The Impact of a Text-based Campaign on Intimate Partner Violence in Peru

Researchers:

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Sector(s): Crime, Violence, and Conflict, Gender, Health

J-PAL office: J-PAL Latin America and the Caribbean

Fieldwork: Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)

Sample: 900 men

Initiative(s): Crime and Violence Initiative (CVI)

Target group: Men and boys Urban population Families and households

Outcome of interest: Aggressive behavior Gender-based violence Health outcomes

Intervention type: Digital and mobile Information COVID-19 response

AEA RCT registration number: AEARCTR-0006180

Partner organization(s): Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations of Peru (MOW), Ministry of Economics and Finance of Peru

In the wake of Covid-19, countries around the world have experienced an increase in reported cases of intimate partner violence (IPV). In partnership with the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations of Peru, researchers are evaluating a text-based campaign designed to help men regulate their emotions and reduce perpetration of IPV.

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In the wake of Covid-19, countries around the world have experienced an increase in reported cases of intimate partner violence (IPV). Declines in household income as a result of the pandemic are likely to increase the emotional stress levels of potential perpetrators and thereby increase rates of aggression. Moreover, while lockdown and shelter-in-place measures are crucial for slowing the spread of coronavirus, such measures put women and children at higher risk of domestic violence as they are confined with potential abusers and have limited access to support services.

Traditionally, programming to reduce IPV has largely focused on women, with few programs targeting men and perpetrators. Further, strategies like anger management that have been shown to reduce violence in other contexts have been understudied as a way to reduce domestic violence. In the context of Covid-19, traditional options for reaching households at risk of IPV may not be practical as mobility restrictions can hinder survivors' ability to seek outside help, creating a greater need for innovative programming. Could an IPV awareness and anger management campaign delivered via text messages to men at risk of perpetrating such violence reduce its incidence?

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A 2018-19 study estimated that about 39 percent of women in Peru, where this study takes place, have experienced IPV. [1], Further, during the first week of the Covid-19 lockdown in the country, a major helpline dedicated to domestic violence registered a 30 percent increase in calls. Combatting IPV is a priority for Peru's Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP), which has been collaborating with the research team for several years to design and evaluate programs aimed at reducing gender-based violence. In response to Covid-19 restrictions, MIMP's in-person programs and evaluations have been paused, but the Ministry is working with researchers to introduce new programs capable of remotely reaching the same at-risk participants during the lockdown, including a text-based information campaign. MIMP is also providing other services to survivors of IPV, including a 24/7 hot line for crisis counseling and remote or clinic-based legal, medical, and psychological support services. In addition, the government is delivering a one-time cash transfer to women in order to address heightened short-term economic need.

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In partnership with the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations of Peru, researchers evaluated a text-based campaign designed to help men regulate their emotions and reduce intimate partner violence in urban areas of the country. Through phone surveys with couples, researchers also aimed to understand the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on IPV and intra-household conflict. They planned to use this information to identify households at heightened risk of IPV in order to inform the government's response and ability to target services.

After a brief phone survey, a random subset of men initially selected to participate in another MIMP program that was paused due to Covid-19 were given the option to enroll themselves and other adult household members into a text-based information campaign. [2] The campaign was described to the 900 surveyed men as providing information on managing stress and domestic

harmony during a time of reduced mobility and access to resources. Among those who opted in, researchers randomly assigned half of households to receive IPV-relevant information or, for the comparison group, general advice on managing stress that would not likely influence emotional regulation or episodes of violence. Participants received information via text three times per week for ten weeks.

For the group receiving IPV-relevant information, researchers reduced components of well-vetted anger management trainings to short text messages, some with links to internet-based resources. The texts included information on coping mechanisms for stress-related emotional responses and tips for managing interpersonal conflict between partners and family members. The content was designed to be relevant to high-stress circumstances such as the Covid-19 lockdown and economic downturn, and to promote awareness of alternatives to violence.

During the initial phone survey in June 2020, researchers collected information on spousal relationships and conflict, as well as on changes in economic circumstances resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. After the text campaign ended, researchers conducted another phone survey in December 2020 to measure the efficacy of the campaign on IPV, wellbeing, and other health-seeking behaviors. To address the risk of underreporting of IPV by men, researchers used data collected from men and their female partners before the pandemic began to create an algorithm that predicts the true incidence of IPV.

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Evaluation ongoing; results forthcoming.

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1. Agu□ ero, Jorge M., Úrsula Aldana, Erica Field, Veronica Frisancho, and Javier Romero. 2020. "Is Community-Based Targeting Effective in Identifying Intimate Partner Violence?" *AEA Papers and Proceedings*, 110: 605-09.DOI: 10.1257/pandp.20201046

2. The alternative program men were scheduled to participate in was Men for Equality, which aims to change gender norms around IPV through peer workshops.