Poverty reduced
Poverty reduced

OBJECTIVE OF STRATEGY: Alleviate poverty through interventions targeted at women or the household including cash transfers, savings, microfinance loans, and labour force interventions.

Rationale

The links between poverty and violence against women (VAW) are well established, with women in poor households facing disproportionately high risks of violence. Globally, people living in poverty are more likely to live in locations with more conflict, fewer support services, and weaker legal systems. Poverty also increases risk factors for intimate partner violence (IPV), including ill-health, reduced educational opportunities, and household stress. At the same time, violence increases women’s risk of poverty due to both the direct costs of violence, such as out of pocket health expenditure, as well as indirect costs such as reduced earnings productivity. Thus, the relationship can be seen as mutual and reinforcing – creating either a virtuous or detrimental cycle.

Interventions that aim to reduce poverty and increase economic security may offer promising and cost-effective solutions to address VAW, in particular due to the bi-directional linkages between poverty and IPV (see Figure 1). This may be the case, even when these poverty reduction programmes do not have an explicit focus on VAW prevention or target women specifically. This strategy therefore aims to leverage the large-scale reach of social safety nets, such as cash transfers, for IPV prevention, offering unprecedented opportunities for scale.

Figure 1: Bi-directional relationship between poverty and women’s experiences of violence. Diagram from Gibbs, Duvvury and Scriven (2017) What Works Evidence Review: The relationship between poverty and intimate partner violence.

Risk and protective factors
This strategy aims to address the following poverty related risk factors and promote the following protective factors for VAW:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Risk factors</th>
<th>Protective factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Economic insecurity (women and men)</td>
<td>Economic security (women and men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poverty-related stress and poor behavioural coping strategies (men and women)</td>
<td>Psychosocial wellbeing (men and women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low self-efficacy and self-esteem (women)</td>
<td>High efficacy and self-esteem (women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Financial autonomy (women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Insecure and unstable household economic status (including low wealth, financial assets and food security)</td>
<td>Secure and stable household economic status (including high wealth, financial assets and food security)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High levels of household stress and intra-household conflict</td>
<td>Low levels of household stress and intra-household conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High levels of inequality in intimate partner and in-law relationships</td>
<td>Intimate relationships characterised by gender equality including shared decision making and household responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>High levels of poverty and unemployment</td>
<td>Low levels of poverty and unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High levels of economically motivated crime</td>
<td>Low levels of economically motivated crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal</td>
<td>Low levels of women’s employment</td>
<td>High levels of women’s employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic shocks (including economic downturns, disasters, conflict)</td>
<td>Strong economic social safety nets and social protection¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Economic stability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theory of change

The following diagram provides a simplified theory of change demonstrating how poverty reduction programmes can lead to sustained reductions in VAW. This would need further development and adaptation for specific programmes.

**P: Poverty reduced**

- Improved household economic security, including basic needs, economic assets and financial services (e.g. cash, savings)
- Women have greater access to income, land and other productive assets
- Women and men’s improved labour force opportunities (e.g. employment, self-employment, livelihoods), including to safe, decent and fairly paid work
- Women’s increased knowledge and skills for financial and economic activities
- Reduced household poverty and economic stress
- Women have increased economic security
- Women have increased financial independence
- VAW is reduced or eliminated
- Improved health and development outcomes in households, communities and society
Types of interventions

Interventions under this strategy primarily aim to alleviate poverty and improve development outcomes. The following table outlines three common types of poverty alleviation interventions featured in the RESPECT framework and provides a brief overview of the current evidence base on impact on VAW for each type of intervention and example programmes where these are available. Note that this typology is not exhaustive, and other areas of future research may expand knowledge, in particular into interventions supporting women’s asset ownership, or claim to inheritance of land or housing. The most promising type of intervention under this strategy is economic transfers, while labour force and microfinance or savings interventions without additional components are not recommended as standalone interventions to reduce women’s experiences of IPV.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Summary of evidence</th>
<th>Example programmes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic transfers including conditional/unconditional cash transfers vouchers, and in-kind transfers</td>
<td>Economic transfers, including the direct transfer of cash, food or food vouchers to households, are rapidly expanding in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs) as a tool to reduce poverty and improve the lives of the poor and vulnerable. Economic transfers vary substantially in their approach, modality and delivery mechanism. They can be unconditional or conditional on specific behaviours such as child health visits, school attendance or participation in nutrition counselling. They can be part of government-led large-scale national social protection programmes, or short-term interventions delivered by NGOs. The recipient of transfers is typically either the household head or a woman in the household, depending on the setting and objectives of the programme.</td>
<td>There is a promising evidence from LMICs which demonstrates that economic transfers to poor households show significant reductions in violence outcomes. This includes a review of 22 studies on cash transfers and IPV where 73% of studies showed reductions in IPV. More evidence is needed from HICs. Quantitative evidence has demonstrated that reductions are strongest for physical and/or sexual IPV, with weaker impacts for other forms of violence including emotional abuse and controlling behaviours. Qualitative evidence shows that these reductions likely occur through three main pathways: 1) increased household economic security and emotional wellbeing, 2) decreased intra-household conflict and 3) increased women’s empowerment. However, more evidence is needed to understand how targeting and modality matters (in particular how much it matters if women themselves</td>
<td>Economic transfers in Northern Ecuador and transfers plus nutrition programming in Bangladesh, World Food Programme HPTN 068, South Africa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend
- Green circle denotes promising, >1 evaluations show significant reductions in violence outcomes
- Orange square denotes more evidence needed, >1 evaluations show improvements in intermediate outcomes related to violence
- Yellow exclamation denotes conflicting, evaluations show conflicting results in reducing violence
- Red square denotes no evidence, intervention not yet rigorously evaluated
- Black triangle denotes ineffective, >1 evaluations show no reductions in violence outcomes

H World Bank High Income Countries (HIC)
L World Bank Low and Middle Income Countries (LMIC)
Labour force interventions including employment policies and livelihood and employment training

These interventions focus on supporting a person or household to develop economic assets through increased employment, labour force participation or earnings, and opportunities for income generation (including livelihoods training or productive asset transfers, cash for work and public works programming). They also include social protection programming for labour markets, including unemployment benefits, minimum wage and other benefits guaranteeing safe and dignified employment.

Microfinance or savings interventions without any additional components

Interventions which focus on supporting a person or household to develop their own economic assets through savings and loans. This includes microcredit, micro-savings interventions and individual or group village savings and loan associations (VSLAs). This excludes interventions combining microfinance or savings with social empowerment activities (which are included in the Empowerment of Women RESPECT Strategy Summary).

While there is promising evidence from HICs that factors like women’s increased employment and earnings can lead to reductions in VAW, more evidence is needed from LMICs.

The current evidence from LMICs suggests that these interventions can lead to improvements in protective factors for IPV experience such as improved economic wellbeing for women and households, as well as improvements in women’s relationships. However, evidence is limited on their ability to result in direct robust reductions in VAW (rather than part of programming bundled with other social components).

Evidence from LMICs suggests that microfinance or savings interventions alone are ineffective in reducing violence outcomes. There is no evidence from HICs, as interventions have not yet been rigorously evaluated.

A number of interventions combine microfinance or savings with other types of social empowerment interventions and have shown more promising results in terms of reductions in VAW. Examples of combined economic and social empowerment programmes are included in the Empowerment of Women RESPECT Strategy Summary.
Example programmes

The following table summarises two different economic transfer programmes which have been shown to deliver reductions in VAW prevalence within programmatic timeframes. Examples are not provided for the two other intervention types, which are not recommended as standalone programming for VAW prevention based on available evidence. The table should be reviewed alongside the design and implementation checklist on page 9, as well as the guiding principles of effective programming provided in the RESPECT framework when adapting any of these methodologies. More detailed information on each programme is provided in the programme summaries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Target population</th>
<th>Core activities</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Evaluation and Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| World Food Programme Cash Transfer programme (Ecuador) | A conditional transfer programme which aimed to support dietary diversity and nutrition, women’s bargaining power with respect to the food security domain, and integration of Colombian refugees into Ecuadorian communities, implemented by the World Food Programme (WFP) | Poor urban areas of Northern Ecuador | Poor women, including both Colombian refugees and host Ecuadorians (men were also targeted in the minority of households without an adult woman present) | Women (and some men) in participating households received transfers equivalent to approximately $40 per month (approx. 11% of household consumption) in the form of cash, vouchers and food. The transfers were provided over a period of 6 months and were conditional on attendance of monthly nutrition trainings. | 6 months | Type of evaluation: Randomised controlled trial (RCT)¹⁶

Impact: The evaluation found that transfers resulted in a reduction in physical and/or sexual violence by intimate partners of 30% after approximately 6 months of transfers. The results did not vary by type of transfer showing that cash was as effective as in-kind transfers at reducing VAW. Analysis suggests three complementary pathways led to decrease: 1) decreased marital conflict previously attributed to the need to negotiate money for daily family needs, 2) increases in family wellbeing and happiness and 3) women’s increased decision-making, self-confidence and freedom of movement.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
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<th>Evaluation and Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| HPTN 068, a conditional cash transfer for HIV reduction in South Africa | Cash transfer programme conditional on school attendance of girls and young women | Rural South Africa  | Young women and girls of secondary school age (age 13-20) and their parents and/or guardians | Cash was transferred to the girls and their families conditional upon secondary school attendance of at least 80% of school days per month. The cash amounted to approximately 15.7% of pre-programme monthly household expenditure and included $10 for girls and $20 for their parents/guardians every month. | Up to 3 years | Evaluation type: RCT\(^{17}\)  
Impact: The evaluation found that receipt of the cash significantly reduced girls’ and young women’s experiences of physical IPV by 34% after three years. Analysis suggests cash transfers reduced young women and girls’ exposure to potential violent partners, delaying their sexual debut and reducing the number of sexual partners. |
Programme design and adaptation

Ensure quality of delivery and sufficient benefit levels for economic programming. While addressing poverty can have transformational potential for participants, the quality of delivery and benefit levels are critical. For example, cash transfer programmes that are of low value or implemented poorly – with unpredictable delivery – are unlikely to have widespread beneficial outcomes. Likewise, employment and labour policies and programmes which are based on exploitative work or unsafe conditions, or which discriminate against women are unlikely to have gender quality impacts. Livelihood training must be appropriate to the setting and delivered via skilled trainers and mentors. Savings and credit programmes which charge high and predatory interest rates are unlikely to alleviate poverty or poverty-related stress. Thus, to be successful in reducing and addressing VAW, programming must first be successful in achieving a strong impact on poverty reduction.

1. Design and adapt transfer interventions to address key pathways to VAW prevention. To optimise the impact of poverty reduction interventions on VAW, it is important to carefully consider how context and design features may impact on potential pathways to reduce VAW that operate within a given setting. For example, in the case of economic transfer programmes, whether the transfer will be provided to male household heads or women, the anticipated impact on intra-household relationships, whether messaging around the transfer promotes positive gender norms, and whether any conditional features such as group trainings are necessary to shift intra-household dynamics and mitigate against backlash. These factors are likely to be determined by setting, including an assessment of key gender inequalities, gender-related norms and considerations of the specific target group.

2. Further testing of standalone labour force or microfinance interventions is needed, as evidence to date has not shown consistent impacts on levels of VAW. Part of this is due to the limited number of rigorous studies in LMICs, as well as the limited ability of studies to unpack the specific contribution of the economic component versus other bundled components. In order to assess the strength of potential impact, consideration should be given to broader literature on the economic effectiveness of such programming. Thus, careful consideration and more testing is needed before recommending these types of programmes.

3. Incorporate complementary activities to enhance and optimise the impact of poverty reduction programmes on VAW. Complementary activities which either directly or indirectly improve women’s status within the household may be important for sustaining impact on IPV. For example, an evaluation of the World Food Programme transfer programme in Bangladesh found a 26% reduction in physical IPV among participants who received the transfer as well as the nutrition behaviour change communication component persisting 6 to 10 months after the
programme ended, but no such change among participants who only received the transfer.  

4. Consider carefully how to frame interventions. For example, framing a transfer programme around child health, or household wellbeing more generally, may be more easily accepted, and less likely to prompt backlash, than framing the programme directly around women’s empowerment. While there is no quantitative evidence exploring these trade-offs, consistent with other VAW literature, experts hypothesize that how programmes are viewed and accepted by men (and male engagement) can be an important component in determining programme impact on VAW.

**Implementation and scale-up**

5. Design monitoring and evaluation frameworks to generate evidence on how programmes lead to reductions in VAW. This should include a mixture of credible quantitative and qualitative methods (see the Monitoring and Evaluation Guide) to capture pathways of change, and to understand the benefits of different components. Where appropriate, measures should include both experience, frequency and severity of VAW to capture marginal changes. Importantly, more evidence is needed over longer time horizons, including medium and longer-term impacts (5-10 years) and post-intervention impacts, to understand if VAW reverts back to pre-programme levels after benefits end or if beneficial impacts remain.

6. Measure and track impact on economic and emotional forms of violence, in addition to physical and sexual forms. There is a lack of evidence on how poverty reduction programmes impact on economic and emotional violence, with some evaluation results suggesting that these forms of violence may be harder to shift than physical and sexual forms, or could even increase as a result of men’s response to shifts in resources and gender power dynamics at the household level.

7. Disaggregate data to better understand impacts on different types of households, such as female-headed households, households with women and girls with disabilities, displaced households, and polygamous households. For example, the evaluation of the LEAP 1000 cash transfer programme in Ghana for new mothers found that while the intervention reduced frequency of IPV across the entire intervention, experience of IPV was only reduced among monogamous households (despite polygamous households having higher rates of IPV). Conversely, an evaluation of a national cash transfer programme in Mali which targeted male heads of household found significant decreases in IPV in polygamous households but limited impacts in monogamous households. While an explanation for this could be context specific, this emerging evidence suggests that both levels of violence and responses to programming may be different by household structure.
### Entry points

The following table highlights key entry points for this strategy, which involve leveraging existing poverty reduction programmes or platforms in order to maximise their positive impacts on IPV, whilst minimising any potential negative impacts. It also includes some programme examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry point</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social safety nets</strong></td>
<td>Over 2.5 billion people in LMICs are covered by some form of social safety net(^{25}), including economic transfers. Due to their wide and expanding reach in low resource settings, and their ability to directly target women and economically marginalised groups, social safety net programmes offer an unprecedented opportunity for policy makers to achieve results at scale. Emerging evidence has demonstrated that even where economic transfers do not directly intend to reduce VAW, they can lead to large scale reductions in IPV. By tweaking the design or adding on additional components to intentionally tackle key pathways to change, including intrahousehold dynamics, women’s economic empowerment and household economic wellbeing can lead to bigger and more sustainable reductions in VAW. For example, the additional behaviour change component of the Bangladesh transfer modality research initiative (which included interactive group training for mothers as well as community engagement) was central to sustaining results six to ten months after the food and cash transfer had ended. An evaluation of the initiative found evidence that this additional component had directly impacted on three key pathways to VAW reduction, including women’s increased social capital and bargaining power, greater social costs to men of inflicting violence, and long-term improvements in household well-being.(^{26})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing community-based economic institutions e.g. savings and loan groups, self-help groups, social protection recipients</strong></td>
<td>In addition to functioning as a standalone intervention, existing economic structures and institutions at community level may offer a cost-effective and scalable entry point for other types of VAW prevention work. While there is not robust evidence showing these types of interventions alone are effective at reducing VAW, complementary evidence suggests that bundled economic and social empowerment interventions have been successful. These interventions have worked via building women’s social skills, confidence and networks, in parallel with economic components. For example, the Indashyikirwa intervention in Rwanda successfully built on CARE’s existing VSLA as an entry point to engage couples to improve unequal relationship dynamics and reduce IPV.(^{27}) Thus, economic programming was a useful platform to access and engage women through a network already accepted by partners and the wider community. In Tanzania, the MAISHA intervention combined microfinance with a gender empowerment intervention to reduce the risk of women experiencing physical and/or sexual IPV.(^{28}) More information on bundling approaches can be found in the RESPECT Strategy Summaries on Relationships Skills Strengthened and Empowerment of Women.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Resources

Evidence reviews


This mixed-method review of studies of fourteen quantitative and eight qualitative studies in low- and middle-income countries developed a programme theory proposing three pathways through which cash transfers could impact IPV: 1) increases in economic security and emotional wellbeing, 2) changes in intra-household conflict, and 3) changes in women’s empowerment.


This rigorous evidence review identifies and presents the results from economic transfer programmes, microfinance savings and finance interventions, and combined economic empowerment and social empowerment interventions on preventing IPV.


This report summarises the evidence from 29 studies of gender and cash transfer programmes in humanitarian contexts.

Case studies and briefs


This case study summarises the impact of a short-term food, cash, and voucher program targeted to the urban poor in Northern Ecuador, which led to a 30 percent reduction in physical and/or sexual IPV.


This case study summarises findings from an economic transfer programme coupled with a nutrition behaviour change communication component in Bangladesh. The programme led to a 26% reduction in physical IPV.


This brief summarises the impact of a conditional cash transfer programme targeted at adolescent girls in South Africa. The programme led to a 34 percent reduction in intimate partner physical violence by allowing girls to avoid potential violent partnerships, as transfers delayed sexual debut and lowered their number of sexual partners.

Getting down to business: Women’s economic and social empowerment in Burundi. International Rescue Committee (IRC), New York: IRC.

This case study summarises findings from an evaluation of the IRC’s EA$E (Economic And Social Empowerment for women) programme in Burundi. Results showed that adding a gender discussion group to a VSLA resulted in a significant reduction in IPV (22% in the last two weeks). See also the EA$E Programme Implementation Manual.

Practical guidance


This brief supports cash and GBV practitioners to ensure protection from GBV for crisis- and conflict-affected populations


This compendium aims to help humanitarian actors to integrate GBV risk mitigation and prevention in cash and voucher assistance (CVA) interventions, and integrate CVA into GBV prevention and response when appropriate.

Webinar

Leveraging Cash Transfers to Reduce Intimate Partner Violence at Scale, Promise and Potential from Research around the Globe. The Transfer Project (2019) CSW63 Side Event [online video]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNxb8FKnyc

This CSW63 side event hosted by UN Women, Sida and the Prime Minister’s Office (Tanzania) presents emerging evidence from around the world on how cash transfers can help reduce intimate partner violence (IPV) against women.
Endnotes

1 This strategy acknowledges that there are distinctions between the concepts of poverty, economic security, economic insecurity, wealth, assets, but they are used interchangeably for the purposes of narrative frameworks. More specific concepts are used for individual indicators when describing specific research.


5 Ibid.

6 Social safety nets can be defined as “noncontributory benefits, provided either in cash or in kind, which are intended to support the poor or the vulnerable. They are a component of the larger social protection system that also includes contributory social insurance, such as pensions and health insurance, as well as labor market policies and programs” – p.4 of Beegle, K., Coudouel, A. & Monsalve, E. (2019) Realizing the Full Potential of Social Safety Nets in Africa. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

7 Evidence ratings are largely derived from systematic reviews of more than 1 evaluation of interventions that mostly use experimental designs including randomized, cluster randomized and quasi-experimental methods. It is recognized that for some strategies such as justice sector interventions, alternative evaluation methods may be more appropriate including time series, observational and cross-sectional designs despite being typically considered lower quality. This is an emerging field and hence, there is a great deal of variation in rigor of study design and evaluation. The sources for these reviews and studies are provided as part of references.

8 e.g. legal interventions like equal property rights have worked well with direct poverty intervention strategies in India. See: Amaral, S (2017) Do Improved Property Rights Decrease Violence Against Women in India? Institute for Social and Economic Research.


10 Ibid.


14 The Trickle-Up programme comprised a control arm and an economic intervention-only arm, with VSLA, livelihoods training and start-up capital for women over a six-month period.


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