
EXPLORING THE IMPACTS OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A summary report for Oxfam's knowledge hub on violence against women and girls and gender-based violence

LAURA DÉSILETS

Department of Sexology, *Université du Québec à Montréal*
Interdisciplinary Research Center on Family Violence and Violence against Women (CRI-VIFF)

Under the supervision of

MYLÈNE FERNET, PHD

Department of Sexology, *Université du Québec à Montréal*
Interdisciplinary Research Center on Family Violence and Violence against Women (CRI-VIFF)

MAGALI VIDEAU, HADEEL QAZZAZ, ROXANA GALANT, ZAINEB AL-HINDAWI, NOUR ALI AND MICHAËL ARNAUD

Oxfam-Québec

This literature review is part of a research initiative to analyze the impacts of participating in women's economic empowerment initiatives on the increase or decrease of domestic violence. The project stems from a collaboration between Oxfam and CRI-VIFF. Specifically, it aims to document best practice in preventing domestic violence and supporting women who experience it, in the context of international development initiatives to further women's economic empowerment. This literature review is the first step in a process that will be followed by case studies and guidelines to support program development and the work of project teams.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Studies and reports on women's economic empowerment suggest a link between the potential risk of domestic violence and women's participation in economic empowerment initiatives. On reviewing studies on women's economic empowerment initiatives, Hugues et al. (2015) concluded that these initiatives can have positive impacts on marital and family dynamics, but also create adverse effects that may increase domestic violence (Hugues et al., 2015). That being said, the results of empirical studies of this issue tend to be contradictory. While many studies point to an increase in domestic violence against women and girls following their participation in such initiatives (Angelucci, 2008; Suneeta et al., 2010), others report a decrease in violence (Haneef et al. 2014; Kim et al. 2007; Perova 2010). This discrepancy deserves greater scrutiny so as to better contextualize seemingly contradictory results.

Until now, very few studies have documented the practices used to prevent domestic violence and support the women who experience it within the framework of women's economic empowerment initiatives. It should be essential that interventions designed for women should include risk-reduction strategies on domestic violence and take a holistic empowerment approach that considers economic, social and political factors (Hughes et al., 2015). In order to formulate recommendations based on reliable evidence, it is important to identify the risk and protection factors associated with exposure to domestic violence for women who take part in economic empowerment initiatives. It is also necessary to document the perceived impacts of participating in these initiatives, especially those that integrate the issues of gender inequality and/or violence against women and girls in their programming. This type of integration could entail, for example, designing and implementing awareness-raising, prevention and support activities focused on gender inequality and/or violence against women and girls in women's economic empowerment programs.

In this literature review, the term "domestic violence" is preferred over "intimate partner violence", "spousal abuse" or "gender-based violence". Domestic violence refers to violent and controlling behaviours exhibited within the family or the conjugal relationship. It includes the harm caused to women, mothers and children who witness domestic violence and/or victims of family violence. Furthermore, while the authors recognize that the issue of women's economic empowerment lies within the wider context of violence against women and girls and gender inequality, including workplace harassment, travel-related safety concerns and employment discrimination, a choice was made to focus on domestic violence as a consequence of women's economic empowerment initiatives or as an obstacle to women's economic empowerment. Additionally, "women's economic empowerment initiatives" refers here to the programs, projects and activities that aim to increase women's access to and control over productive resources, proceeds from their work and all decisions related to their financial independence. These initiatives can include, for example, programs focused on microfinance, conditional cash transfers, access to sustainable livelihoods, income generating activities or employment for women and girls.

OBJECTIVES

This literature review aims to document the impacts of participation in women's economic empowerment initiatives on the increase or decrease of domestic violence. Its objective is to provide an overview of current knowledge by documenting the factors that influence exposure to domestic violence, as well as best practice in terms of prevention and support for women affected by domestic violence in connection with these initiatives. More particularly, this review draws together findings from studies that document the following:

1. Risks and protective factors associated with exposure to domestic violence among women who took part in economic empowerment initiatives;
2. Perceived impacts of women's participation in economic empowerment initiatives on domestic violence, whether or not these initiatives integrated issues of gender inequality and/or violence against women and girls in their programming; and
3. Best practice in terms of violence prevention and support for women who experienced domestic violence in connection with economic empowerment initiatives.

RELEVANCE

This literature review will serve to better guide the design of women's economic empowerment programs, projects and activities in the context of international development, with the aim of reducing the risks of domestic violence. To minimize these risks, it is imperative that the people who work with women and girls in economic empowerment programs are aware of the proven prevention and support strategies they can implement to respond to domestic violence.

As part of a holistic approach to women's empowerment, it is essential that project teams, including senior managers, learn about the potential risks of victimization associated with these initiatives and that they are able to recognize the various forms of domestic violence, the factors associated with it and the consequences for women participants. In addition, project teams must be able to intervene appropriately in support of women who experience domestic violence during the implementation of women's economic empowerment initiatives.

2 METHODOLOGY

The bibliographic search on which this literature review is based was used a systematic process (Higgins and Green, 2011). The sources consulted were accessed via various databases (*Sociological Abstracts*, *International Bibliography of the Social Sciences*, *PsycINFO*, *SAGE Journals Online*, *PubMed* and *SpringerLink*) and relevant electronic periodicals. The following combinations of key words were used: (1) Economic empowerment program AND domestic violence OR intimate partner violence, and (2) Economic development initiatives AND domestic violence OR intimate partner violence. The articles containing the following key words were selected for a first reading: economic empowerment program; conditional cash transfer program; microfinance initiative; livelihoods program; economic development initiatives; income-generating activities; women's employment; domestic violence; intimate partner violence; violence against women; and gender-based violence. The "snowball" approach was then applied, which involved identifying empirical studies in bibliographies published in scientific articles and grey literature reports.

A total of 223 article results, including duplicate results, were identified in databases. Among these, 38 articles were selected for a first reading, while four were identified in bibliographies. Following a second in-depth reading, 19 articles were selected on the basis of the match between their content and the inclusion criteria for this review.

The studies and reports included in this review (1) are based on a quantitative, qualitative or mixed method, or on a systematic literature review; (2) were published between 2007 and 2018; (3) were conducted in developing countries; (4) examine programs implemented by NGOs other than Oxfam; and (5) jointly address violence and women's economic empowerment. A codification grid was developed to code the studies and reports according to their objectives, methodology (sample, variables, procedures and analysis) and main results. This codification grid was used to synthesize the results of the empirical studies and make them more accessible to a general audience.

Methodological limitations

Although this literature review is the product of a systematic and rigorous approach, certain methodological limitations remain. The bibliographical search was performed with the help of social sciences databases (psychology, social work, sociology) given their conceptualization of domestic violence as a social issue. As such, it is possible that relevant articles, such as articles featured in economic sciences databases, were excluded. Furthermore, the studies under review were performed in developing countries, which means that studies conducted in the United States and Canada were excluded. Several American authors (Sanders and Schnabel, 2006; Sanders, Weaver and Schnabel, 2007; Hahn and Postmus, 2014; Hetling, Stylianou and Postmus, 2015) have examined the links between women's economic empowerment and domestic violence in North America, but these researchers focused mostly on economic empowerment initiatives designed for women survivors of intimate partner violence. These studies were excluded given that the social, cultural and political contexts of the countries targeted by Oxfam's interventions differ greatly from those of Western North American countries and the fact that these studies did not address violence as a risk associated with economic empowerment. Finally, it is important to note that the sample of studies considered by this systematic literature review was composed of women and men in heterosexual relationships.

Furthermore, the studies under review offer only a limited understanding of the phenomenon. First, underlying mechanisms are not explained. For instance, even though some studies recognize a higher prevalence of domestic violence among women with low levels of education, they do not offer any explanations as to why this may be. Other studies report that after couples take part in economic empowerment initiatives with a component on gender inequality and/or violence against women and girls, the quality of the conjugal relationship improves; however, the factors that might explain this change are not examined. Second, only a few authors provide rationales for the results observed or recommend concrete avenues for research to explain the interplay between women's economic empowerment and domestic violence.

3 FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH EXPOSURE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FOR WOMEN WHO TAKE PART IN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES

A total of nine studies have examined the factors associated with exposure to domestic violence for women who took part in an economic empowerment initiative with the goal of guiding practices related to domestic violence prevention and support for affected women. The studies surveyed identified individual, interpersonal and social factors. This section outlines the findings related to sociodemographic characteristics, the education levels of the women and their male partners, employment, and gender-related roles and social norms.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Some of the women who participate in economic empowerment programs appear more vulnerable than others to domestic violence. Ethnic origin, marital status, socio-economic status, education level and place of residence have all been identified as sociodemographic characteristics that can explain increased exposure to domestic violence. According to Hidrobo and Fernald (2013), belonging to an indigenous community, being unmarried, being younger, living in a rural region and having several small children are all associated with greater exposure to domestic violence. As such, practitioners who work to further women's economic empowerment should pay attention to these characteristics in order to better identify the women likely to experience domestic violence and offer them appropriate support.

EDUCATION LEVEL

Studies do not agree on whether women's education level, or that of their male partner, has an impact on their exposure to domestic violence following their participation in economic empowerment initiatives. However, there is a wide consensus that education is an efficient strategy to minimize the risks of domestic violence associated with these initiatives (Dalal, 2011; Dalal, Dahlström and Timpka, 2013; Hidrobo and Fernald, 2013; Vyas and Watts, 2009).

A study by Hidrobo and Fernald (2013) reports that employed women experience less emotional violence and spousal control when they have six or more years of schooling, as opposed to women with less than six years of schooling. It therefore appears that women's education level, and that of their male partner, could constitute a protective factor against domestic violence (Vyas and Watts, 2009). Conversely, Dalal, Dahlström and Timpka found that among women enrolled in a microfinance program, twice as many highly educated participants experienced domestic violence as the least educated ones, despite allegedly having more egalitarian relationships with their male partners (Dalal, Dahlström and Timpka, 2013).

Finally, a study by Dalal (2011) shows that the frequency of domestic violence episodes seems to be similar among employed and unemployed educated women. However, employed women who experience domestic violence seem to take more steps to seek help, which suggests that being employed acts as a protective factor in domestic violence situations (Dalal, 2011).

POVERTY AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF WOMEN AND THEIR MALE PARTNERS

Reducing financial precarity in households in which women develop financial independence may be an effective strategy for reducing domestic violence. The stress associated with poverty and low income may lead to a greater risk of domestic violence by male partners (Krishnan et al., 2010). Furthermore, addressing poverty reduction in the home seems to have a positive impact in lowering the frequency of domestic violence experienced by women (Vyas and Watts, 2009).

Being employed and transitioning to the labour market seem to increase women's risk of victimization (Dalal, 2011; Krishnan et al., 2010; Krishnan et al., 2012; Vyas et al., 2015). Women who are gainfully employed seem to experience more domestic violence than unemployed women (Dalal, 2011; Vyas et al., 2015). In particular, women who have recently entered the labour market are eight times more likely to experience domestic violence than unemployed women (Krishnan et al., 2010; Krishnan et al., 2012).

Dalal's study (2011) highlights certain characteristics related to women's employment that could increase their exposure to domestic violence. Among these characteristics, employment outside the home (as opposed to employment within the home) and seasonal and occasional employment (as opposed to regular employment throughout the year) seem to be linked to women's exposure to emotional and physical violence. For example, a greater number of women with seasonal and occasional jobs report experiencing sexual violence in a conjugal context than women with regular employment (Dalal, 2011).

Furthermore, women who own their business exclusively—that is, independently from their male partner—appear more likely to experience domestic violence, whereas co-owning a business with a male partner appears to be associated with lower rates of violence (Vyas et al., 2015). Indeed, when a woman is an exclusive business owner, her husband has no control over the income generated and is therefore more likely to be confronted with non-traditional gender roles (Vyas et al., 2015).

Women's income also seems to be a factor associated with domestic violence. Women who earn more than their male partner are more likely to experience domestic violence episodes than women whose income is equal to or lower than their male partner's (Dalal, 2011). However, the more women are able to pay for household and family expenses themselves, the less likely they are to experience domestic violence (Dalal, 2011).

Job stability for male partners is also associated with women's exposure to domestic violence. Husbands who experience difficulty in finding and maintaining employment are more likely to exert violence against their wives than husbands who have stable employment (Krishnan et al., 2010; Krishnan et al., 2012). Indeed, unemployed husbands are likely to experience frustration and stress related to their employment status and, as a result, be unable to fulfill traditional gender roles that designate males as providers for the family (Krishnan et al., 2010).

In other words, the employment status of women and of their male partner may conflict with traditional patriarchal social norms that relegate women to housekeeping and caregiving roles and keep them financially dependent on their husbands (Dalal, 2011; Vyas et al., 2015). Women's economic empowerment may challenge men's role as family providers, which could explain why women who are gainfully employed and financially independent are more vulnerable to domestic violence (Dalal, 2011; Krishnan et al., 2010; Krishnan et al., 2012; Vyas et al., 2015).

GENDER ROLES AND NORMS

Given that it challenges traditional gender roles, women's economic empowerment may generate resistance from some male partners and, as a result, lead to conjugal conflicts that may result in domestic violence (Fries and Finigan, 2014). Studies suggest that women who make important household decisions appear to be more likely to experience domestic violence than women whose husbands are responsible for most decisions (Dalal, 2011). Furthermore, men whose masculinity is threatened by financial instability tend to be more likely to reassert their power in the household by resorting to violence (Falb et al., 2014).

According to nine Oxfam professionals who work on women's economic empowerment initiatives, the increased risk of domestic violence associated with women's economic empowerment can mostly be explained by gender-based social relations (Hughes et al., 2015). According to the professionals interviewed, women's economic empowerment initiatives contribute to reducing the risks of domestic violence in that they increase women's economic and social power. However, these same professionals report that an increase in women's economic power may also generate domestic violence as men attempt to reaffirm their power within the household. Conflict may also erupt when husbands cannot accept the fact that their financially independent wives are accessing public spaces such as markets, group meetings, and places of employment. Women's economic empowerment initiatives tend to raise awareness about and foster change in gender roles, which could cause some men to respond with violence and thus reinforce patriarchal sociocultural norms. Oxfam professionals also report that women's economic empowerment initiatives promote women's financial autonomy which may be viewed by husbands as a threat to their own power. This perceived loss of power can then create conflict, especially in households with marked gender inequality (Hughes et al., 2015).

As women develop their financial independence, the social, political and cultural contexts that surround them and their male partner also appear to have a significant impact on women's exposure to domestic violence (Vyas and Watts, 2009). Because these contexts vary greatly from one region to another, as well as within the same country, how participation in women's economic empowerment initiatives affects domestic violence rates depends on the interplay of various macrosystemic factors (Vyas and Watts, 2009). These factors include, among others, existing social norms and values, the community's level of progressiveness, the social acceptability of violence against women and girls, existing laws, and the public policies and services provided by influential institutions.

A number of risk and protective factors are associated with women's exposure to domestic violence when they take part in economic empowerment initiatives. It is important to be aware of these factors in order to identify them, to place them in their social context and to consider them in relation to the social norms that are valued in the targeted communities.

4 PERCEIVED IMPACTS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

For a number of years now, a multitude of women's economic empowerment initiatives have been implemented in the context of international development. Recognizing that women who participate in these initiatives may risk victimization, some programs now include awareness-raising, prevention and support activities to address gender inequality and/or violence against women and girls. However, very few studies have assessed the effectiveness of these measures on domestic violence. Such an assessment is essential in order to identify which best practices should be prioritized to minimize the risks of domestic violence associated with women's participation in economic empowerment initiatives.

This section describes the perceived impacts of women's participation in two economic empowerment projects and five economic empowerment projects with integrated program components on gender inequality and/or violence against women and girls. Only projects whose effects have been assessed and whose results have been published in a peer-reviewed journal are reviewed in this section. For each study reviewed below, we present a brief overview of the sociocultural and political context, along with a description of the research design and the results observed.

PERCEIVED IMPACTS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN TWO ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Local economic cooperatives in Rwanda (Cherry and Hategekimana, 2013)

In Rwanda, more specifically in the region of Mayaga, assault and crimes against women are relatively widespread and violence against women and girls is mostly accepted by society. Relationships between men and their wives are highly unequal. In addition, according to the study, in 2013 very few girls had access to education due to a pervasive patriarchal system.

The study aimed to document how local economic cooperatives contribute to the development of women's economic empowerment and the prevention of domestic violence. Women members of twelve local economic cooperatives took part in group interviews to share their experiences and their views on the perceived impacts of their membership in a cooperative on relationships between women and men, marital dynamics and their own financial independence.

On a professional level, the women reported that being a cooperative member allowed them to participate in financial decision-making, occupy a position with many responsibilities, have better access to credit and sources of financing, and gain better access to land and property. Their cooperative membership also improved their marital relationships and introduced more egalitarian power relations into their household. These gains resulted in women's participation in decisions pertaining to household expenses, increased control over their sexual health (for instance, the right to turn down their male partner's request for sexual relations) and a reduction in marital conflict.

Co-op representatives also shared their view of the perceived impacts of cooperatives on women's economic empowerment and domestic violence. According to them, improvements in marital relationships and the emergence of egalitarian power relations for women co-op

members must be viewed in the wider context of institutional strategies implemented by the Rwandan government, such as policy and social reforms related to safety and gender-based violence.

The results of this study suggest that women's economic empowerment through membership in a cooperative, along with public safety reforms and public policies that support the prevention and eradication of violence against women, seem to help reduce exposure to domestic violence among women who participate in an economic initiative.

Access to microfinancing in Ethiopia (Haile, Bock and Folmer, 2012)

The Amhara and Southern regions of Ethiopia differ from each other in terms of the marital models valued by the communities and the division of responsibilities within households. The Amhara region values monogamous marriages in which men and women make decisions jointly and share equal ownership of household property (*Central Statistics Agency and ORC Macro, 2006*, cited in Haile, Bock and Folmer, 2012). In the Southern region, polygamous unions are accepted but only by a few ethnic groups. Women are relatively independent when it comes to disposing of their own income but men control all decisions pertaining to household expenses (*Central Statistics Agency and ORC Macro, 2006*, cited in Haile, Bock and Folmer, 2012). In both regions, women are expected to handle childcare and domestic tasks, and to take part in farm work (Haile, Bock and Folmer, 2012).

This study aimed to identify the sociocultural, economic and organizational factors that foster the development of women's economic empowerment by comparing two microfinance programs implemented in Ethiopia. A total of 142 married women living in the Amhara or Southern regions took part in group interviews to discuss the perceived impacts of their participation in microfinance programs on their expenses, assets and savings, as well as marital conflicts.

Overall, participation in microfinance programs seems to have a positive effect on women's decisions when it comes to household expenses and asset ownership, which, for the majority, has resulted in lower levels of marital conflict. However, the women interviewed reported that conflict, and even violence, could arise if they refused to secure a loan that would then be controlled by their male partner. In addition, the impacts of the microfinance programs differ according to each region's sociocultural context. The program with the most positive impacts on women's economic empowerment and access to power was the one implemented in the Amhara region, where traditional gender roles already tend to be under transformation.

PERCEIVED IMPACTS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN RELATION TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN FIVE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES WITH INTEGRATED COMPONENTS ON GENDER INEQUALITY AND/OR VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Some women's economic empowerment initiatives address, as part of their programming, issues related to gender inequality and/or violence against women and girls by offering awareness-raising, prevention or support activities. The perceived impacts of women's participation in these initiatives have been assessed in order to better guide efforts to reduce violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, while promoting the participants' financial independence.

Economic strengthening intervention in Burkina Faso (Ismayilova et al., 2017)

In Burkina Faso, where polygamous marriage is accepted and practised, more than 20% of women report experiencing various forms of violence from the age of 15. Among them, a majority report experiencing domestic violence (*INSD & ICF International, 2012*, cited in Ismayilova et al., 2017), particularly in the Northern region, where husbands make household

decisions and women enjoy only limited autonomy (*Kabore et al., 2008*, cited in Ismayilova et al., 2017).

A study conducted by Ismayilova et al. (2017) in Burkina Faso aimed to assess the effects of an economic strengthening intervention combined with gender-sensitive family coaching on women's financial autonomy, their decision-making power, gender norms and domestic violence. The family coaching activity consisted of five to six awareness-raising sessions involving all members of the household (women, children, husbands and in-laws). During these sessions, normative gender beliefs related to domestic violence and gender roles, as well as child protection issues (early and forced marriage, girls' education) were addressed. However, the article only offers a somewhat limited description of this family coaching activity.

To fulfill the study's research objectives, more than 350 women filled out a pre- and post-test survey at a twelve-month interval following their participation in the economic strengthening intervention. Three groups were compared: (1) women who received the economic strengthening intervention without family coaching; (2) women who received the intervention with family coaching; and (3) women who received no intervention (control group).

After 12 months, regardless of whether the economic strengthening intervention was conducted alone or in combination with family coaching, the women who received the intervention reported greater financial autonomy, improvements in the quality of their marital relationship and a lower exposure to emotional abuse from their partner than women in the control group. The study measured the quality of the marital relationship in terms of the time the couple spent together and whether the husband respected the woman's wishes, showed affection towards her and included her in household decisions. In contrast, the intervention did not seem to have an impact on exposure to physical violence as reported by women, on beliefs about gender equality or on the sharing of household decisions.

IMAGE intervention in South Africa (Kim et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2009)

IMAGE (Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity) is an intervention program in South Africa designed to address economic empowerment, gender inequality, domestic violence, sexuality and HIV. By facilitating access to microfinance, this program aims to prevent HIV, reduce domestic violence and promote women's economic and sexual well-being.

An evaluation on the impact of IMAGE's work was conducted among women enrolled in the program (Kim et al., 2007). Women who took part in the program were less likely to report experiencing domestic violence following their participation. In addition, they seemed to have developed progressive attitudes towards domestic violence and traditional gender norms and wished to challenge them within their marital union and their community as a whole. From the participants' point of view, the training sessions offered as part of the program triggered discussions on domestic violence, HIV and gender norms within the household, but also more widely at the community level. While discussions on domestic violence initially generated resistance and discomfort within the group, this effect dissipated gradually over the course of the sessions (Kim et al., 2007).

A second evaluation was performed, this time among three groups: (1) women with exposure to the IMAGE program, combined with an intervention to access microfinance and a health training program; (2) women benefiting from an intervention to access microfinancing alone; and (3) women not targeted by any intervention (control group). The two groups benefiting from an intervention showed improved economic autonomy, as opposed to the control group. Overall, Group 1 (IMAGE intervention combined with an intervention to access microfinance) and Group 2 (microfinance access intervention alone) report similar impacts. Positive effects were reported in terms of economic well-being and independent decision-making in the household among both groups of participants. However, the reduction in exposure to domestic violence is stronger in Group 1 (IMAGE participants) than in Group 2. As such, the results suggest that an intervention which integrates activities targeting both gender inequality and violence against

women and girls may have a more significant impact on shared decision-making in the couple, as well as on domestic violence (Kim et al., 2009).

MEN'S PARTICIPATION IN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES

As part of a global effort to reduce domestic violence, some women's economic empowerment initiatives have taken an innovative approach by calling on the participation of male partners.

Savings program in Côte d'Ivoire (Gupta et al., 2013)

In Côte d'Ivoire, nearly half (47.5%) of women reported experiencing domestic violence in the past year (*Institut National de la Statistique, Ministère de la Lutte contre le Sida and ORC Macro, 2006*, cited in Gupta et al., 2013). To promote women's economic empowerment and reduce violence against women, a savings program was developed for Ivorian women with no prior experience with this type of initiative. The savings program included eight sessions during which women and their male partners were invited to take part in dialogue groups. The sessions included forum theatre activities, exercises and group discussions that addressed, among other topics, the importance of communication, gender equality in the household, non-violence and marital well-being.

A study was conducted to measure the impacts of women's and male partners' participation in dialogue groups on victimization. In total, 934 partnered women were assessed; some of the women had taken part in the savings program only, while others had been in the savings program combined with dialogue group sessions. Participants filled out a questionnaire assessing their experience with domestic violence (economic, physical and sexual) and attitudes towards gender norms.

The approach that led to the lowest level of acceptance of domestic violence consisted of participation in the savings program combined with dialogue group sessions. More specifically, results suggest that physical violence, sexual violence and economic violence towards women had declined after following the combined approach. However, none of the observed results are statistically significant. In addition, attitudes about gender norms remained unchanged after participation using the combined approach. Despite their participation in dialogue groups, participants still believed that women are not allowed to refuse sexual relations.

Another study (Falb et al., 2014) surveyed 32 Ivorian male partners who had taken part in the savings program to document their attitudes towards women's economic empowerment programming, their motivation for participating in the program and the perceived benefits of participating. First and foremost, most participants recognized the relevance of this type of programming, as much for their wives as for their family. Further to their participation in the program, which was primarily intended for their wives, the men also reported improvements in their marital relationship. They felt that their participation had, among other things, made financial planning easier with their female partner. They also reported that the program has challenged their masculinity and their perceptions of gender roles.

Microenterprise program in Uganda (Green et al., 2015)

A microenterprise program targeting women was implemented in Northern Uganda to alleviate the poverty brought on by civil war. The long years of conflict have negatively impacted income-generating agricultural activities due to the large number of communities that were displaced after the war (*Annan et al., 2006*, cited in Green et al., 2015). In Uganda, women generally take part in crop growing, animal husbandry and selling activities, all areas often controlled by men. Yet, women usually do not have sufficient independent financial resources to support the development of income-generating activities.

A study was conducted to assess the perceived impacts of the microenterprise program on women's economic empowerment, gender relations and domestic violence. More specifically, the study aimed to assess the impacts of the "Women Plus" variant of the program which called on the participation of the female participants' male partners or other important male figures, such as a father or brother. Topics addressed as part of the activity touched on culture, gender, financial barriers experienced by women entrepreneurs, communication and conflict resolution.

Results indicate that men's participation in this type of program can significantly improve the quality of the relationship between marital partners and reduce spousal control and domestic violence. However, men's involvement does not seem to have an impact on the success of women entrepreneurs' microenterprises or on attitudes towards traditional gender norms pertaining to the division of labour. In cases where the program was only available to women, women seemed to achieve higher levels of economic independence than when it included the "Women Plus" variant, which involved both women and their male partners. The authors do not offer any explanation for these results.

5 BEST PRACTICE IN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES TO PREVENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SUPPORT THE WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCE IT

As a result of this systematic literature review, it is possible to identify a number of best practices that can be implemented to prevent domestic violence and support the women who experience it as a result of their participation in economic empowerment initiatives. The process involves identifying the relevant components to minimize the risk of exposure to domestic violence, with a view to improving monitoring, preventing the onset of domestic violence and providing safe assistance to women who experience it (Hughes et al., 2015). Domestic violence should be addressed through a holistic and multidisciplinary approach that explicitly takes into account gender inequality and empowerment (Hughes et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2009; Krishnan et al., 2010).

RELEVANT COMPONENTS

To minimize the risks of victimization associated with women's participation in economic empowerment initiatives, it is essential to address the norms, roles and cultural and social beliefs pertaining to gender. The studies reviewed are unanimous in stating the importance of addressing these components (Kim et al., 2009; Krishnan et al., 2010; Slegh et al., 2013; Vyas et al., 2015). As such, women's economic empowerment initiatives should promote egalitarian gender attitudes and norms (Krishnan et al., 2010) while taking into account the social representations associated with gender (Slegh et al., 2013). Counteracting gender-based violence should also be a priority in women's economic empowerment initiatives (Kim et al., 2009). In fact, it has been shown that interventions that encompass these components can help women participants develop skills to better communicate, manage conflict with their partner and deal with violent situations (Hughes et al., 2015; Vyas et al., 2015). Finally, women's economic empowerment initiatives should foster autonomy and self-confidence in women participants (Hughes et al., 2015).

Raise awareness among front-line practitioners engaged in women's economic empowerment initiatives

Front-line professionals and practitioners who implement women's economic empowerment initiatives should also be made aware of the various issues linked to exposure to domestic violence (Hughes et al., 2015). For the whole duration of the initiative, these practitioners are responsible for minimizing the risks of exposure to domestic violence for women targeted by their interventions (Hughes et al., 2015; Fries and Finigan, 2014). To do so, practitioners and professionals must first recognize the potential risk of domestic violence for the women participating in their economic empowerment initiative (Dalal, Dahlström and Timpka, 2013). Practitioners must also be able to identify the risk and protective factors associated with domestic violence following women's participation in an economic empowerment initiative (Dalal, Dahlström and Timpka, 2013; Hughes et al., 2015).

Beyond evaluating potential risks, it is essential that these front-line practitioners feel sufficiently competent to detect cases of domestic violence. They must also be able to offer appropriate support to women and girl survivors and have good knowledge of the resources available so as to refer these women as needed (Hahn and Postmus, 2014; Hughes et al., 2015; Fries and

Finigan, 2014). Recommendations also include developing intervention tools adapted to the initiative's implementation context, but the authors reviewed do not specify the form that these tools should take (for instance, questionnaires, kits or checklists) or the purpose they should fulfill (for example, detection or direct support) (Fries and Finigan, 2014).

Perform a prior analysis of the needs and sociocultural context of the women targeted by the intervention

Before implementing a women's economic empowerment initiative, it is essential to understand the sociocultural context, the reality of the women targeted by the initiative and the environment in which they live (Fries and Finigan, 2014; Vyas et al., 2015). To do so, the team responsible for creating and implementing the economic empowerment initiative should perform an in-depth analysis of the women's needs and context. The women involved should be invited to actively contribute to this needs analysis by sharing their reality, the challenges they face with regards to gender roles and domestic violence, and the strategies they use to respond to domestic conflicts and violence (Fries and Finigan, 2014). As such, women's economic empowerment initiatives should necessarily include activities that address social gender norms and roles in light of these contexts (Vyas et al., 2015).

Build on the participation of spouses or male partners

Given the positive effects of spouses' participation in women's economic empowerment initiatives, it would be strategic to include male partners in order to improve the quality of conjugal relationships, prevent domestic violence and increase women's participation in household decision-making (Falb et al., 2014; Gupta et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2015; Sleggh et al., 2013). For example, male partners' participation in financial management activities designed for women contributes, among other things, to prompting discussions on gender norms, power dynamics and domestic violence (Falb et al., 2014; Sleggh et al., 2013). Strategies that promote dialogue with male partners should be favoured to reduce the risks of exposure to domestic violence for women enrolled in economic empowerment initiatives.

Opt for multi-target programs that also engage children, families and communities

In addition to engaging male partners in women's economic empowerment initiatives, some studies suggest using a systemic approach in implementing these initiatives by calling on children, family members and the community. Given that the positive impacts of economic empowerment initiatives appear to be more significant when participation includes children, male partners and women (Ismayilova et al., 2017), it would be strategic to undertake activities that promote dialogue with children as part of the initiative (Ismayilova et al., 2017; Sleggh et al., 2013). Incidentally, women who are financially independent are more likely to seek help when they fall victim to domestic violence and to call on members of their own family (Dalal, 2011). These findings confirm the importance of raising awareness among all family members and the need to offer appropriate support not only to women, but also to the children who may, themselves, witness or experience domestic violence.

An effective practice to reduce domestic violence is to raise community awareness about the benefits of women's economic empowerment and gender equality as it promotes the social acceptability of women's financial independence. Indeed, the studies reviewed herein show that initiatives involving a combination of economic empowerment strategies and community awareness-raising activities are more effective than economic intervention strategies directed solely at women participants (Gupta et al., 2013).

Value intersectoral collaboration

Multisectoral collaboration should be considered as part of the priority strategies in designing and implementing women's economic empowerment initiatives (Hughes et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2009). To minimize the risks of domestic violence, women's economic empowerment initiatives should be designed and implemented by professionals from many

different sectors. Partnerships between the project team, professionals specialized in gender issues and violence, and other professionals with socio-legal expertise would allow women to benefit from collaborative and integrated services (Hughes et al., 2015). Intersectoral collaboration targeting the health and economic development sectors can also generate concrete interventions and have a significant impact on reducing both poverty and violence against women and girls (Kim et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2009).

Deploy strategies targeting political and institutional structures

In parallel with women's economic empowerment initiatives, it is necessary to address, on a larger scale, the political and institutional structures that perpetuate gender inequality, gendered norms and the acceptability of domestic violence (Kim et al., 2007). To minimize the risks of exposure to domestic violence, economic empowerment programs must be implemented within an institutional and social framework that is consistent with reducing violence against women and girls, including domestic violence (Cherry and Hategekimana, 2013). Women's economic empowerment initiatives should be part of a comprehensive public health strategy in order to increase the benefits of women's economic empowerment initiatives on individuals, but also on the community (Kim et al., 2007). To achieve this, it is suggested that women enrolled in an economic empowerment initiative unite to make their voices heard publicly to promote the transformation of unequal power relations (Cherry and Hategekimana, 2013).

Girls' and boys' education is also an area of intervention that should be prioritized to further the positive impacts of women's participation in economic empowerment initiatives. In fact, education is recognized as a protective factor against domestic violence (Hidrobo and Fernald, 2013; Vyas and Watts, 2009). To better support women's economic participation, it is essential to implement social policies that reinforce youth education in the community (Dalal, 2011).

6 CONCLUSION

In light of the findings reviewed above, future initiatives to promote women's economic empowerment should be based on data-driven evidence and take into account best practices in keeping with a holistic approach to women's empowerment. Recommendations include:

- Promoting harmonious, egalitarian and violence-free relationships between women and men as part of women's economic empowerment initiatives in order to better support the economic participation of women, as well as that of their male partners, family members and communities, on the basis of a systematic analysis of needs and context.
- Equipping the practitioners and professionals who implement women's economic empowerment initiatives so as to allow them to detect and prevent domestic violence and provide adequate support and referrals to women participants who experience violence.
- On a wider scale, working in collaboration with the economic, legal, social, educational, political and health sectors of the regions targeted by women's economic empowerment initiatives, and actively engaging these stakeholders in the design, implementation, evaluation and learning processes surrounding these initiatives.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The studies reviewed here suggest relevant avenues for future research in order to deepen reflections about domestic violence inflicted on women participants in economic empowerment initiatives. Future studies would benefit from identifying more precisely the individual, interpersonal and sociocultural characteristics of the groups of women at risk of being exposed to domestic violence following their participation in an economic empowerment initiative, so as to improve the risk reduction strategies directed at these specific groups (Dalal, Dahlström and Timpka, 2013). Other studies could document relations of gender, power and inequality from the perspective of women participants in economic empowerment initiatives and the strategies used by women to counteract them (Dalal, 2011; Vyas and Watts, 2009). It would also be relevant to document the most effective theories of change that can be applied to modify the attitudes and social norms about gender equality that perpetuate violence against women and girls (Gupta et al., 2013). Finally, it would be beneficial to further explore the best practices surrounding male partners' participation in women's economic empowerment initiatives to minimize the risks of domestic violence (Green et al., 2015).

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The Interdisciplinary Research Center on Family Violence and Violence Against Women (CRI-VIFF) was established in 1992. It promotes research, training and knowledge-transfer activities focusing on the issues surrounding family violence and violence against women and girls. More specifically, CRI-VIFF aims to advance knowledge among women and girls who are victims of violence, as well as male aggressors and children who experience or witness violence.

CRI-VIFF also focuses on providing training to student researchers. As part of this mandate, Laura Désilets, a student member of CRI-VIFF and a graduate student in the Masters of Sexology Program at *Université du Québec à Montréal*, actively works on systematically reviewing current literature as part of this research initiative on the links between women's economic empowerment and domestic violence.

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