



# LAC Gender Impact Evaluation Initiative

Building Agency through Practical Interventions

## Bolsa Familia and Violence in Brazil: Does Increasing Women's Income Decrease Domestic Abuse?

This analysis seeks to analyze the effect *Bolsa Familia*, Brazil's flagship Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), has had on domestic violence rates in Brazil and to provide insight into the targeting methods used for future conditional cash transfer programs. Violence against women is notoriously prevalent in Brazil, with some estimates claiming that every 15 seconds a woman is raped, beaten, and/or impeded from leaving her home. Some proponents of the *Bolsa Familia* CCT program in Brazil claim that by distributing CCTs directly to women rather than men lowers the wage gap between the sexes. More monetary independence increases a woman's bargaining power within the household and could lower domestic abuse rates. Conversely, others claim that targeting transfers specifically towards women creates animosity and jealousy within the household, leading to more cases of domestic violence. This study seeks to fill the knowledge gap as few studies have been conducted regarding the effects of CCTs on domestic violence.

### Program Design

The *Bolsa Familia* CCT program provides support to mothers of poor families conditional on the children's regular school attendance and medical checkups, both of which the government provides free of charge. If mothers fulfill these conditions, they can receive up to \$11 a month per child (for a maximum of three children) with an additional \$34 a month unconditionally if they live in extreme poverty.

Although lowering the rate of domestic violence in Brazil is not an explicit objective of the *Bolsa*

Intervention Period: 2003-Current

*Familia* program, an increase in economic means available to women outside of marriage can increase their bargaining power in intra-household affairs. While there have been few studies on the effects of CCT programs on domestic violence rates, and counter arguments exist that state that increased wages for women can actually lead to increased domestic violence, it is often believed that increasing women's bargaining power is tied to decreased levels of domestic abuse and violence.

## Evaluation Design

Female homicide rates were used a proxy measure for domestic violence rates, due challenges related to cultural norms and self-reporting. Female homicide rates do not fully capture the level of domestic violence. However, studies have shown that approximately 70% of all female homicides are due to domestic violence. The homicide rate was then compared to the rate of coverage of the *Bolsa Familia* program.

Using a Differences-in-Differences (D-D) approach for the years from 2006-2009, the years for which all variables were available on surveys, and controlling for changes in the regular homicide

**Identification Method:** Difference-in-Differences

rate, it is possible to examine the effects of *Bolsa Familia* on domestic violence. This test was also performed using the changes in wage gap by sector to test for the robustness of results. Results were then checked against changes in the overall homicide rate to ensure that changes were in fact related to domestic violence and not overall trends. Another test to check for the effects that the *Bolsa Familia* program has on agency is to run a regression compared to the rate of separations and divorces in Brazil.

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## Findings

**Results from this study showed a decrease in homicide rates for both men and women, however, the relative change was higher for women.** When comparing urban and rural effects of *Bolsa Familia*, it was, once again shown that homicide rates decreased in both scenarios. The same trend held true for a comparison between the North and South of Brazil, with the exception being that, female homicides decreased relatively more in the North while male homicides decreased by more in the South. When broken down by education level, it is found that the effects of *Bolsa*

*Familia* on the female homicide rate are significantly higher amongst more highly educated women. This suggests that, despite transfers from the Brazilian government, those with little education still do not have many options outside of their current situation. A positive correlation is evident when compared to separation and divorce rates. This further supports the hypothesis that women have more options outside of marriage, and thus higher agency, as a direct result of *Bolsa Familia*.

## Publications

Perova, Elizaveta and Sarah Reynolds. *Do Economic Gains for Women Reduce Domestic Violence?: Female Homicide, Bolsa Familia, and the Gender Wage Gap in Brazil*.

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