

Domestic Violence and Women's Power within the Household: The Roles of Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes.

“The classical definitions of power come from sociology and political science and, not surprisingly, resonate more for sociologists and political scientists than for economists.”

Robert A. Pollak (1994: 148)

“Over the past ten years, the microeconomics of the household has experienced a paradigmatic transformation. It is no longer acceptable to ignore inequalities of power and welfare among household members...” Nancy Folbre (1997: 263)

Summary

Economic studies on domestic violence¹ have mostly focused on women economic opportunities and economic or institutional factors that are external to the household². These studies implicitly assume that women's economic and non-economic resources homogeneously influence their power within the household—after controlling for correlates, such as marital capital or experiences of violence as a child. However, socio-cultural aspects also affect an individual's behavior and decision-making processes, mediating the effects of economic and non-economic factors on her/his power within the household. Our objective in this paper is to analyze the effects of women's beliefs, values, and attitudes (BVAs) regarding gender roles and gendered individual agency on the likelihood of domestic violence. We focus on the case of Mexican women and draw data from a recent and detailed survey on gender violence, the 2006 National Survey on the Dynamics of the Relationships within Households (ENDIREH, Spanish acronym).

To discuss power within the household, economists have largely used the concepts of bargaining power and threat points. “Extrahousehold environmental parameters” (EEPs), such as property, marriage, and divorce rules; taxes and transfers conditioned on marital status; or child support and child care subsidies, influence threat points and bargaining power of household members (McElroy, 1997: 57-61). Moreover, EEPs may be regarded actually as “gender-specific environmental parameters” (GEPs) (Folbre, 1997: 265-6). GEPs differently affect an individual's bargaining power depending on her/his gender; for example, poor

¹ Notice that we loosely use domestic violence and intimate partner violence interchangeably. Also that we mostly refer to works that focus on women.

² On women economic opportunities see Tauchen et al. (1991), Farmer and Tiefenthaler (1997), Bobonis et al. (2009), Aizer (2007), and Angelucci (2007); on the external economic or institutional factors see Tauchen and Witte (1995), Farmer and Tiefenthaler (1996), Bloch and Rao (2002), and Bowlus and Seitz (2006); and for exceptions see Lehrer et al. (2009), who study the relationship between religiosity of women and the risk of facing intimate partner violence among Chilean college students, and Pollak (2004), who develops an intergenerational model of domestic violence.

enforcement of child support affects the threat point of a woman who is expected to assume custody of children consequently leaving her in a worse bargaining position within marriage (Folbre, 1997). England and Kilbourne (1990) highlight that, among other factors, cultural forces affect differently women's and men's marital power because such forces devalue female work and encourage altruism of women. Our study on the relationship between BVAs, power, and domestic violence conceptually follows the ideas of Folbre, and England and Kilbourne. BVAs on gender roles and gendered individual agency act as power-shifters with ultimate effects on domestic violence³.

Most studies on domestic violence usually face the lack of random and representative data⁴. In our analysis, we are able to overcome estimation drawbacks encountered by previous studies because we use a random selected and nationally representative survey that includes information of married, not married, and single women (15 years and older)⁵. On the other hand, we foresee some potential problems with respect to our econometric estimation. Women more tolerant of violence could marry more violent men or women with fewer options outside marriage could cope better with abusive partners, i.e. an assortative mating problem. BVAs that we want to correctly identify may be endogenous if, as discussed by England (2003) and Folbre (1997), preferences and values change with life experiences. Then, for example, women may strategically, i.e. ideologically or attitudinally, adapt in different ways to her situation of experiencing violence in order to reduce psychic/emotional deterioration or to achieve internal coherence. However, we are able to correct these empirical concerns by controlling for additional covariates, such as: experiences of non-domestic violence, past (previous to last year) violence by current partner, domestic violence in family of origin of both partners. Provided that we fairly deal with estimation drawbacks, we expect to contribute to the literature on domestic violence by improving our understanding of its relationship with women household power.

³ For studies on gender, power, and domestic violence in the sociology literature, see Anderson (1997) and Anderson and Umberson (2001). Please notice that we focus on women because available data does not contain men's records.

⁴ Exceptions are, for example, Angelucci (2007), Bobonis et al. (2009), and Bowlus and Seitz (2006) in the economic literature; and De Maris et al., (2003), Anderson (1997), Umberson (1998) in the sociology and psychology literatures.

⁵ Married includes women living in consensual union, not married women include separated and divorced women and widows.

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