ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT TO ADDRESS 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 research interventions funded by the Development Marketplace: Innovations to Address GBV show promise in targeting individuals and risk factors associated with violence.

CASH TRANSFERS & BEHAVIOR CHANGE COMMUNICATION

RESULTS

Cash transfer programs have become an increasingly utilized approach to poverty reduction in low and middle-income countries. There have been fears that these programs—particularly when targeted to women—could put women at risk, as their husbands could inflict violence against them to take control of cash or as a backlash against a change in power dynamics.

The International Food Policy Research Institute undertook a study that addressed two key gaps in the evidence base. First, there were no rigorous quantitative research studies on cash transfers and IPV in South Asia, as most evidence came from Latin America. Second, there were no rigorous studies of what happens after programs end.

The study built on a program that provided cash or food transfers to poor rural women in Bangladesh, with or without intensive nutrition behavior change communication (BCC). The BCC was focused on improving knowledge and practices in terms of infant and young child feeding in a gender-sensitive way that proved far more broadly transformative for women.

The researchers found no evidence of increased IPV – and that is consistent with the global evidence, but notable because the study took place in Bangladesh, where there was an evidence gap. They found suggestive evidence that all interventions reduced IPV during the program. And they found clear evidence that only the combination of transfers and BCC caused sustained reductions in IPV, with 26% less physical IPV than in the control or transfers-only group, at 6-10 months post-program.

This suggests that cash transfer programs can reduce IPV even in conservative settings, and that these impacts can be sustained.
The Gender Equity Model (GEME) Project is bringing together American University, the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower, community development NGOs and private firms in Egypt to explore intersections between women’s economic empowerment and GBV. The project targeted private firms that employ or could employ women and aims to strengthen their approach to gender equity in employment and to develop a women-friendly working environment. Training for private sector leaders has been delivered, and there will be a systematic search for entry points for interventions.

Despite an increasing evidence base, the exact impact of economic empowerment programs on violence—and particularly on intimate partner violence—is still unknown. Send a Cow and research partner the Global Women’s Institute are undertaking a two-year research study to examine the effectiveness of economic interventions on reducing IPV rates in target communities in Western Kenya.

The University of Ibadan and the International Center for Research on Women are testing a program in Ibadan that aims to increase women’s participation in household decision-making by fostering more egalitarian relationships in young couples aged 18-35. The research partners will examine if the program has an impact on emotional, physical and sexual IPV, and allow for a more nuanced understanding of how the program might help couples create a more equitable relationship and reduce violence. The program aims for men to experience and understand the relevance of shifts in gender relations, rather than for the woman alone. It is hoped that such an approach may foster long-term change toward an egalitarian relationship that is free not only of violence, but of other displays of power dynamics and coercive behaviors such as controlling women’s resources and reproductive decision-making.