

Helpdesk Research Report

Social protection programmes supporting women survivors of domestic violence

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Question

What are the lessons learnt from social protection/cash transfer programmes which target women survivors of domestic/family violence?

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1. Overview

This rapid review presents lessons learnt from social protection/cash transfer programmes which target women survivors of domestic/family violence. As a result of the impact of domestic violence, women survivors of violence often require the support of social protection programmes. This is because domestic violence compromises their personal security; household security; their ability to be gainfully employed; and household income/productivity (Bhatla et al, 2006, p. 4). It also increases their risk of destitution and decreases their access and participation in development programmes (Bhatla et al, 2006, p.4).

Few cash transfer programmes appear to specifically target women survivors of domestic violence. As a result this paper takes a broad understanding of social protection. This draws on the transformative social protection framework, which adds transformative measures to protection, prevention and promotion measures (Fonteneau et al, 2014, p. 12). Protective social protection measures include cash transfers and social services like shelters for survivors of domestic violence and the provision of health and legal aid. These types of programmes tend to be responsive. Transformative social protection measures targeting women survivors of violence include changes to the regulatory frameworks to protect victims of domestic

violence and sensitisation campaigns to transform public attitudes and behaviour towards violence against women (Fonteneau et al, 2014, p. 13). These types of programmes tend to try and prevent domestic violence occurring. The most effective programmes appear to combine both prevention and response measures. Many of the programmes described below are ‘transformative social protection’, as they aim to change lives through achieving empowerment, equality, social inclusion and the realisation of human rights (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004).

The **evidence base** for social protection programmes, especially cash transfers, which target women survivors of domestic violence is very weak (expert comment). The literature is closely connected with literature on programmes addressing violence against women and girls. There is conflicting evidence about whether **cash transfers** increase or decrease domestic violence, although very few cash transfer programmes have been specifically designed to support survivors of domestic violence. A lot of the literature is written by donors. However, there have been a number of attempts to draw out lessons learnt from experiences in a variety of contexts of programmes which target violence against women, including social protection programmes targeting women survivors of violence.

Interventions have not had the same effect on all women experiencing domestic violence. One expert suggests that ‘variables that may influence the outcome include: age at marriage, age differential between spouses, levels of education for both men and women, employment status of the husband, overall household well-being/poverty’ (expert comment). In addition, interventions may have different impacts over time, with short-term increases in domestic violence followed by long-term decreases, for example (expert comment).

Factors which contribute to the **success** of social protection programmes targeted at women survivors of domestic violence include:

- **Holistic, comprehensive, long-term programmes:** which are more effective than single-focus interventions.
- **Economic empowerment measures:** which target poverty as an underlying cause of violence and enable women to leave abusive situations.
- **Support services:** which meet the short- and long-term needs of all women.
- **Sound policy and legal frameworks:** which address underlying causes and strengthen responses.
- **Transformative measures:** which change gender power dynamics, and include communities, men and boys.
- Programmes which **consider women’s safety and differing needs.**
- **Capacity development:** of all those engaged in combating domestic violence.

Factors which have caused **challenges** for social protection programmes targeted at women survivors of domestic violence include:

- **Backlash** against women involved in the programmes.
- **Short-term programmes:** which compromise the sustainability of the programme’s aims.

Case studies from Albania, the Philippines, Peru, and Uganda provide some further examples of social protection programmes that have targeted women survivors of domestic violence.

2. Cash transfers

Few cash transfer programmes appear to target women survivors of domestic violence (see section 5 for an example from Uganda which combines cash transfers with a component aimed at reducing violence against women). There have been very few evaluations of the impact of cash transfer programmes on reductions in incidence or prevalence of gender based violence (expert comment). There is some suggestion that due to the relationship between poverty and domestic violence, cash transfers may reduce domestic violence by alleviating poverty which is a major cause of marital fights (Angelucci, 2008, p. 2). However, a number of studies have suggested that conditional cash transfers may lead to some increased incidences of domestic violence (Amin, 2013, p. 18; Hidrobo and Fernald, 2013). They can place an undue burden on women and perhaps expose them to backlash from family and community members (Amin, 2013, p. 18). With views of masculinity associated with their ability to provide for their families, men may feel threatened and frustrated by large increases in their wives' relative income (Angelucci, 2008, p. 2). In addition, as many conditional cash transfers focus on women as mothers of their children rather than women in their own right, they often reinforce gender-stereotyped roles (Paes-Sousa et al, 2013, p. 69).

An evaluation of Mexico's *Oportunidades* conditional cash transfer programme aimed at alleviating poverty suggests that domestic violence decreased among households entitled to the minimum transfer and where husbands had completed primary school (Angelucci, 2008, p. 37). However, incidences of domestic violence increased in households entitled to a large transfer where the husband was uneducated (Angelucci, 2008, p. 37). Differing effects of cash transfers on domestic violence within families have been observed elsewhere. An evaluation of an unconditional cash transfer programme in Ecuador for mothers, found that cash transfers significantly increased emotional violence in households amongst women educated to primary school or less if their education was equal to or more than their partner's (Hidrobo and Fernald, 2013). However, cash transfers decreased psychological violence in families where women were educated beyond primary school (Hidrobo and Fernald, 2013).

In some communities in Peru, the *Juntos* conditional cash transfer programme linked up with other services which exist to support women and children against violence (Molyneux and Thomson, 2011, p. 200). As a result there was a reduction in domestic violence in areas where some local *Juntos* managers combined awareness raising activities with threats to stop the cash transfers if men's violent behaviour continued (Molyneux and Thomson, 2011, p. 201). One expert suggests that as a result of the 'weak' evidence on cash transfers as stand-alone interventions and the nature of violence against women, it is important to consider the impact and sustainability of such initiatives in the absence of other supports (expert comment). Such supports include referrals to legal, safety, health and protection services; additional longer-term capacity building through education, skills and vocational opportunities; considerations related to children's well-being; and other interventions that address the root causes of gender inequality/discrimination and power dynamics between men and women (expert comment).

3. Lessons learnt: what works in social protection programmes targeted at women survivors of domestic/family violence

Holistic comprehensive programmes

Donor and policy documents suggest that social protection programming should respond holistically to violence against women. The Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F) report which

draws lessons from case studies of programmes working towards gender equality calls for ‘comprehensive, holistic and multi-sectoral responses’ to gender-based violence (Cooper et al, 2013, p. 6). These should develop legal and policy frameworks to prevent and eliminate violence against women, provide quality support services to survivors, and balance the unequal gender power relations that contribute to violence, combining elements of protective and transformative social protection (Cooper et al, 2013, p. 6). Prevention and response interventions should be integrated or run concurrently (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 10; UN WOMEN, 2012, p. 44). DFID’s experience on working to tackle violence against women at the community level, evaluated for its How To Note, suggests that multi-sectoral responses are more effective than single focus interventions (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 10, 22-23). They bring together the various different actors and institutions required to tackle domestic violence and help speed up and solidify the process of social change (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 10; see also Amin, 2013, p. 29). DFID’s experience on working to tackle violence against women at the community level and a WHO and UNAIDS study into ways of addressing violence also suggests that long-term commitment is important to programme success (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 11; Amin, 2013, p. 29).

Economic empowerment

Bhatla et al (2010, p. 220) have gathered evidence to show that poverty and economic crisis within households are factors contributing to domestic violence. Women often stay in abusive situations because they fear the loss of shelter and lack of economic opportunities to provide for themselves and their families (Bhatla et al, 2010, p. 221; Brickell et al, 2014, p. 18). The evidence base for economic empowerment programmes suggests that it can lead to greater voice, power, agency or status for women in their intimate relationships and help women leave abusive relationships by increasing their options (Amin, 2013, p. 16).

Bhatla et al’s study in India indicates that ownership of land or housing might provide women with a degree of protection against domestic violence (Bhatla et al, 2010, p. 220; see also Bhatla et al, 2006). This is supported by evidence from Uganda and South Africa which indicates that women’s access to land and ownership of assets contributes to their ability to leave abusive or violent relationships (Amin, 2013, p. 19). Social protection measures should thus ‘incorporate elements of both social and economic security’ and allow for wealth creation on the part of women (Bhatla et al, 2010, p. 236). This also means strengthening community norms and national legal measures which recognise women’s property and inheritance rights (Bhatla et al, 2010, p. 236). However, such measures have not yet been evaluated to verify their effectiveness (Amin, 2013, p. 19).

Support services

Survivors of domestic/family violence require ‘timely access to shelter and medical, psychological, legal, economic and other counselling and support services’ (Cooper et al, 2013, p. 9). The social support services should address the various consequences of abuse and help survivors rebuild their lives (Cooper et al, 2013, p. 9; UN Women, 2012, p. 52). All support services should work together in an integrated fashion to provide a better response to violence against women (UN Women, 2012, p. 45).

For example, in Morocco, the Batha Centre provides a chain of services, including crisis intervention (i.e. shelter, psychological counselling, clinical services), empowerment training and access to economic opportunities. In South Africa, Georgia, the Palestinian National Authority, and the Dominican Republic, shelters provide social protection through skills development and income generating efforts and there are multi-sectoral efforts aimed at reintegrating survivors of violence into the labour market (UN Women, 2012, p. 52).

DFID's study into tackling violence against women at the community level suggests that women-only safe **spaces** that provide social support and skills training can help build women's social assets and safety nets (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 10). This is especially important for adolescent girls who are particularly vulnerable to violence (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 28; see also Amin, 2013, p. 21).

It is important that support services cover the whole country and are accessible to all women (UN Women, 2012, p. 45). While the state should play an important role in setting up and funding support services, it is not always the most appropriate body to run the services (UN Women, 2012, p. 45). Where possible, specialist support services for survivors of violence should be run by independent and experienced women's non-governmental organisations (UN Women, 2012, p. 45).

Sound policy and legal framework

Transformative social protection also involves changing the policy and legal environment to better support vulnerable groups. National action plans are important for creating long term programmes that address the underlying causes of violence against women and strengthen the responses to it (UN Women, 2012). The requirement to adopt and implement national action plans to address violence against women is set out in international human rights and policy instruments (UN Women, 2012). National action plans should have a human rights based approach, acknowledging that violence against women is a form of discrimination; recognise the different forms of violence against women; and draw on solid research and data (UN Women, 2012).

A study by WHO and UNAIDS into ways to address violence against women suggests that while laws alone cannot reduce or prevent domestic violence, they are important for bringing the issue out in the open and making clear what is socially acceptable (Amin, 2013, p. 41). An evaluation of the Domestic Violence Law in Cambodia indicates that a holistic approach is needed as it is important to cultivate consciousness of the law, including promoting its successes; as well as providing support services such as safe houses; and reducing women's economic dependency (Brickell et al, 2014).

Experience from the case studies in the MDG-F report suggests that a participatory process to develop a sound policy and legal framework is important for preventing violence against women and improving survivor support (Cooper et al, 2013, p. 10). A wide multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder consultative process underpinned the formulation of the national plan on gender-based violence in Timor-Leste (Cooper et al, 2013, p. 10). Estimating the cost of the plan was important for ensuring that funds were allocated in the national budget (Cooper et al, 2013, p. 10).

Transforming gender power dynamics

As part of the transformative element of social protection programmes, efforts have been made to transform attitudes and behaviour towards violence against women. As well as preventing violence against women occurring in the first place, these efforts can help women survivors of domestic violence who remain in their abusive situation. Some women they feel they cannot leave, while others do not want to leave (Brickell et al, 2014, p. 18; Amin, 2013, p. 9). These women survivors remain at risk of further violence unless the underlying causes of violence are tackled.

In recognition that violence against women is ‘a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women’¹ many programmes seek to transform the social and cultural norms which influence the power dynamics between men and women (Cooper et al, 2013, p. 9; see also Amin, 2013, p. 8-9). Violence prevention strategies do this by ‘challenging gender-based stereotypes and sociocultural patterns of behaviour that legitimise, exacerbate or tolerate violence against women’ (Cooper et al, 2013, p. 9). In addition, many programmes aim to promote women’s empowerment and human rights (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 9; see also Amin, 2013, p. 16; UN Women, 2012, p. 11). It is important that the message is reinforced across a range of settings and engages with different groups (UN Women, 2012, p. 32). Men and boys should be engaged with the process, although it is important to ensure it remains women-centred (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 10; UN Women, 2012, p. 40-41). The focus has tended to be on changing the attitudes and behaviour of individual men, although interesting work is emerging around efforts to enlist men as allies in women’s rights advocacy (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 17; see also Amin, 2013, p. 25).

The WHO and UNAIDS study indicates that it is important to give clear and positive messages about gender equitable norms rather than negative messages that shame and blame men (Amin, 2013, p. 29). In addition, approaches which involve participatory reflection appear to be most effective in bringing about collective change towards women’s rights (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 13; see also Amin, 2013, p. 10, 29).

The importance of wider attitudes and norms on the success of social protection programmes is highlighted by Bhatla’s et al (2010) study of domestic violence and social protection in India. They suggest that for domestic violence responses to be effective, social protection programmes should strengthen community norms which recognise the unacceptability of domestic violence (Bhatla et al, 2010, p. 236).

Ensuring women’s safety and different needs

Some general lessons emerge from the literature that highlight issues which are important to keep in mind when creating programmes working with women survivors of domestic violence. DFID’s experience indicates that it is important for programmes to put in place strategies which ensure the safety of the women involved (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 11; see also UN Women, 2012, p. 44). The location, outreach and timing of programme activities should minimise risk of further violence (Amin, 2013, p. 9). Risk factors to survivors seeking services, such as community punishment for women seeking support or abusive police, should be identified and mitigated (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 23). Minimum standards for all interventions should include basic ethics regarding ‘confidentiality, informed consent, appropriate treatment of children/legal minors, safety and security, and upholding the rights, dignity and choice of survivors’ (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 23). The WHO and UNAIDS report on addressing violence against women suggests that programme staff must be responsible for promoting and upholding women’s rights (Amin, 2013, p. 9). This includes respecting a ‘woman’s right to make her own decisions in relation to the violence she experiences (e.g. choosing not to leave or report an abusive relationship to authorities)’ (Amin, 2013, p. 9).

Social protection programmes need to be tailored to meet the needs of women of ‘different ages, marital status, disability, social class, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and other identities’ all of whom may experience domestic violence but face different problems accessing support (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 11; see also UN Women, 2012, p. 15-16).

¹ The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>

Capacity development

For social protection programmes to be effective it is important that all those involved in the process have the necessary capacity to support women survivors of violence. The MDG-F report highlights the need for capacity development support for all those engaged in combating domestic/family violence (i.e. law enforcement officials, judicial officers, medical personnel and social workers) (Cooper et al, 2013, p. 9). This will ensure that they can provide effective and sensitive support. The report suggests that a 'system that unites mandatory and systematic training, clear guidelines and protocols, greatly improves response' (Cooper et al, 2013, p. 9). It is also important to raise women's knowledge of the existing social protection programmes they can access (Cooper et al, 2013, p. 9). A joint programme in Timor-Leste, for example, which developed a manual and trained police officers, has helped strengthen coordination and improved communication between service providers, which had resulted in timely support to survivors (Cooper et al, 2013, p. 10).

4. Lessons learnt: what does not work in social protection programmes targeted at women survivors of domestic/family violence

There is some evidence in the literature that social protection programmes can sometimes result in increased domestic violence. Bhatla et al (2010, p. 237) indicate that social protection programmes need to understand their potential negative impact on domestic violence in order to counter it (see also section 2 for the impact of cash transfers on domestic violence).

Backlash

Programmes need to be aware that there can be a backlash against women and girls who, as a result of the programme, speak out against violence or question established norms (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 12; see also Amin, 2013, p. 9). As a result, Raising Voices, a Ugandan NGO working on preventing violence against women, has set up community run Domestic Violence Watch Groups that actively watch for violence and intervene when appropriate (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 12).

Short-term programmes

Programmes which are ad hoc, short-term, small scale and standalone are less effective at changing behaviours, which benefit from long-term community mobilisation (Lockett and Bishop, 2012, p. 12). Short-term investments can mean that the social protection programme's aims are not sustainable (Angeles, 2012, p. 2). This was a concern for the Uganda cash transfer programme (see section 5 below).

5. Case Studies: social protection programmes targeted at women survivors of domestic/family violence

Further information and individual lessons learnt from the case studies detailed in the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund report and the DFID Practical Guide on Community Programming on Violence against Women and Girls can be found in the original papers (see references). They include

examples from: Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Ghana, Haiti, India, Liberia, Morocco, Nepal, Timor-Leste, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zambia. Additional case studies from other sources are detailed below.

Albania

An example of a holistic social protection programme targeting women survivors of violence can be found in Albania, where UNDP has helped set up the Coordinated Community Response against domestic violence. This combines a 'referral mechanism that involves the entire community, from local government units to law enforcement agencies, health care providers, judges and prosecutors'² with national shelters for survivors of domestic violence. They offer a 'combination of services such as medical attention, psychological counselling, legal representation, child care and employment support'. UNDP reports that greater public awareness of the Coordinated Community Response has led to more women affected by domestic violence turning to them for help.

Philippines

The UNIFEM East and Southeast Asia Region website details the different social protection programmes aimed at addressing violence against women in the Philippines. Government organisations and NGOs provide a range of protective and transformative social protection support including shelters, crisis support, survivor's support groups, awareness raising and advocacy, and women friendly environments in hospitals. There is a focus on developing a community response to domestic violence.

Substitute Home Care shelters run by the government provide women with shelter, food, clothing and personal care items. In addition, they offer a wide range of support services, including legal services, counselling, health checks, and skills development. The skills development training includes social and livelihood skills. Upon leaving the shelters the women are provided with a small grant to start up their own micro-businesses. The women continue to receive longer-term support once they have left the shelter to reintegrate into their families and communities from the Field Offices of the Department of Social Welfare and Development. However, in recognition that shelters are often not used by the urban poor, a project was set up to change attitudes towards violence against women in the community and to empower women, using male and female community educators and advocates. The process was community based and introduced issues of domestic violence cautiously. Male allies were important for carrying out awareness raising efforts with other men. The decrease in cases of domestic violence was attributed to 'overall increased community awareness; increased awareness of rights among victims, and increased willingness to seek help and prosecute their abusers; and fear of punishment among abusers'.

Experience from the awareness raising activities run by the Women's Crisis Centre indicates that training needs to be ongoing for attitudes and behaviour to change.³

Peru

In January 2014, a new social protection programme was launched in Peru which seeks to combat violence against women through microfinance. Finca Peru will adapt the Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity (IMAGE) model which has proven to reduce the risk of domestic violence by half among

² Gender Equality and Gender-Based Violence Programme: http://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/operations/projects/poverty_reduction/gender-equality-and-gender-based-violence-programme-/#

³ Organizations addressing VAW - Philippines: [http://www.UN Women-eseasia.org/projects/evaw/vawngo/vamphil.htm](http://www.UNWomen-eseasia.org/projects/evaw/vawngo/vamphil.htm)

women participating in the programme in South Africa (expert comment). Economic empowerment gained through microfinance activities enable women to take concrete action against violence. Through the programme, women will also receive education to 'tackle gender norms and roles, enhance communication skills, improve women's influence in household decisions and create collective action mechanisms to combat violence against women'.⁴

Uganda

In 2011 Action Against Hunger started a cash transfer intervention targeted at women in Northern Uganda which aimed to 'reduce gender-based violence while strengthening livelihoods through increasing household assets and income diversification' (Angeles, 2012, p. 1). The two components were run in parallel to each other (Angeles, 2012, p. 6). An evaluation of the programme indicates anecdotal evidence that the programme was successful in strengthening livelihoods and also led to a decrease in domestic violence (Angeles, 2012, p. 1). Women also suggested that the programme had led to an increase in consultative decision making between families and a stronger social support systems if couples do fight. The livelihood component has proven to be more successful so far. In order to help ensure the sustainability of the programme's aims women's groups have been created to sustain changes in attitudes and practice towards domestic violence. However there are fears that the programme is not providing enough long-term support to sustain the women's groups. The programme would benefit from stronger integration of its two objectives and a greater focus on the gender-based violence component (Angeles, 2012, p. 2, 14).

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⁴ MIF and Finca Peru seek to prevent violence against women through an innovative microfinance program: <http://www.fomin.org/HOME/News/PressReleases/TabId/467/ArtMID/3819/ArticleID/1043/MIF-and-Finca-Peru-seek-to-prevent-violence-against-women-through-an-innovative-microfinance-program.aspx>

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