmes have the potential to reduce violence against women in the region.³

The Sexual Violence Research Initiative is supporting research on risk factors to improve interventions, including those with a microfinance component.



SAVINGS AND LENDING GROUPS FOR WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY TRAINING FOR MEN

Programmes that combine interventions to improve women's household finances with interventions for men and community leaders that

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challenge gender norms and power dynamics show promise in reducing intimate partner violence. For example, the “Together to End Violence Against Women” programme in Tanzania supported savings and lending groups for women and gender-equality workshops for men and community leaders.^{4,5} The savings and lending groups aimed to increase women’s economic independence and strengthen their support networks through savings and credit activities. Women also received training in business skills, financial literacy, and HIV and violence prevention. Male partners participated in workshops exploring gender norms, power dynamics, violence prevention and HIV prevention, while community leaders participated in community dialogues exploring similar topics.

Results indicate positive changes in attitudes and a lower frequency of intimate partner violence in the three months since the intervention ended. Participants noted positive changes in their relationships, including improved communication and greater equity in making decisions. Community leaders and study participants requested that the interventions be continued and expanded, suggesting that participants saw these activities as relevant and helpful.



CASH TRANSFERS

Cash transfers are another intervention that may reduce violence. Several cash transfer programmes^{6,7} targeting women in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa reduced intimate partner violence – a promising finding given that such programmes are used around the world to address poverty. However, there is little evidence on whether these positive impacts continue after the transfer programmes end and whether this depends on other programme features.

An ongoing study in Bangladesh is exploring whether transfers to women result in lower intimate partner violence after the programme ends, when provided on their own or in conjunction with communication on nutrition to change behaviour.⁸ This study is analysing data from the Transfer Modality Research Initiative, a cluster-randomised trial that was implemented by the World Food Programme in 500 villages in rural Bangladesh between 2012 and 2014. Mothers with children under two years old were given cash transfers (1 500 Bangladeshi taka/\$18 per household per month) or food transfers (rice, lentils and fortified oil), with or without nutrition communication,

which involved weekly group training, home visits and meetings with community leaders.



BUILDING THE EVIDENCE BASE

Although these economic interventions show promise, more research is needed to understand why levels of violence change and how this depends on context. For example, cash transfers may increase intimate partner violence in certain contexts: men may use violence to extract money or to reassert authority after a shift in power in the relationship. Exploring these issues will allow researchers to determine whether these approaches can be adapted to different contexts and on different scales, what (if any) other interventions are needed in combination with economic interventions to reduce violence, and under what circumstances these impacts may be sustainable.

The Sexual Violence Research Initiative and the World Bank Group are working with researchers to widely disseminate the findings to promote the use of evidence to inform policy and practice.

¹ Pigs for Peace. n.d. *Pigs for Peace*. Available: <http://www.pigsforpeace.org/pigs-for-peace.html> [2017, April 12].

² Pigs for Peace. n.d. *Rabbits for Resilience*. Available: <http://www.pigsforpeace.org/resilience.html> [2017, April 12].

³ Kohli, A., Remy, M.M., Binkurhorhwa, A.K., Mitima, C.M., Mirindi, A.B., Mwinja, N.B., Banyewesize, J.H., Ntakwinja, G.M., Perrin, N.A. & Glass, N. 2017. Preventing risky behaviours among young adolescents in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: A qualitative study. *Global Public Health*. DOI: 10.1080/17441692.2017.1317009.

⁴ Messersmith, L.J., Halim, N., Kawemama, P., Steven, E. & Reich, N. 2016. A mixed methods study to test the preliminary effect of World Education’s Together to End Violence Against Women (TEVAW), a program to address intimate partner violence in northern Tanzania: Baseline report. Available: <http://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2016-08-22/TEVAW%20Baseline%20Report%20final.pdf> [2017, May 26].

⁵ Messersmith, L.J., Halim, N., Kawemama, P., Steven, E. & Reich, N. 2017. A mixed methods study to test the preliminary effect of World Education’s Together to End Violence Against Women (TEVAW), a program to address intimate partner violence in northern Tanzania: Final report. Available: http://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2017-05-15/WEI-B-BU-SVRI_TEVAW%20Endline%20Report_FINAL_4.12.17%20%288%29.pdf [2017, May 26].

⁶ Buller, A.M., Hidrobo, M., Peterman, A. & Heise, L. 2016. The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach?: A mixed methods study on causal mechanisms through which cash and in-kind food transfers decreased intimate partner violence. *BMC Public Health*. 16(488). DOI: 10.1186/s12889-016-3129-3.

⁷ Pettifor, A., Selin, A., MacPhail, C., Kahn, K. & Gomez-Olive, X. 2015. The impact of a conditional cash transfer study (HPTN 068) and a community mobilization intervention on experiences of intimate partner violence: Findings from rural Mpumalanga, South Africa. *SVRI Forum* 2015. 15-17 September 2015. Stellenbosch, South Africa. Available: <http://www.svri.org/forums/forum2015/presentations/Impact.pdf> [2017, May 26].

⁸ Hidrobo, M. & Roy, S. 2016. *Can transfers and training reduce intimate partner violence?* Available: <http://www.svri.org/blog/can-transfers-and-training-reduce-intimate-partner-violence> [2017, April 12].

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For more information on the grants, see <http://www.svri.org/what-we-do/research-support/svri-grant>.