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The Hidden Costs of Violence

How Crime Shapes Women's Labor Market Outcomes in Latin America

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Abstract

This study explores the gendered impacts of violent crime on economic opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean. While both men and women experience violent crime, their exposure to violent crime and the consequences they suffer differ. Women are disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, and mobility restrictions, all of which limit their labor market participation and economic independence. Through a review of the literature, the study identifies six primary mechanisms through which violent crime affects women's economic outcomes: sectoral segregation, fear of victimization, mobility constraints, intra-household bargaining power shifts, increased intimate partner violence, and disruptions to human capital accumulation. By analyzing these gendered dimensions, the study highlights how violent crime may contribute to inequality and restrict women's access to economic opportunities. Policy responses must go beyond general crime reduction strategies and incorporate gender-sensitive interventions, including stronger legal protections, labor market reforms, and investments in childcare and financial inclusion. Addressing violent crime from a gendered perspective is essential for fostering economic resilience and reducing inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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The Hidden Costs of Violence:
How Crime Shapes Women's Labor Market Outcomes in Latin America[1]

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- **Comprehensive Framework for Gendered Impacts:** The paper introduces a six-part taxonomy—sectoral segregation, fear, mobility, intra-household bargaining, intimate partner violence, and human capital—to explain how violent crime differentially affects men and women's economic opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

- **Violence as a Structural Economic Barrier:** Violent crime undermines women's labor force participation, caregiving choices, and bargaining power, reinforcing gender inequality across the life course.

- **Mobility and Safety as Hidden Constraints:** Fear of violence and limited freedom of movement significantly reduce women's access to work, education, and public life—especially in informal and low-income settings.

- **Evidence-Based Policy Pathways:** Drawing on extensive empirical literature, the paper identifies targeted policy responses for each mechanism, including investments in childcare, safer urban infrastructure, financial inclusion, and legal reform.

- **Linking Security and Social Protection:** Addressing gendered impacts of crime requires integrated approaches that combine gender-based violence services, mental health care, labor rights enforcement, and access to justice.

- **Institutional Gaps Undermine Implementation:** In high-crime settings, weak enforcement and incomplete legal protections amplify women's vulnerability—highlighting the need to close both legal and institutional gaps to translate rights into real economic opportunity.

1. Introduction

Imagine a world where the fear of violence dictates your daily life. You avoid certain places, restrict your movements, and constantly look over your shoulder. In many parts of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), this fear of violence is a daily reality, particularly for women. High crime levels restrict women's movement, limit their access to economic opportunities, and undermine their well-being. Although both men and women are affected by violent crime – defined as the use, attempted use, or threat of force – its impacts are not gender-neutral. Women are disproportionately affected by sexual and intimate partner violence (IPV), which shapes their social and economic participation in unique ways (Jaitman, 2019). Understanding these gendered dimensions of violent crime is essential for designing policies that effectively mitigate its adverse consequences and promote equitable economic development.

This paper reviews the literature on how violent crime differentially impacts men and women's economic opportunities in LAC, a region with some of the world's highest violence levels (UNODC, 2023). While men are more often homicide victims, women face higher rates of sexual violence and harassment. About 20 percent of ever-partnered women have experienced IPV, with 8 percent reporting such violence in the past year (World Bank Gender Data Portal[2]; WHO, 2021). These experiences not only cause immediate physical and emotional harm but also have long-term socio-economic impacts, reinforcing gender inequality in labor market participation and outcomes. Despite a growing body of research on the economic effects of crime, these gender-specific impacts remain understudied.

We contribute to the literature by systematically examining how violent crime shapes labor market outcomes differently for women, highlighting the specific mechanisms driving these gendered effects. We identify six primary mechanisms[3] that explain gendered effects on labor market outcomes:

[2] See: https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/regions/latin-america-caribbean

[3] While other factors, such as financial inclusion and asset ownership, matter, they are often encompassed within these broader categories.

1. **Sectoral segregation**, with women concentrated in informal and low-wage jobs more vulnerable to instability and violence.
2. **Fear and mental well-being**, as women experience higher fear of crime, leading to reduced labor force participation and poorer mental health.
3. **Intra-household bargaining power**, which declines as violence increases, limiting women's autonomy and access to economic resources.
4. **Mobility constraints**, due to threats of harassment and violence in public spaces.
5. **IPV**, exacerbated by rising societal violence, which undermines women's job performance and labor force participation.
6. **Reduced human capital accumulation,** with girls more likely to leave school due to safety concerns, caregiving demands, and restrictive social norms.

We discuss policy options that can directly address each of these mechanisms. In addition, using data from the World Bank's Women, Business, and the Law, we explore how reforms can reduce vulnerabilities. Key policy areas include stronger workplace protections, access to childcare and finance, legal support for GBV survivors, and improved enforcement of existing laws.

The paper proceeds as follows: section 2 outlines crime trends and gendered impacts; section 3 examines underlying mechanisms and policy solutions; section 4 discusses cross-country variation in the legal framework within which these policy solutions are embedded; section 5 concludes.

2. Background and Context

2.1. Violent crime in Latin America and the Caribbean

LAC is among the world's most violent regions. Though home to just over 8% of the global population, it accounts for nearly half of all intentional homicide victims (Machado & Valdés, 2023). LAC's homicide rate is roughly ten times that of other emerging economies and twice that of Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2022, the regional rate was 20 per 100,000—over three times the global average of 5.6 (Perez-Vincent et al., 2024). Figure 1 illustrates how LAC's homicide rates sharply contrast with those of other regions: while Europe & Central Asia and the Middle East & North Africa report rates below 2 per 100,000, LAC reports 32.5 per 100,000 males and 3.7 per 100,000

females. These high rates highlight the urgency of policy action. In 2021, crime-related expenditures reached 3.44% of GDP (about 80% of the region's education spending) and have held steady since 2019. Organized crime remains a key driver, accounting for nearly half of homicides in the Americas (UNODC, 2023). This violence diverts resources away from vital areas like education and infrastructure, hindering long-term growth (Perez-Vincent et al., 2024). Although men face higher homicide rates, women experience more sexual and psychological violence (WHO, 2014; Kendall, 2020). Spikes in violence have direct and indirect effects, can affect women and men differently, and may worsen preexisting gender inequalities (Buvinic et al., 2013). Yet, there is no systematic review of these gendered effects, and evidence to guide policy remains scarce.

Labor market outcomes are a key domain where these direct and indirect effects play out. Despite rising female labor force participation in LAC (Frisancho, Bustelo & Viollaz, 2023; Marchionni, Gasparini & Edo, 2019), gender gaps persist and tend to be larger in more violent countries. Evidence links higher homicide rates and violence against women to poorer economic outcomes for women. Thus, labor market trends should be analyzed in tandem with violence to understand how insecurity limits women's economic opportunities.

Studying the economic impacts of crime is methodologically challenging. Crime is not randomly distributed, complicating causal inference. Reliable data on crime and victimization are also limited. As violence and economic outcomes are often observed simultaneously, disentangling cause and effect is difficult. Nevertheless, recent empirical work has used quasi-experimental designs to estimate these effects. The next section focuses on this literature, with a particular emphasis on gendered impacts.

2.2. Crime and economic outcomes: A gendered perspective[4]

The relationship between violence and labor market outcomes is bidirectional: while economic inequality can fuel violence, exposure to violence can depress employment, hours worked, and earnings. These effects are particularly pronounced for women, whose labor supply

[4] This section and the following are based on a semi-structured literature search focused on LAC. Appendix 1 provides details on the approach for the literature search.

responses are shaped by both economic vulnerability and gendered constraints. This sub-section examines how violent crime affects women's labor outcomes differently from men's, highlighting the mechanisms behind these gendered impacts. The following sub-section briefly discusses the reverse channel—how adverse economic conditions can contribute to rising levels of violence.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that the literature on the gendered impacts of violent crime—on labor market outcomes and beyond—varies widely in scope and methodology. Some studies focus on specific forms of violence, such as drug-related crime, armed conflict, or IPV, while others differ in whether and how they compare outcomes by gender. These differences complicate cross-study comparisons but consistently point to gender disparities in how violence shapes economic opportunities.

Research on post-2007 drug-related violence in Mexico demonstrates how diverse empirical strategies can uncover gender-differentiated impacts of violent crime. Using a regression discontinuity design, Dell (2015) shows that municipalities narrowly won by President Calderón's party (PAN) experienced a sharp increase in homicides, which corresponded with a decline in male informal wages and reduced female labor force participation. Similarly, Velásquez (2020), using panel data and individual fixed effects, finds that increases in violence led to a significant reduction in labor force participation and annual working hours among self-employed women, while male participation remained largely unchanged. The mechanism appears to be driven by a fear of victimization: women who reported higher levels of fear were significantly more likely to reduce labor supply, and the time previously allocated to paid work was often reallocated to domestic chores and family care. These effects were most pronounced among women with weaker labor market attachment, particularly those in informal or flexible work arrangements.

In contrast, Tsaneva et al. (2019) find that higher levels of drug-related violence are associated with an increase in labor force participation and working hours among married women, alongside a decline in men's probability of working. Their interpretation suggests that this is not the result of diminished bargaining power or fear-based withdrawal, but rather a coping response to household economic instability, with women increasing their labor supply to compensate for men's labor market withdrawal. However, this increase in work came with costs: women continued to bear unpaid domestic responsibilities, resulting in time poverty and no lasting gains in

bargaining power within the household. The effect was also short-lived, with no evidence of durable shifts in household welfare.

These differing results can be explained by several factors. First, the studies examine different populations and outcomes. Velásquez distinguishes between self-employed and wage-employed women, finding adverse effects primarily among the self-employed, while Tsaneva et al. focus on married women more broadly, without distinguishing by employment type. Second, while Velásquez focuses on long-term impacts such as annual hours worked and reallocation of time within households, Tsaneva et al. analyze short-term responses like hours worked in the past week and employment status at the time of the survey. This distinction may reflect different temporal dynamics of coping with violence: short-term economic necessity may lead women to enter the labor force, but prolonged exposure may eventually lead to withdrawal, particularly in sectors where flexibility allows for such adjustment.

Despite these divergences, the findings are not necessarily contradictory. They highlight the importance of employment type, time horizon, and household dynamics in shaping women's economic responses to violence. In settings where violence causes men to exit the labor market or household income to fall, women may temporarily increase labor supply out of necessity. However, in contexts where fear of victimization dominates, especially among self-employed or informal workers, women may reduce labor market participation to avoid risk.

These insights carry important implications for policy. Supporting self-employed women—who appear particularly vulnerable to withdrawal from work—requires targeted interventions such as improved workplace safety, access to credit and formalization tools, and stronger social protection. Where violence leads women to increase labor supply despite domestic burdens, programs that offer subsidized childcare, flexible work arrangements, and mental health support are essential to prevent burnout and time poverty. Moreover, these findings underscore the importance of incorporating fear and security concerns into employment and gender policy design, particularly in high-violence settings. Finally, the mixed evidence points to the need for continued research and monitoring to identify which groups of women are most at risk of economic harm from violence, and to tailor interventions accordingly.

Studies in other contexts and of other types of violence also find differential effects on the earnings of women and men. One strand of literature focuses on the impacts of displacement due

to violent conflict. Gimenez-Nadal et al. (2019) find that women in Colombia displaced by conflict earn 18%–37% less than those who moved for other reasons. Displaced men also earn less, but the gap is smaller. Calderón et al. (2011) find that displaced rural women in Colombia earned more after moving to cities due to better skill-job alignment, though they still faced precarious work and limited bargaining power. Another strand of the literature focuses on IPV, showing that its impacts on labor outcomes may not be unidirectional. Fajardo-Gonzalez (2021) finds that women who experienced IPV are more likely to work, possibly seeking economic independence. However, Rios-Avila and Canavire-Bacarreza (2017) find that IPV increases job exits, especially among non-Indigenous women. Thus, IPV can both push women into work and force them out, depending on context.

Overall, the evidence shows that violence affects labor participation, income, hours, unpaid work, and health. These effects can be persistent and disproportionately harm women, limiting their economic independence and reinforcing structural inequalities—even when they are not direct victims. Understanding the channels through which these impacts occur is key to designing effective, gender-responsive labor and violence policies. The next section examines the mechanisms in greater detail.

2.3. Labor market outcomes as drivers of crime and violence

While violent crime affects labor market outcomes, the reverse relationship also holds. High unemployment and limited job opportunities can increase crime by lowering the perceived risks of criminal behavior. Conversely, a rise in women's labor force participation has been argued to potentially disrupt family structures and increases youth exposure to crime (for discussion see Rivera, 2016).

Labor market conditions for both men and women play a central role in IPV through economic stress and intra-household dynamics. In a study exploiting data from 31 countries, Bhalotra et al. (2021) find a positive association between male unemployment and the incidence of physical violence against women. Indeed, studies exploiting natural experiments, such as mass layoffs in Brazil (Bhalotra et al., 2025) and staggered imposition and lifting of lockdowns during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Chile (Bhalotra et al., 2024), find that male job loss increases IPV.

These findings are corroborated by evidence from developed country contexts (Anderberg et al., 2016; Arenas-Arroyo et al., 2021).

The effect of women's employment on gender-based violence appears to differ across contexts. Villareal (2007) finds that employed women face lower rates of IPV, likely due to increased financial autonomy. Accordingly, Bhalotra et al. (2025) find that female job losses increase IPV. However, other studies report the opposite: women's employment may increase vulnerability to domestic abuse (Bhalotra et al., 2021; Gaviria & Vélez, 2001). In 1990s Vera Cruz, Mexico, for instance, growing female employment was linked to a rise in sexual offenses, possibly fueled by envy and resistance to shifting gender norms (Blanco & Villa, 2008). Patterns of backlash and a positive relationship between women's economic empowerment and IPV are not unique to LAC but can also be observed in other contexts (Heath, 2014; Erten & Keskin, 2018).

Economic inequality—both general and gender-based—also plays a role. Disparities in income are closely linked to violence, with higher inequality correlating with increased homicide and victimization (Enamorado et al., 2016; Schargrodsky & Freira, 2023), and areas with greater inequality reporting higher perceptions of risk (Gaitán-Rossi & Shen, 2018). Gender inequality matters too: in Brazil, improvements in the female-to-male wage ratio are associated with lower female homicide rates, especially among younger women in low-human development areas (Perova et al., 2021). Similar patterns can be observed in for instance the United States (Aizer, 2010). Sectoral patterns of female employment also influence violence. In rural areas, higher female income generally reduces domestic violence—except when women work in the service sector, possibly due to lower perceived status of such jobs within the household (Iregui-Bohórquez et al., 2019).

3. Taxonomy of mechanisms and policy recommendations

The relationship between crime and labor market outcomes operates through multiple channels, with distinct consequences for men and women. Our examination of the literature reveals six key mechanisms: gendered sectoral effects, fear of victimization and mental well-being, mobility restrictions, IPV, human capital accumulation, and intra-household bargaining power.

Figure 2 provides a schematic overview of these mechanisms. In this section, we review in more detail the evidence on each of the six pathways and potential policy solutions to address them.

3.1. Gendered sectoral effects

Channel

Violent crime significantly affects economic activity. As mentioned above, Perez-Vincent et al. (2024) estimate that crime costs nearly 3.5 percent of regional output—comparable to 78 percent of education budgets and 12 times R&D budgets—reducing investment in critical sectors. Likewise, using nighttime light data, Bisca et al. (2024) find that a 10 percent rise in homicides in a municipality lowers local economic activity by 4 percent. A recent study by Bernal et al. (2024) illustrates these impacts. It shows that expectations of peace in Colombia led to job creation, which reversed when the peace process collapsed. These findings are summarized in Table 1.

These effects are not gender-neutral, because women and men cluster in different sectors that are unequally exposed to violence. Table 2 summarizes key findings that highlight this pattern. Women in LAC are disproportionately employed in low-wage, informal jobs, especially in services (Arora et al., 2023; Berniell et al., 2024). Arora et al. (2023) show that women are less likely than men to earn above-median wages in every sector, while Berniell et al. (2024) report that 69.1 percent of women in lower-middle-income LAC countries work informally, compared to 65.5 percent of men, and find that women are less likely to work in large firms. Sectoral segregation is entrenched: 85 percent of nonagricultural female workers are in services, compared to 64 percent of men. Women dominate fields like retail (23% of female workers and 51% of industry workers), domestic services (15% and 93%), education (10% and 70%), hospitality (8% and 58%), health care (7% and 72%), and personal services (4% and 74%) (Arora et al., 2023). Men are concentrated in construction, transport, and manufacturing, with textiles being the only industrial sector where women outnumber men (7% of female workers and 71% of industry workers).

This segregation has labor market and safety implications. Employment in higher-paying sectors may reduce domestic violence, while concentration in lower-paying jobs may increase it (Iregui-Bohórquez et al., 2019). Micro and small enterprises—especially prevalent in retail and

services (Dini and Stumpo, 2019)—are more vulnerable to crimes such as extortion (Maloney et al., 2025). Perez-Vincent et al. (2024) find that violent crime lowers productivity, particularly in small firms. The hospitality and tourism sectors, where women are overrepresented, are especially affected, as higher crime deters tourist arrivals and revenues. Indeed, Motta (2016) finds that crime negatively affects small and medium enterprises in services and hospitality.

Moreover, employment in the informal sector leaves women more exposed to the impacts of violent crime. The issue is especially pressing for the 15 percent of nonagricultural women workers employed in private households as domestic laborers, where they often work in isolation, making abuse difficult to report, detect or prosecute.[6,7] These vulnerabilities reinforce inequality and limit access to safer, more stable employment. [8,9]

In short, because women and men work in different sectors, violent crime affects them differently. Women's overrepresentation in low-paying service jobs and informal work heightens their vulnerability to economic and physical harm in high-crime environments.

Policy Solutions

Governments across LAC can further strengthen and scale up Active Labor Market Programs (ALMPs) to advance gender equity, especially in the context of post-pandemic recovery (Escudero et al., 2019). Evidence indicates that these interventions can be powerful tools when properly designed and targeted (Table 3). For instance, workfare programs like Argentina's PROEMPLEO demonstrate that prioritizing women and youth in employment programs can yield measurable wage gains (Galasso et al., 2004). Similarly, the expansion of vocational and technology training initiatives has been shown to disproportionately benefit women and youth (Card et al., 2017). In high-crime settings, digital skills training is particularly critical: in Colombia and Argentina, coding bootcamps raised women's employment in tech by 38 percent (Aramburu et al., 2021), illustrating how investments in future-oriented skills can open safer, better-paid opportunities. Moreover, entrepreneurship support must be embedded into national strategies. In Mexico, programs combining soft skills with business literacy for women-led enterprises generated a 380 percent return on investment, even under conservative assumptions (World Bank, 2021). Likewise, evidence from Lima indicates that scaling of business training targeted at women

entrepreneurs significantly improves planning and sales outcomes, particularly for larger firms (Valdivia, 2011).

However, not all ALMPs close gender gaps. In Chile, an impact evaluation by Fundación AGROUC (2009) found that the "Programa de Bonificación a la Contratación de Mano de Obra" benefited male employment more than female employment, maintaining the formal labor gender gap. This may be due to employer preferences, labor market segregation, subsidy conditions, and structural barriers limiting women's access.

3.2. Fear and mental well-being

Channel

A high prevalence of violent crime can instill a fear of victimization and undermine women's mental well-being, limiting their use of public spaces and reinforcing gendered norms that restrict their economic participation. Velásquez (2020) finds that increased insecurity had detrimental effects on labor outcomes in Mexico, with self-employed workers experiencing the most pronounced impacts. However, the effects differed by gender. Specifically, self-employed men faced reductions in earnings and productivity, likely due to a decline in consumer engagement and demand for services, whereas self-employed women tended to reduce their working hours or exit the labor force entirely. One potential explanation for this gender disparity is fear of victimization. While both men and women report heightened fear in response to increased violence, only self-employed women adjust their labor market participation accordingly. This aligns with broader evidence suggesting that women consistently express higher levels of perceived insecurity than men, even when they face lower victimization rates (Hernández-de-Benito, 2022; Schargrodsky & Freira, 2023).

In parallel, evidence from Mexico shows that exposure to violence deteriorates mental health outcomes, particularly among women (Balmori de la Miyar, 2019). Mental health distress—whether induced by direct victimization or persistent fear—can have long-lasting intergenerational consequences, as maternal mental health has been linked to adverse cognitive and socioemotional outcomes in children (Moya et al., 2021).

Table 4 summarizes the evidence on how exposure to violence shapes labor force participation, mediated in part by increased fear of victimization and deteriorating mental health. These mechanisms highlight how violence not only disrupts labor market participation in the short run but also exacerbates gender inequality in economic and social domains. While men's economic losses from violence are primarily driven by reduced business activity and earnings, women's losses are compounded by behavioral constraints and long-term psychological effects. Given these disparities, policies addressing labor market consequences of violence must integrate a gender perspective, ensuring that interventions support women's workforce reintegration, access to mental health services, and measures that enhance safety in public spaces and workplaces.

Policy Solutions

As shown in Table 5, addressing the psychological consequences of violence is critical for economic reintegration of victims coping with trauma and fear. One promising initiative is *Semillas de Apego* (SA), a trauma-informed program in Colombia targeting caregivers in violence-affected communities. SA improves maternal mental health, parenting, and child development by offering emotional support and parenting tools (Harker Roa et al., 2023). Evaluations show improvements in caregiver mental health, parenting quality, and child development, particularly for those with prior mental health issues (Sanchez-Ariza et al., 2024). Impacts, however, are limited for women in extreme poverty, highlighting the need for complementary economic support.

Alongside mental health support, security interventions play a crucial role in reducing fear of victimization. A common approach is increasing police presence in high-crime areas, though its effectiveness varies. Community policing programs, such as *policías comunitarias* in Latin America, aim to build trust between law enforcement and local communities (Casas, González, & Mesías, 2018). However, the results are mixed. For instance, a pilot program in Chile successfully reduced crime near a shopping center but unintentionally increased fear among those who directly interacted with the police (Benavente and Goya 2023). This underscores the need for policing strategies that enhance security without exacerbating anxiety, particularly among vulnerable groups. In contrast, Peru's *Women's Justice Centers* (WJCs) provide police, medical, and legal

services, reducing domestic violence and improving child outcomes (Sviatschi & Trako, 2024). By strengthening enforcement and access to justice, WJCs offer a model for security policies that protect women without increasing fear.[5]

In several contexts, women's police stations have helped reduce fear and improve access to justice. In Argentina, they have challenged patriarchal norms and offered women escape routes from abuse (Carrington et al., 2020). In Brazil, they have been linked to a 17% reduction in female homicides in metropolitan areas (Perova & Reynolds, 2017), greater trust in law enforcement, and enhanced perceptions of safety (Córdova & Kras, 2019).[6] In Brazil, perceptions of police legitimacy are strongly linked to neighborhood safety (Rodrigues, 2006). Community-based strategies like neighborhood alert systems can reduce crime by fostering resident-law enforcement collaboration, though sustaining participation remains a challenge (Ungar & Arias, 2012).

3.3. Intra-household bargaining power

Channel

Violent crime also reshapes intra-household dynamics, often weakening women's bargaining power over key decisions and financial matters (Table 6). Violent crime reduces women's control over major household expenditures, employment decisions, and resource transfers, especially in high-violence areas (Hernández-de-Benito, 2022; Tsaneva et al., 2019). These effects can persist over time, influencing broader outcomes like fertility, marriage, education, and employment—all of which feed back into women's long-term bargaining power (Ajefu & Casale, 2021). Declines in women's labor income further reduce their household influence, affecting their own and their children's well-being (Hernández-de-Benito, 2022). This

[5] Consistent with these mixed findings, in another context Amaral et al. (2023) show that while visible police patrols can reduce severe forms of harassment in public spaces, the effectiveness of these interventions depends heavily on police visibility and their attitudes toward harassment. Moreover, in conflict-affected areas, militarization has been found to lower certain types of violence, particularly against men, while increasing the risk of sexual violence for women. This raises critical questions about whose security is prioritized and how state policies may overlook or even contribute to gendered violence (Theidon, 2007).

[6] Evidence from India also supports their effectiveness in increasing reporting and reducing GBV (Amaral, Bhalotra, & Prakash, 2021). Building trust in law enforcement is essential.

erosion of bargaining power can trap women in a cycle: with less influence over household resources and decisions, they face more difficulty reentering or remaining in the labor force.

In some contexts, violence shifts household roles. Calderón et al. (2011) find that drug-related violence leads men to exit formal employment, while women's labor participation rises. Yet rather than translating into greater agency for women, this reversal of roles can heighten tensions within households, often manifesting as increased IPV, as men seek to reassert control in response to their diminished economic role. As women's economic role grows but their agency does not, conflict within households can increase.

In summary, violence affects intra-household dynamics, weakening women's decision-making power and limiting their economic opportunities. This finding highlights how exposure to violence extends beyond immediate security concerns, fundamentally altering economic decision-making at the household level and reinforcing long-term gender disparities in labor market outcomes. Addressing these effects requires policies that account for both the direct impacts of violence on employment and the more subtle yet profound consequences on intra-household dynamics and resource distribution.

Policy Solutions

Strengthening women's bargaining power requires improving legal protections, expanding asset ownership, and shifting intra-household norms. Table 7 summarizes evidence on these policy approaches. Property ownership and social capital enhance women's influence in household decisions (Friedemann-Sánchez, 2006). Legal reforms, such as Argentina's pension expansion and Chile's child support changes, have improved women's financial autonomy and reduced dependency (Martínez, 2013; Berniell et al., 2020). Addressing domestic violence is crucial, as income and education affect bargaining power (Friedemann-Sánchez & Lovatón, 2012). Policies must support financial independence, legal protections, and equitable labor roles to foster gender equality (Reynolds, 2015).

Care infrastructure plays a vital role. Public and subsidized childcare reduce women's care burden, enabling greater workforce participation and shifting household labor divisions. In Colombia, private childcare subsidies raised women's paid work hours by 0.6 percent, while public

provision had an even greater impact, increasing participation by 0.9 percent (Cicowiez et al., 2023). Investments in accessible care services thus support women's economic independence and mitigate some effects of violence on household dynamics.

3.4. Mobility

Channel

As shown in Table 8, violent crime constrains mobility in Latin America and the Caribbean, with especially acute effects for women. Both women and men adjust their mobility out of concern about exposure to violent crime. These include fears of leaving behind children and other family members, as well as personal belongings. Concerns about violent crime often discourage people from moving freely, with many feeling unsafe when outside their homes. This fear of victimization can lead individuals to avoid public spaces or limit their activities beyond the home (Ross and Jang 2000; Villarreal and Yu 2017; Whitley and Prince 2005), which in turn can reduce labor force participation.

Research from across the region shows that higher crime rates reduce people's willingness to travel freely. In Mexico, increased homicides are associated with avoidance behaviors and heightened feelings of insecurity (Gaitán-Rossi & Shen, 2018). In eight LAC countries, perceptions of unsafe public spaces correlate with reduced walking (Castillo-Paredes et al., 2022). However, women are disproportionately affected. Studies from Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico show that women not only report greater fear but also modify their routines more than men, especially avoiding travel at night or using public transportation (Valente & Vacchiano, 2021; Gaitán-Rossi & Shen, 2018). These constraints are compounded by fear of sexual harassment, further restricting their mobility and limiting their ability to participate equally in the labor market (Jaitman 2020). Women's heightened feelings of insecurity frequently compel them to prioritize guarding their families and homes, often leading them to adopt caregiving roles within domestic spaces. Consequently, women tend to plan shorter, safer trips to remain close to their children and homes (Dominguez Gonzalez et al., 2020; Dammert, 2013; Berrebi and Ostwald 2016). These restrictions, though protective, reduce labor market access and reinforce traditional domestic roles.

Knight et al. (2024) take this analysis further by examining COVID-19 lockdowns in Colombia that restricted mobility based on sex. Based on this natural experiment, they demonstrate that these gender-based movement restrictions contributed to an overall escalation of crime, including increased insecurity for women. The rise in crime was primarily driven by higher rates on men-only days, when both potential male perpetrators and male victims were more present in public spaces. The authors rule out gender composition as a confounding factor by analyzing crime data disaggregated by victim gender: crimes against male victims rose sharply on men-only days, while crimes against female victims increased on women-only days, particularly in the later phase of the lockdown when more men were present due to eased restrictions. Although offender data were not available, these victim-based patterns align with established gender differences in offending and support the conclusion that the policy inadvertently heightened overall crime and insecurity.

In short, women face greater mobility constraints than men due to fear of violence and caregiving roles. These challenges reduce their access to public transportation, limit labor force participation, and reinforce household responsibilities.

Policy Solutions

As summarized in Table 9, improving women's mobility requires addressing safety, infrastructure, and planning. Women tend to rely more on public transport and walking, often making complex, multi-stop trips tied to caregiving roles. Yet transport systems across LAC remain poorly suited to their needs (Dominguez Gonzalez et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2024). Moreover, ingrained gender norms and security concerns further restrict women's freedom in public spaces, leading to exclusion and reduced access to economic opportunities, particularly in high-crime areas (Roy et al., 2024).

Gender-sensitive urban design—such as better lighting, surveillance, and accessible public transit—can improve mobility and safety (Sundling & Ceccato, 2022). However, barriers persist: women remain underrepresented in transport planning, and urban policies often lack a gender lens (Mejia-Dorantes, 2018; Uteng et al., 2019). Ensuring equitable access to transport for essential

services—such as health care and employment—is also crucial, especially for women balancing work and caregiving responsibilities (Montoya-Robledo et al., 2020).

Some initiatives, such as women-only transport options in cities like Mexico City, have been implemented to curb harassment, yet they come with unintended consequences. In Mexico City, these initiatives reduced harassment but also increased non-sexual aggression among men (Aguilar et al., 2021). In Brazil, women-only subway cars inadvertently stigmatized women who chose mixed spaces, reinforcing harmful norms (Kondylis et al., 2025). These examples underscore the need for well-designed interventions that enhance safety without deepening exclusion.

3.5. Intimate partner violence

Channel

While IPV is itself a form of violent crime, we treat it as a mechanism because rising societal violence often intensifies IPV and undermines women's labor market participation. The literature documents substantial economic costs of intimate partner violence (IPV) for women and their households. These effects can persist over time and extend beyond women themselves, generating human capital losses and negative spillovers for children and households (Carrell & Hoekstra, 2010; Walby, 2004).

Table 10 summarizes the key findings from the literature on LAC. In Mexico, increases in conflict-related homicides are linked to higher rates of IPV, with effects lasting up to four years (Alamir, 2024). These increases are most pronounced in households where women have limited bargaining power, suggesting that pre-existing vulnerabilities amplify IPV risks. Similarly, forced displacement has been associated with a rise in IPV, as men facing psychological distress and economic instability may exert control through abuse (Calderón et al., 2011). More broadly, violence—particularly in areas with organized crime—has been linked to greater risks of sexual exploitation and trafficking (Carpenter, 2024).

The consequences of IPV are far-reaching. IPV reduces women's ability to engage in paid work by increasing absenteeism and reducing productivity. Vara-Horna et al. (2023) show that women experiencing IPV lose substantial work time, including presenteeism—being physically present but unable to perform due to trauma. In line with this evidence, Ribero and Sánchez (2005)

document that IPV in Colombia raises women's unemployment probability and lowers earnings. Similarly, Ríos-Ávila and Canavire-Bacarreza (2017) find that IPV increases job exits, particularly among non-Indigenous women, who may leave jobs due to fear, emotional distress, or coercion. Long-term effects include deterioration of mental health, especially increased rates of depression and anxiety (Asencios-Gonzalez et al., 2023). These conditions further erode women's work performance and economic stability, reinforcing cycles of dependence and limiting long-term labor force attachment.

IPV risk is also linked to broader social structures. In high-violence settings, limited reproductive health access, incarceration of male partners, and gang activity contribute to high rates of unsupported single motherhood (Pan, 2014). These conditions constrain economic opportunities and deepen vulnerability. While evidence links single-parent households to increased juvenile delinquency, the reverse pathway—where community violence increases single motherhood and deepens poverty—remains underexplored.

In sum, IPV represents a major mechanism through which a general climate of violent crime worsens gender inequality in labor markets. Rising insecurity increases domestic abuse, which in turn reduces women's economic agency through physical harm, psychological stress, and constrained opportunity.

Policy Solutions

Table 11 highlights policy responses to IPV in Latin America and the Caribbean. Despite the scope of the problem, many countries lack femicide-specific laws, dedicate no budget to GBV response, and fail to provide police training (World Bank, 2024; see also Appendix 3). Integrated survivor services are a promising response. In Peru, *Centros de Emergencia Mujer* (CEMs) offer legal aid, psychological counseling, and shelter coordination (Sviatschi & Trako, 2024). Peru's *Chat 100* online platform also provides real-time guidance to IPV survivors.

Effective police intervention can play an important role in addressing and preventing IPV. In Brazil, women's police stations reduce homicide rates among young women in metropolitan areas (Perova & Reynolds, 2017). Evidence from outside LAC also confirms the role of effective police intervention. In the U.S., a victim-focused police intervention providing risk awareness and

safety planning to at-risk victims of IPV reduced the rate of female homicides by 40 percent (Koppa, 2024). In England, arrests for domestic violence strongly reduce repeat emergency calls for domestic violence both in the 48 hours following an emergency and during the following 12 months (Amaral et al., 2023a).

Cash transfer programs help to reduce chronic risks of victimization. In Peru, the *JUNTOS* conditional cash transfer program has been associated with a 25%–30% reduction in physical IPV, largely attributed to lower alcohol consumption and reduced aggression among male partners (Díaz & Saldarriaga, 2022). In Ecuador, transfers (cash, food, or vouchers) cut IPV by 6–7 percentage points (Hidrobo et al., 2016). Bobonis et al. (2013) document comparable patterns in Mexico, where targeting transfers to women through the *Oportunidades* program reduced physical abuse by 40 percent but increased non-physical threats, consistent with strategic responses to shifts in intra-household bargaining power. Related evidence shows that permanent increases in women's income reduce husbands' alcohol abuse and alcohol-related violence (Angelucci, 2008).

However, economic interventions can produce backlash. Microfinance programs have been associated with reductions in psychological and emotional abuse, but their impact on physical IPV is less clear (Allan-Blitz et al., 2023). Some studies indicate that economic empowerment programs can inadvertently increase IPV, as shifts in household financial power sometimes lead to male resentment against women gaining independence (Leite et al., 2019). This underscores the importance of careful program design to mitigate potential negative effects (Del Campo & Steinert, 2020). Using state-level variation in the rollout of unilateral (no-fault) divorce laws beginning in 2008, García-Ramos (2021) finds that IPV did not decline in the short term but increased by 3.7 percentage points over time, particularly among women who remained married—again reflecting potential backlash effects.

Programs that combine economic empowerment with gender sensitization training have demonstrated stronger outcomes. A meta-analysis found that such interventions led to significant reductions in emotional, sexual, and physical IPV, though ongoing monitoring and risk assessments are necessary to prevent unintended consequences, such as retaliatory violence (Del Campo & Steinert, 2020). Moreover, legal and institutional settings, including arrest policies and divorce regimes, shape both the incidence of IPV and incentives to report it (Cook, 2019).

In closing, while there is evidence on interventions that are impactful in specific circumstances, it is important to consider that much of the current evidence does not distinguish between impacts on situational violent episodes and longer-term chronic risks of violence. Ultimately, policy responses need to deal with different types of violence and there are no one-size-fits-all policies. A combination of approaches to protect and support survivors in the short and long-term needs to be combined with efforts to prevent and reduce exposure to IPV.

3.6. Human capital accumulation

Channel

Violent crime limits human capital development through displacement, psychological stress, and unsafe learning environments. These effects are gendered and affect future labor market outcomes. Table 12 summarizes the evidence.

For girls, safety concerns lead families to prioritize nearby schools over quality education. Girls may also take on additional domestic responsibilities, limiting academic engagement and skill development.[7] In some contexts, social norms drive early marriage or constrain mobility, curtailing long-term educational opportunities. Although the long-term consequences of these mechanisms remain underexplored, these pressures may have lasting effects on women's labor force participation and economic mobility. Boys, meanwhile, face increased risks of school dropout, as they are more vulnerable to gang recruitment and engagement in high-risk behaviors (Sviatchi, 2021). The need to contribute economically to their households also accelerates their labor market entry, often at the expense of continued education, with long-term consequences for their employment prospects and earning potential (Brown and Velásquez, 2017; Fergusson et al. 2020).[8] In high-violence areas, parents may also increase supervision into adolescence, especially mothers, which constrains their labor market engagement.

[7] See for instance UNHCR: https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/womens-human-rights-and-gender-related-concerns-situations-conflict-and-instability?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[8] On the supply side, educational infrastructure may be compromised; schools are destroyed, become inaccessible, or operate under threat due to violence in the surrounding areas (Canal Ramírez 1966, cited in Fergusson et al. 2020; Oquist 1980, cited in Fergusson et al. 2020). Evidence from school closures induced by gang violence in Brazil suggests that boys may be disproportionately affected by these disruptions, potentially due to lower educational resilience and a higher likelihood of disengaging from school when faced with instability (Monteiro and Rocha, 2017).

Violence-induced migration also affects school outcomes. Padilla-Romo and Peluffo (2023) show that student displacement from violent regions negatively affects host-school performance—especially among girls and high-performing students. Even in safer areas, peer disruptions can hurt learning. Acute stress further worsens academic performance. Michaelsen and Salardi (2020) find that homicides near schools depress student outcomes. While the study does not explicitly examine gendered differences, it is known that boys and girls respond differently to stress, with boys more likely to disengage from school and girls more likely to internalize stress in ways that affect cognitive performance and concentration.[9]

In short, violence reduces educational attainment differently for boys and girls, reinforcing long-term labor market disparities and economic vulnerability.

Policy Solutions

Table 13 outlines strategies to safeguard educational attainment. Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs), like Brazil's *Bolsa Família*, increase school attendance and reduce early dropout. The program raised attendance among 16-year-old boys by 16 percentage points and improved participation and grade progression for girls aged 15–17 (Reynolds, 2015; de Brauw et al., 2015). CCTs also reduce child labor during income shocks (Fitz & League, 2021) and limit participation in illegal economies (Sviatschi, 2022). Supporting female-headed households is especially important, as these women have less opportunity to be active in the labor market (Maurizio & Vázquez, 2014).

Reducing hypersexualization and gender norms that restrict girls is key. Hypersexualization lowers self-esteem and career aspirations (APA, 2007). Mentorship programs and role model interventions can reshape aspirations, emphasizing professional skills over appearance, aligning them with available economic opportunities (Muller et al., 2024). Increasing female participation in STEM through updated curricula has been shown to reduce gender gaps

[9] Verma, et al (2011) explain that men and women exhibit different responses to stress, both psychologically and biologically. Men often display a "fight-or-flight" response, characterized by increased autonomic responses, while women are more likely to engage in a "tend-and-befriend" approach, focusing on social support and nurturing behaviors. These differences suggest that men may be more prone to disengaging from stressful situations, whereas women might internalize stress, potentially affecting cognitive functions such as concentration and performance.

(Agurto et al., 2021; World Bank, 2023). Updating Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs to align them with labor market needs ensures that both boys and girls gain access to stable, well-paying jobs (Tripney & Hombrados, 2013).

Changing social norms starts early. Engaging boys and girls in discussions on gender norms weakens restrictive beliefs that limit women's opportunities (Dhar et al, 2022). Jayachandran (2021) highlights that boys are more likely to act on gender-equal attitudes, making their inclusion in initiatives and programs essential. Mothers also play a crucial role in shaping their children's views; men whose mothers worked are more likely to have working wives, reinforcing gender-equitable norms (Dhar et al. 2019; Fernandez et al. 2004).

4. Legal framework

In many countries in LAC, legal and structural barriers continue to hinder women's economic participation. Despite decades of advocacy and reform, discriminatory laws and institutional shortcomings still obstruct women's professional advancement. These challenges, exacerbated by violence and systemic inequality, create a self-perpetuating cycle that reinforces gender disparities. The effectiveness of mechanisms and policy responses to violence critically hinge on the surrounding legal environment. This section therefore examines legal frameworks governing gender-based violence, labor rights, and family law in LAC, emphasizing their role in shaping women's economic outcomes. We first examine the broader issue of legal inequality in the LAC region, highlighting how women and men do not have equal legal rights and how this inequality is particularly severe in countries with higher crime rates. Building on this foundation, we then explore specific policy measures to address the structural and legal barriers that restrict women's economic opportunities.

The Women, Business, and the Law (WBL) dataset from the World Bank provides a valuable tool for this effort. By identifying the legal and regulatory barriers to women's economic participation, the WBL dataset highlights the gaps that most urgently need reform (Appendix 2 provides a description of the WBL database). It makes clear that, although LAC countries have enacted 69% of the legal provisions needed for gender equality, countries with high rates of violence—particularly those with elevated female and overall homicide rates—tend to lack robust

legal protections for women (Figure 3, left-hand side). In violent crime-ridden environments, where women face disproportionate risks, the absence of strong legal frameworks exacerbates their vulnerabilities. When focusing specifically on female homicides, the same significant and negative correlation can be observed (Figure 3, right-hand side).

Jamaica, for instance, has the region's highest homicide rate (2021) and one of the lowest WBL scores. Alongside other Caribbean nations such as St. Lucia and Antigua and Barbuda, Jamaica lacks legislation on child marriage, femicide, domestic violence, and parental leave. These gaps compromise women's safety and limit their professional growth. The absence of paternity leave reinforces traditional gender roles, restricting women to unpaid care responsibilities.

Structural deficiencies persist throughout LAC. In 2023, 76% of countries had no legal protections against child marriage, despite one in four young women marrying before age 18 (Murphy-Graham 2024). These early unions limit education and employment prospects. Additionally, 67% of countries lack mechanisms to enforce equal pay, thus perpetuating wage disparities. In Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Peru, women with similar qualifications earned 25% less per hour than men in 2018 (Gasparini and Cruces 2021). Women hold only 14% of board seats and 4% of CEO positions in listed firms (IFC 2022).

Limited political representation further hinders legal reform. Though LAC outperforms other regions, only about one-third of national parliament seats are held by women.[10] Kim (2022) shows that women's political participation strengthens legal gender equality, while Schwindt-Bayer (2006) highlights the role of female legislators in shaping gender-responsive policy. Hanmer et al. (2024) argue that women's leadership is critical in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Increasing women's representation beyond elected office, including in law enforcement, the judiciary, and public administration, is key to improving responses to gender-based violence and ensuring that legal protections translate into real-world outcomes for women.

Countries with the highest homicide rates tend to have the weakest childcare legislation. As a result, women's labor market participation is negatively affected both by insecurity and by limited time to engage in work. Moreover, there is a strong and significant correlation between the strength of childcare legislation and laws addressing gender-based violence, suggesting that

[10] See: https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/regions/latin-america-caribbean (accessed on March 21, 2025)

countries with high crime must focus on both issues in tandem. Evidence from Colombia underscores the importance of policy design: expanding public childcare provision or offering subsidies significantly boosts women's labor supply, while cash transfers without accompanying measures to promote women's employment tend to reinforce unpaid care work at home (Cicowiez et al., 2023).

However, the passage of laws alone is insufficient. Many LAC countries have advanced gender equality legislation, but gaps in institutional and policy frameworks continue to hinder effective implementation of laws. Weak enforcement mechanisms, underfunded public programs, and the absence of dedicated oversight bodies undermine the impact of these legal advancements.[11] This disconnect between legal provisions and their enforcement is evident in regional data. The WBL Index measures supportive frameworks, including national policies, programs, budgets, data collection, and institutions that reinforce or mitigate legal barriers for women in the workforce. These elements help assess how effectively a country supports gender equality in economic participation. The average implementation framework score stands at just 38.6%, highlighting significant shortcomings (Figure 4). For instance, 79% of countries lack dedicated agencies to address workplace gender discrimination, 91% have no mechanisms to enforce pay transparency, 94% fail to collect gender-disaggregated property ownership data, and 97% do not produce quality reports on childcare services. These figures underscore the systemic barriers that prevent gender equality from being fully realized.

In high-violent crime settings, these institutional weaknesses deepen women's economic vulnerability, reinforcing cycles of low-wage employment and instability. Without strong legal protections and enforcement, crime compounds existing gender disparities. Figure 4 illustrates this, organizing LAC countries by homicide rate (bars), while dots represent the measure of supportive frameworks for implementing laws. The graph highlights that tools for implementation are generally weak across the region, both in low-crime settings and in higher-crime environments, where such weakness is most problematic.

[11] Note that in the case of gender-based violence, enforcement strategies must be designed with care, as Amaral et al. (2023) show that police arrests in domestic violence cases can sometimes trigger backlash effects, particularly in settings with entrenched gender norms.

While the development and implementation of comprehensive legislation remain ongoing, there is encouraging evidence of programs that can help address some of the mechanisms through which violent crime affects the labor market outcomes of women and men in LAC. Closing the enforcement gap—particularly in high-violence settings—will be critical to ensuring that legal rights translate into meaningful economic opportunities for all.

More broadly, the literature suggests that legal reforms are most effective when strong legal design and enforcement are complemented by efforts to engage with and gradually shift gendered social norms, through information campaigns, community-based interventions, and role-model or awareness-raising initiatives, together with clear implementation practices, such as accessible administrative procedures, adequate resourcing, and coordination across public institutions, enabling women to effectively exercise their economic rights and participate in the labor market (Gurbuz-Cuneo et al. 2025).

5. Conclusion

Violent crime in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) constitutes a pervasive barrier to women's economic participation and broader gender equality. While men face higher rates of homicide, women are uniquely and disproportionately affected by IPV, fear of victimization, mobility constraints, and weakened economic agency—all of which reduce labor market access and reinforce structural inequality. This study offers a new taxonomy of six mechanisms through which violent crime affects women's economic opportunities and outlines policy solutions tailored to each.

Sectoral Segregation and Informality

Women are overrepresented in low-wage, informal sectors—such as domestic work, retail, and hospitality—which are more vulnerable to crime, extortion, and economic disruption. This structural segregation not only exposes women to higher economic risk but also limits their upward mobility.

Policy solutions: Active labor market policies (ALMPs), vocational training, and targeted entrepreneurship programs can help transition women into more secure, better-paid sectors.

Fear of Victimization and Mental Health Impacts

Violent crime generates pervasive fear, especially among women, reducing their participation in public life and pushing them out of the workforce—particularly in informal or self-employed roles. Prolonged exposure also deteriorates mental health, which further undermines productivity and labor participation.

Policy solutions: Trauma-informed mental health interventions, such as Colombia's Semillas de Apego, alongside community policing and women's justice centers, can restore a sense of safety and support reintegration into the labor market.

Mobility Constraints

Concerns about personal safety and sexual harassment limit women's ability to commute, use public transportation, or work outside the home—especially in high-crime areas. These constraints restrict access to jobs, education, and services, reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Policy solutions: Gender-sensitive urban planning, improved public transportation, and the inclusion of women in infrastructure design can enhance safe mobility and labor access.

Intra-Household Bargaining Power Erosion

Rising violence weakens women's decision-making power within households, often shifting control of financial and labor decisions toward male partners. Reduced autonomy over income and employment choices traps women in cycles of dependency and economic marginalization.

Policy solutions: Legal reforms that support property rights, social protection, and access to childcare—combined with cash transfer programs and labor rights enforcement—can help rebalance household dynamics and promote economic independence.

IPV

While IPV is a form of violence in its own right, it is often exacerbated in contexts of broader societal crime, leading to absenteeism, reduced productivity, and workforce exit for many women. The psychological toll and coercive control further diminish women's ability to seek or maintain employment.

Policy solutions: Integrated GBV services, police training, specialized legal frameworks, and some well-designed conditional cash transfers have demonstrated success in reducing IPV and supporting survivors' economic re-entry—especially when combined with gender sensitization.

Disruptions to Human Capital Accumulation

Violent crime undermines girls' education through school avoidance, early marriage, and increased domestic responsibilities. Long-term exposure stunts skill development and curtails future earning potential, entrenching intergenerational poverty.

Policy solutions: Conditional cash transfers, education reforms, and gender-transformative mentorship programs are vital to keep girls in school and aligned with future labor market needs.

Addressing the gendered economic impacts of violent crime demands more than generic crime-reduction strategies. It requires a multi-sectoral, gender-sensitive policy agenda that strengthens institutions, improves access to justice and care services, and enables safer labor force participation. Legal reforms must be matched with enforcement mechanisms and budgetary support, particularly in high-crime settings where institutional gaps remain widest.

This study underscores the importance of integrating gender into both security and economic policies. Without this lens, interventions risk overlooking the very mechanisms that perpetuate inequality. Future research should continue to explore the long-term labor market impacts of violence, examine intersectional dimensions (e.g., race, geography, class), and rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of laws and policy interventions.

Ultimately, closing the gender gap in economic opportunity is inseparable from efforts to reduce violence. A comprehensive response that centers women's experiences and agency is essential to fostering inclusive, resilient, and secure economies in LAC.

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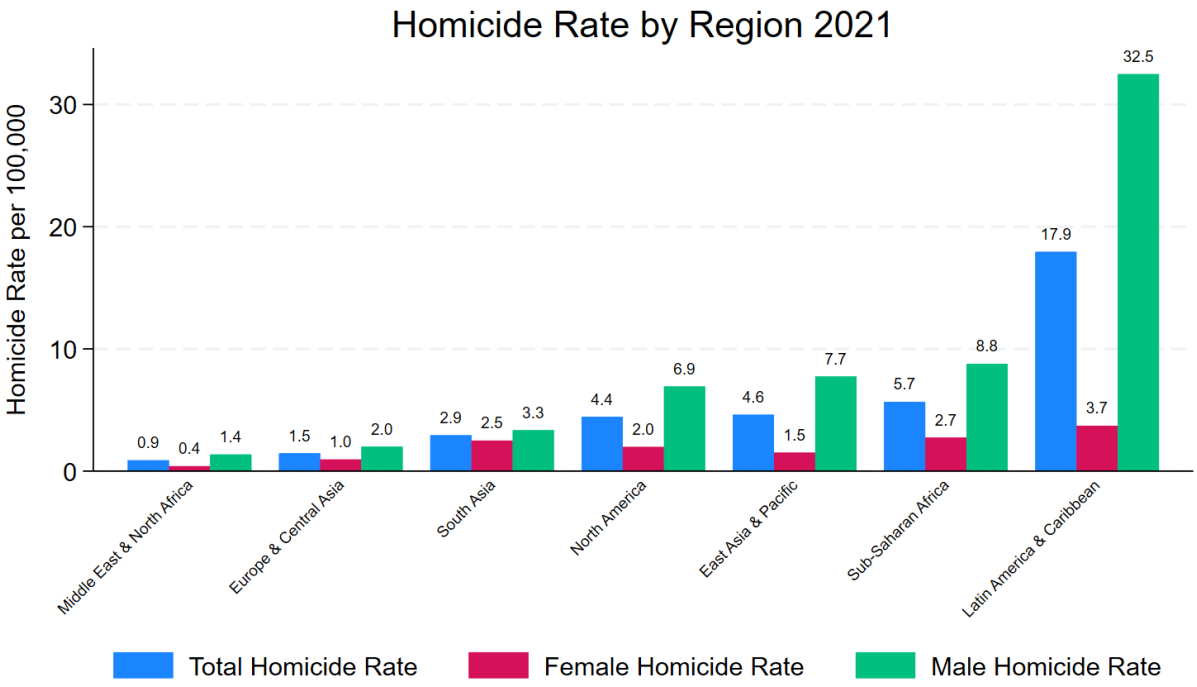
Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Homicides in LAC and rest of the World



Source: World Development Indicators, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and International Labor Organization

Figure 2. Mechanisms through which violent crime differentially impacts the labor outcomes of men and women.

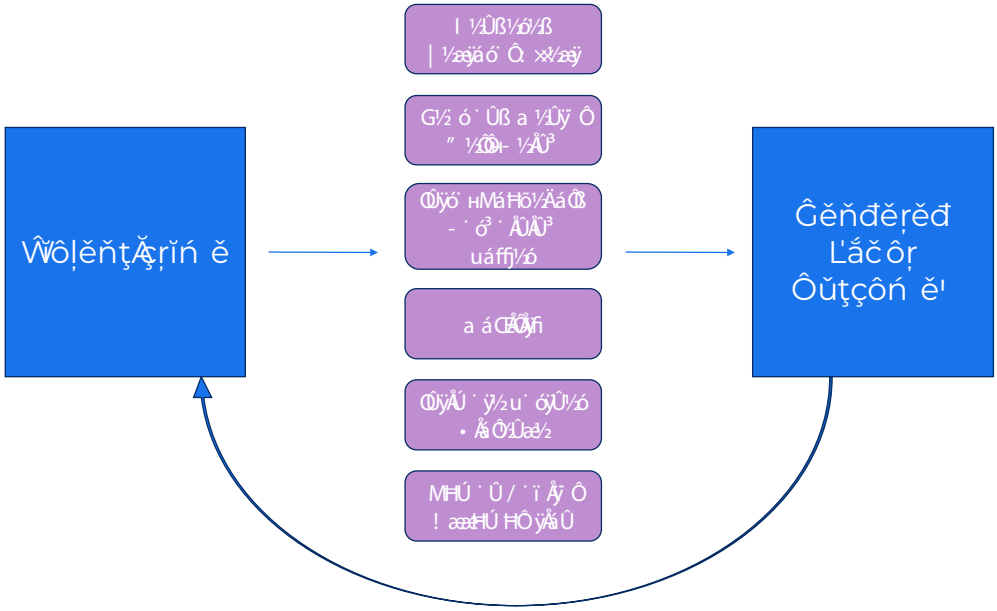
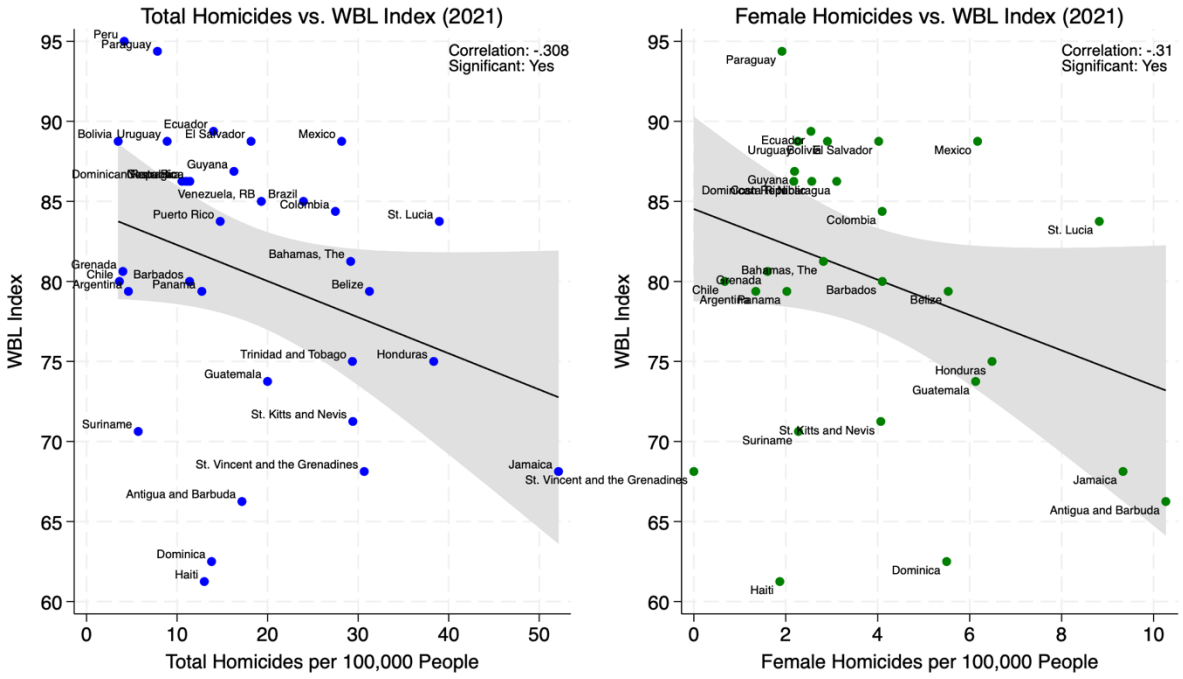
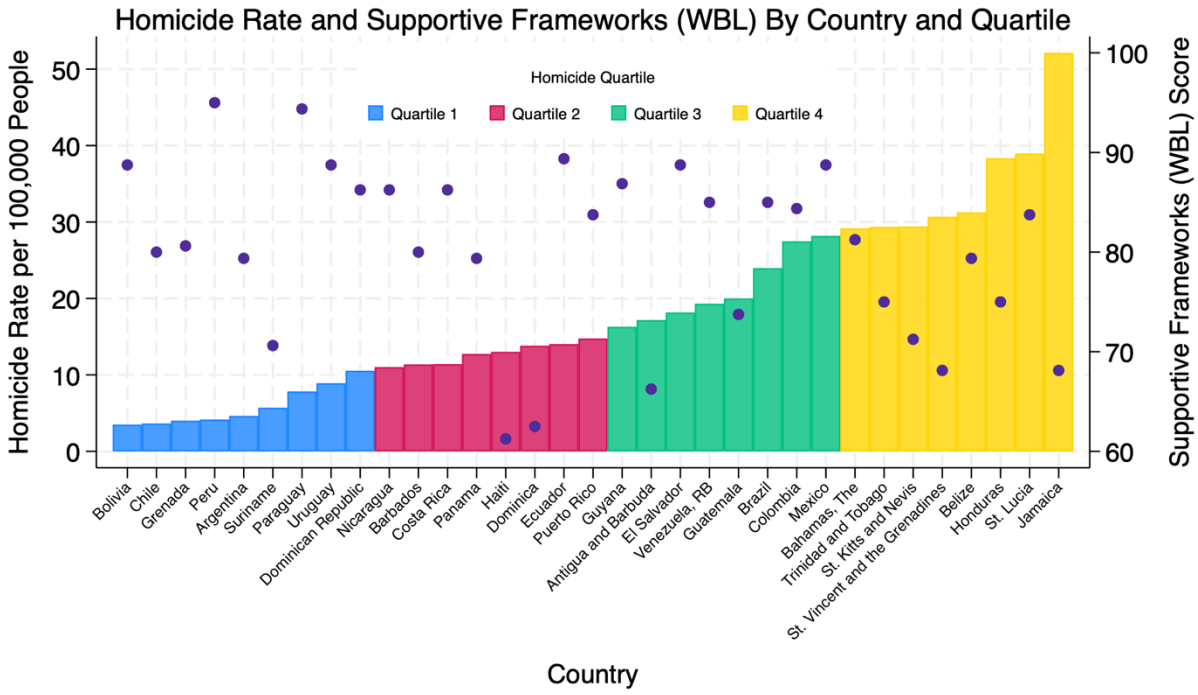


Figure 3. Countries with higher homicide rates tend to have weaker legal protections for women



Note: WBL 2023 data.

Figure 4. Challenges in Legal Supportive Frameworks Across LAC



Note: WBL 2023 data.

Table 1. Economics Impacts of Crime and Violence

Study	Context	Type of violence	Outcomes	Key results
Perez-Vincent et al. (2024)	LAC	Homicides and non-lethal crimes, deprivation of liberty.	Direct costs of crime in terms of (i) human capital lost (ii) expenditures by private firms to prevent crime; and (iii) public spending to respond to and prevent crime	Estimates direct costs of crime and violence to be approximately 3.4% of GDP.
Carpenter (2024)	US	Sex trafficking	Gang organization in San Diego associates significantly with coordinated sex trafficking	As gangs become more organized, they are significantly more likely to direct coordinated sex trafficking (2.4 times higher odds) and to engage in violent offending (1.8 times higher odds).
Bernal et al. (2024)	Colombia	Armed conflict	Firm creation, employment	Ceasefire increased firm creation and employment in places traditionally affected by violence. Rejected peace referendum led to a decrease in firms' entry.

Table 2. Labor Market Composition and Gender-Specific Vulnerabilities

Study	Context	Outcomes	Key results
Arora et al. (2023)	LAC	Share of "good" jobs, defined as those whose median weekly earnings exceed the national median.	Women are underrepresented in good jobs; concentrated in low-value service activities and in lower-level occupations.
Berniell et al. (2024)	LAC	Share of employment in the informal sector, in large firms, self-employment, unpaid work.	In lower and upper middle-income countries in LAC, women are more likely to be employed in the informal sector than men. They are also less likely than men to work in large firms; and in lower-middle income countries, they are more likely to be self-employed. Across the income spectrum, women are more likely than men to be unpaid workers.
Iregui-Bohórquez et al. (2019)	Colombia	Number of suspected incidences of domestic violence.	Increases in women's earnings in the commerce and industry sectors reduce the risk of domestic violence; in the service industry, the opposite occurs.
Dini and Stumpo (2019)	LAC	Survey responses on bottlenecks to business climate and frequency of exposure to delinquency.	Violence is reported as a key challenge affecting SMEs and business climate in the region.
Maloney et al. (2025)	LAC	N/A	Highlights organized crime, including extortion, as an important challenge affecting business costs and competitiveness. States that smaller businesses are more affected by extortion than larger ones.
Motta (2017)	LAC	Firm performance measured as total annual sales per employee.	SMEs in the service sector not affected by crime had higher labor productivity than others that incurred crime-related losses.

Table 3. Active labor market policies and Women's labor force participation

Study	Context	Outcomes	Key results
Escudero et al. (2019)	LAC	Employment status, formal employment, earnings, hours worked	Active labor market policies (ALMPs) significantly improve employment and formal employment, but effects on earnings and hours worked are weaker. Women and youth benefit more from ALMPs than men and older workers.
Card et al. (2018)	OECD and middle-income countries	Employment probability at three post-program horizons: short-run (0–12 months), medium-run (13–24 months), long-run (25+ months)	Average impacts of ALMPs are modest, but positive and grow over time: larger in the medium (1–2 years) and long run (2+ years) than in the short run. Effects are larger for women and the long-term unemployed. Programs in middle-income countries show larger effects than in high-income ones, suggesting more scope for impact where labor market frictions are larger.
Aramburo et al. (2021)	Bogota, Colombia Buenos Aires, Argentina	Coding skill acquisition (measured by theory test scores), and employment probability in technology sector	The designed bootcamp for women increased coding skills; participants outperformed significantly regular students on theory tests. The bootcamp increased the probability of finding a tech job for participants. The tech jobs obtained were more likely to offer flexible hours, remote work, and higher satisfaction, improving overall job quality for women.
World Bank (2021)	Mexico	Business performance and profitability (measured by profit increases), sectoral mobility (entry into male-dominated sectors), and cost-effectiveness and return on investment (ROI) of interventions	Interventions relying on soft skills (personal initiative) and traditional hard skills (business literacy skills), as well as consulting to improve performance and profitability of female entrepreneurs exhibit high returns to investment. Women entrepreneurs who succeed in moving beyond traditional gendered sectors can achieve substantial gains in profits, sales, and job creation.
Valdivia (2011)	Lima, Peru	Business practices (e.g., innovation, management, networking, use of informal credit), business survival and	Business training led to adoption of improved business practices. Women receiving only training were more likely to close unprofitable businesses, whereas

		closure decisions, sales revenue, gender-role attitudes and household decision-making	those with additional technical assistance were more likely to plan and implement innovations, associate with peers, and use informal credit, especially among those with larger businesses. Impacts on decision-making power or gender attitudes were limited.
Galasso et al. (2004)	Argentina	Probability of employment in the private sector, and income	Wage subsidy voucher significantly increased probability of private sector employment compared to control; impact was mainly for women and younger workers. No significant effect on current income. Additional skill training had significant impact on employment among those with better initial education.

Table 4. Labor Market Outcomes and Fear of Victimization and Mental Well-Being

Study	Context	Outcomes	Key results
Velasquez (2020)	Mexico	Labor force participation, hours worked, hourly earnings, total earnings, hours in domestic work, hours in helping HH member with homeowrk	Violence discourages self-employed women from working and reduces earnings for self-employed men. Women reallocate time to household tasks rather than earning income. Fear of crime is a likely mechanism driving these changes.
Hernandez-de-Benito (2020)	Mexico	Household expenditure shares (e.g., food, male clothing, hygiene), women's decision-making power, and resource shares (as proxy for bargaining power).	Increased violence reduced expenditure shares for food and hygiene, and increased shares for male clothing transportation. Additionally, women's resource shares declined. Women reported lower decision-making power in households exposed to higher violence. The effects are driven by fear of victimization, with stronger impacts in households reporting greater fear.
Schargrodsky & Freira (2023)	LAC	Crime rates, measured through both homicide statistics and crime victimization surveys.	Men, young people, and individuals with higher incomes face a greater risk of being victims of crime overall, while homicide rates are higher among those with lower incomes.
Balmori de la Miyar (2020)	Mexico	Mental well-being outcomes: clinical depression, antidepressant use, feeling sad, feeling depressed	Drug-related violence led to a notable increase in feelings of sadness or depression among women, even though these effects were not observed in clinical diagnoses. Among men, drug-related violence did not show any meaningful influence on either clinical or everyday emotional well-being.
Moya et al. (2021)	Tumaco, Colombia - COVID19 lockdown	Anxiety, depression, and parenting stress among primary caregivers	Declines in mental health were more severe for people who were internally displaced, had less education, already struggled with mental health issues, or faced additional hardships during the pandemic (food shortages or losing their jobs) The early stages of the pandemic saw a marked decline in maternal mental health, particularly affecting those who were already vulnerable.

Table 5. Public Policy on Fear of Victimization and Mental Well-Being

Study	Context	Outcomes	Key results
Harker Roa et al. (2023)	Tumaco, Colombia	Implementation quality—measured by acceptability, adoption, appropriateness, fidelity, and sustainability; also dosage (sessions attended) as a fidelity proxy	High acceptability and adoption of psychological support program due to rigorous cultural adaptation, structured team selection/training, and ongoing team support/supervision to prevent burnout. Initial attendance, educational attainment, violence victimization, and employment status were key predictors of successful program dosage (i.e., sufficient participation to benefit). Well-designed implementation processes are critical for high-fidelity delivery and sustainability in extreme adversity.
Sánchez-Ariza et al. (2024)	Colombia	Caregiver mental health (measured by standardized indices), quality and style of child-caregiver interactions, early childhood mental health and development, and pathways of intergenerational transmission of mental health problems in conflict settings	Exposure to conflict-related violence is associated with worse caregiver mental health. Children exhibit elevated emotional and behavioral problems linked to caregiver mental health. Programs that work with both caregivers and children together appear effective in disrupting patterns of intergenerational trauma.
Benavente & Goya (2023)	Chile	Fear of crime (general and among specific groups, e.g., workers), and actual crime rates	Visible policing and community engagement reduced fear among certain groups, while overemphasis on crime risks in awareness campaigns heightened anxiety in some residents. Trust in authorities played a key role in moderating fear levels.
Sviatschi & Trako (2024)	Peru	Incidence of gender-based violence (self-reported domestic violence, female deaths due to aggression, hospitalizations for mental health), and human capital investments in children (school enrollment, attendance, test scores)	Opening Women Justice Centers reduced the incidence of IPV, and increased female educational attainment and labor force participation, as well as children's school enrollment, attendance, and test scores.

Carrington et al. (2020)	Buenos Aires, Argentina	Access to justice and empowerment among women	Women's police stations increase women's willingness to report gender violence, improving the likelihood of intervention and prevention of re-victimization. These stations collaborate with local agencies to coordinate resources and develop local strategies, reducing duplication and improving service delivery
Perova & Reynolds (2017)	Brazil	Female homicide rate (ages 15–49), as a proxy for severe IPV	Opening a women's police station was associated with a significant reduction in the female homicide rate in metropolitan areas. The reduction was even greater among young women (ages 15–24)
Cordova & Krass (2019)	Brazil	Police legitimacy (women's trust in police, perceived police effectiveness), and gendered treatment differences (female vs male perceptions)	Presence of WPS significantly increased women's trust in the police and their assessments of police effectiveness. The presence of these specialized stations leads women to view the police as more legitimate and responsive to their needs, particularly regarding violence against women
Amaral et al. (2021)	India	Police reports of crimes against women (overall and by type, e.g., domestic violence), femicide rates, and survey-reported domestic violence	Opening a WPS increased police reports of crimes against women, , primarily driven by domestic violence cases. No change in femicide rates or self-reported IPV

Table 6. Violence and Intra-household Bargaining Power

Study	Context	Outcomes	Key results
Hernandez-de-Benito (2022)	Mexico	Household expenditure shares (e.g., food, male clothing, hygiene), women's decision-making power, and resource shares (as proxy for bargaining power).	Increased violence reduced expenditure shares for food and hygiene, and increased shares for male clothing transportation. Additionally, women's resource shares declined. Women reported lower decision-making power in households exposed to higher violence. The effects are driven by fear of victimization, with stronger impacts in households reporting greater fear.
Tsaneva et al. (2019)	Mexico	Household decisions made by women, time use, mental health and fear, and labor force participation	An increase of homicides rates reduces female participation in household decisions. These effects are temporary and do not persist once violence levels subside. During periods of elevated violence, women are more likely to enter the labor force and work longer hours, while men's employment declines
Ajefu & Casale (2021)	Nigeria	Women's intra-household decision-making power in adulthood. Socio-economic outcomes (education, health, employment), marriage and fertility choices	Early-life exposure to violent conflict significantly decreases the likelihood of women having decision-making power in adulthood. Mechanisms include poorer education, health, and employment outcomes, as well as different marriage and fertility decisions for exposed women.
Calderón et al. (2011)	Colombia	Female labor force participation, earnings, intra-household bargaining power, and domestic violence	Displaced women work longer hours, earn similar wages, and contribute more to household income than rural non-displaced women. However, this increased economic contribution does not translate into greater bargaining power within the household. In fact, domestic violence against displaced women rises, as does violence directed at children, suggesting increased economic participation does not necessarily empower women or improve their welfare.

Table 7. Policies on Household Dynamics and Bargaining Power

Study	Context	Outcomes	Key results
Friedmann-Sanchez (2006)	Colombia	Women's bargaining power and decision-making within the household, and control over assets and income	Employment in the cut-flower industry (non-traditional agriculture) increases women's access to income and some assets, enhancing their bargaining position within the household. Social capital, particularly kinship and labor-related networks, played a critical role in enabling asset acquisition and increasing women's bargaining position within households
Martinez (2013)	Chile	Household expenditure patterns (especially on children), children's school attendance and educational outcomes, and labor supply and income allocation within the household	The legal reform increasing child support rights increased women's bargaining power, leading to higher expenditures on children and improved school attendance. Changes in legal rights can shift intrahousehold resource allocation in favor of children when women's bargaining power increases
Berniell et al. (2020)	Argentina	Marital stability (divorce/separation rates), household bargaining (women's headship, allocation of chores), and husbands' participation in domestic tasks	A pension reform increased the probability of divorce or separation among highly educated senior women, but had no significant impact on those with less education. For less-educated women, the reform increased bargaining power: it reduced the likelihood that they were solely responsible for household chores and increased husbands' participation in these chores.
Friedmann-Sanchez & Lovaton (2012)	Colombia	Prevalence and risk of physical IPV by department	Low educational attainment (at or below primary school), employment in sales/services/office jobs, affiliation with social security, early sexual/reproductive life, and low empowerment in household decisions are key risk factors of IPV.
Reynolds (2015)	Brazil	Adolescent school attendance, and participation in work and household chores	The conditional cash transfer program *Bolsa Familia* increased school attendance for 16-year-olds, especially among urban boys.

			There was little evidence that Bolsa Família influenced adolescents' time spent on paid work or chores.
Cicowiez et al. (2023)	Colombia	Female labor market participation, hours worked, unpaid care work within the home, and macroeconomic variables.	Childcare subsidies and public childcare expansion both significantly increased women's participation in formal labor and reduced unpaid care hours. Cash transfers, in contrast, improved household consumption but predominantly increased women's unpaid care work. The policy generates positive spillovers for the economy: higher female employment leads to increased household income, consumption, and GDP.

Table 8. Mobility of Women Affected by Violence

Study	Context	Outcomes	Key results
Villarreal and Yu (2017)	Mexico	Psychological distress – measured by an index based on symptoms like anxiety, sadness, and sleep issues. Fear of victimization – measured by self-reported fear of being assaulted or robbed during day or night.	Women are disproportionately affected by rising violence, experiencing greater increases in fear of crime and psychological distress compared to men.
Ross and Jang (2000)	Illinois, USA	Fear of victimization – days felt afraid, worried about robbery, or unsafe. Mistrust – days felt suspicious, unsafe trusting others, or feared harm.	Neighborhood disorder increases fear and mistrust, especially among women. Strong informal ties with neighbors reduce these effects.
Whitley and Prince (2005)	London, UK	Mental health – assessed through participant reports of anxiety, stress, low mood, and restricted daily activity due to fear of crime. Fear of crime – explored through qualitative interviews and observations of its effect on daily life.	Fear of crime disproportionately affects low-income mothers, especially those with mental illness. Women experience higher psychological stress and behavioral limitations than men due to crime-related fear.
Gaitán-Rossi and Shen (2018)	Mexico City, Mexico	Fear of crime (FOC) – measured across emotional insecurity, perceived risk, and avoidance behavior.	Women report higher fear and perceived risk, especially in violent areas. Fear is shaped by both individual vulnerability and municipal context. Collective efforts to fight crime can unintentionally increase fear.
Castillo-Paredes et al. (2022)	Eight Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela)	Active transportation (walking and cycling ≥10 min/week) and perceived neighborhood safety (traffic speed, crime rate, lighting, public space safety, etc.)	Unsafe public spaces and daytime crime were linked to reduced likelihood of walking and cycling. Slow traffic speed increased odds of walking. Women and those perceiving higher danger were less likely to engage in active transportation.

Jaitman (2020a)	Lima (Peru) and Asuncion (Paraguay)	Women's insecurity and victimization on public transport; mobility effects; under-reporting	30% of women in Lima and 6% in Asuncion reported victimization on public transport. Over 80% did not report crimes. Insecurity reduced women's mobility and led to time and cost burdens.
Berrebi & Ostwald (2014)	157 countries	Female labor force participation (FLFP) in response to terrorism	Higher levels of terrorism are associated with a significant decline in FLFP. The effect is stronger in low-income countries and persists over time.
Knight et al. (2024)	Bogotá, Colombia	Colombia; COVID-19 lockdown Crime levels during gender-segregated days	Crime rose during the gender-based lockdown, particularly on men-only days. Robberies with male victims surged, and female victimization also rose slightly on women-only days. No crime reduction was observed overall.
Dammert (2012)	LAC	Daily routines, neighborhood interaction, and nighttime activity, among others.	Women showed greater mobility restrictions than men: less likely to walk alone, especially at night; consistently avoid public spaces due to heightened fear. Women reported avoiding evening outings, altering routes, and using taxis instead of public transport to minimize risk.

Table 9. Women's Transport Experiences and Policies

Study	Context	Outcomes	Key results
Dominguez Gonzales et al. (2020)	Lima, Peru; Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Constraints to women's mobility (availability, affordability, acceptability, accessibility, social norms), patterns and barriers in women's urban mobility. and women's agency in mobility decisions	Women make shorter, more frequent trips (often "trip-chaining" for caregiving and work). Yet, safety concerns (harassment, poor lighting) limit their mobility, especially at night. Strong social support (neighbors, family networks, WhatsApp groups) helped women access jobs and coordinate childcare, enhancing mobility.
Roy et al. (2024)	Systematic review	Mobility access dimensions (availability, affordability, acceptability, accessibility), typology (public transport, NMT, safety, norms, urban infrastructure, policies), and consequences: access to services, jobs, social inclusion	Women's mobility is constrained by poor public and pedestrian infrastructure, and unaffordable and unreliable transport. Safety concerns are a major deterrent due to risks of harassment and violence. Additionally, lower incomes and caregiving responsibilities force women to spend more on transport, often opting for costlier but safer options. Social norms around gender roles further limit their travel, particularly when accompanied by children or carrying loads.
Sundling & Ceccato (2022)	Systematic review	Perceived safety (fear of crime, discomfort), and victimization and avoidance behaviors.	Lighting, surveillance (CCTV, staff presence), station maintenance, and presence of amenities (cafés, kiosks) are consistently tied to higher perceived safety. Social factors, especially other passengers' behavior and sense of social control, also impact safety perceptions.
Mejía-Dorantes (2018)	Mexico	Daily travel constraints and mobility patterns, perceptions of transport services, and women's priorities for policy improvements.	Women routinely normalize safety issues, adjusting travel routes or schedules rather than challenging systemic problems. There are significant disparities in mobility experiences based on income level and neighborhood location, those in periphery faced worse service quality and safety.
Uteng and Turner (2018)	Low- and middle-income countries	Mobility access and patterns, barriers (safety, infrastructure, affordability, norms), and policy and planning gaps (gender-blind transport design).	Gender-aware transport research remains scarce in LMICs, with data often limited and indicators gender-blind. Smart-city and smart-mobility discourses in the Global South often exclude gender

			considerations; there's limited integration across sectors or with transport planning.
Montoya-Robledo et al. (2020)	Bogota, Colombia	Caregiving mobility and perceived vulnerability	Women's mobility of care is constrained by safety concerns, lack of infrastructure, and social expectations that undervalue their time and needs. These barriers result in reduced autonomy, limited access to opportunities, and reinforce gender inequalities in urban space.
Aguilar et al. (2021)	Mexico City, Mexico	Self-reported sexual harassment (for women), self-reported non-sexual aggression (for men and women), and willingness-to-pay (WTP) for safety	Women-only cars in the subway system reduced the incidence of sexual harassment, and increased non-sexual aggression among men. While women were willing to pay significantly more to avoid sexual harassment, men also valued non-sexual aggression avoidance, leaving cost–benefit outcomes inconclusive.
Kondylis et al. (2025)	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Incidence of harassment (physical, verbal, staring), women's willingness-to-pay for reserved space, and stigma and perceived norms (Implicit Association Tests, social surveys)	Safe spaces are effective: Random assignment halves physical harassment rates in reserved cars. IATs and surveys reveal stigma toward women riding in mixed cars, linked to perceived sexual availability.

Table 10. Labor Market Outcomes and IPV

Study	Context	Outcomes	Key results
Alamir (2024)	Mexico	Changes in prevalence of IPV (physical acts and threats), women's tolerance for partner abuse, and divorce rates due to domestic violence	Public violence can spill over into households. Incidents of IPV rise in areas with increased conflict-related homicides. The rise in IPV is mostly seen among women who have less power in their households, such as those with lower incomes, less education, or limited say in decision-making. Economic struggles are mentioned more frequently as a reason for IPV following spikes in conflict.
Vara-Horna et al., 2023	Bolivia and Paraguay	Workplace productivity indicators: absenteeism, presenteeism, and job stability. Productivity costs: labor output loss and financial losses to firms.	Having higher-than-average education and earn professional salaries do not automatically lower the risk of experiencing intimate partner violence. Survivors were found to miss work more frequently, and when present, their productivity was reduced due to presenteeism, leading to a substantial loss of workdays overall.
Ríos-Ávila & Canavire-Bacarreza (2017)	Bolivia	Job exit decisions, comparing indigenous and non-indigenous women.	Women who suffer IPV are more likely to leave their jobs, especially non-indigenous women. Cultural acceptance of IPV may explain indigenous women's lower sensitivity to its impact.
Ribero & Sánchez (2005)	Colombia	Employment, earnings, health; child outcomes; GDP costs	IPV is strongly associated with childhood exposure and alcohol abuse. IPV reduces women's employment probability and earnings (~40%) and worsens health. Total indirect costs amount to at least 4.2% of GDP.
Asencios-Gonzalez et al. (2023)	Peru	Morbidity (physical/mental health harm) and Labor productivity: Absenteeism and presenteeism.	IPV diminishes productivity. Morbidity serves as mediator: IPVAW increases morbidity, which in turn raises absenteeism and presenteeism.
Pan et al. (2014)	Mexico	Marriage rates, divorce rates, and births to single mothers.	Higher crime rates are associated with a decline in marriage rates and an increase in both divorce rates and births to single mothers in Mexican border states.

Table 11. Public Policies and Evidence on IPV

Study	Context	Outcomes	Key results
World Bank 2024	Global coverage (190 economies)	Safety, mobility, workplace, pay, marriage, parenthood, childcare, entrepreneurship, assets, and pension.	Safety protections are weak (average score ~36/100), reflecting inadequate legal coverage of domestic violence, sexual harassment in public spaces, child marriage, and femicide.
Sviatschi & Trako (2024)	Peru	Incidence of gender-based violence (self-reported domestic violence, female deaths due to aggression, hospitalizations for mental health), and human capital investments in children (school enrollment, attendance, test scores)	Opening Women Justice Centers reduced the incidence of IPV, and increased female educational attainment and labor force participation, as well as children's school enrollment, attendance, and test scores.
Perova & Reynolds (2017)	Brazil	Female homicide rate (ages 15–49), as a proxy for severe IPV	Opening a women's police station was associated with a significant reduction in the female homicide rate in metropolitan areas. The reduction was primarily observed among young women (ages 15–24) in metropolitan areas.
Koppa (2021)	US	Female homicides committed by male offenders	In Maryland, the Lethality Assessment Program reduces female homicides committed by men by 40%.
Amaral et al. (2023)		Domestic violence emergency calls	An arrest for domestic violence virtually eliminates follow-up domestic violence emergency calls in the following 48 hours and reduces domestic violence emergency calls over the following 12 months by 51%.
Diaz & Saldarriaga (2021)	Peru	Incidence of physical IPV, and male partner alcohol misuse (frequency and alcohol-related aggression)	Peru's Juntos conditional cash transfer led to a decrease in physical IPV among participants. This impact was driven by reduced frequent alcohol consumption and alcohol-related aggression by male partners.
Hidrobo et al. (2016)	Ecuador	IPV: controlling behaviors; physical, moderate physical, sexual violence.	Cash, vouchers, and food transfers led to a decline in controlling behavior as well as physical and/or sexual IPV. Strongest effects were observed among women with limited influence over household decisions.
Allan-Blitz et al. (2023)	Systematic review	IPV prevalence (physical, sexual, emotional abuse), and controlling behaviors.	Microfinance interventions were associated with significant reductions in psychological and emotional IPV, controlling behaviors, and sexual violence, but no significant reduction in physical IPV.

Hartmann et al. (2020)	India	Male alcohol use (via breathalyzer results), and female-reported IPV (Indian Family Violence & Control Scale)	Both intervention arms (economic incentives and behavioral couples therapy) showed reductions in hazardous alcohol use and IPV.
Amaral et al. (2023b)	West Midlands, England	Incidence of repeat DV calls within 1 year, timing of DV recurrence (particularly first 48 hrs), and rates of offender charges brought	Arrests reduce future DV emergency calls in the following year, indicating a strong deterrence effect rather than a retaliatory backlash. The decline is due to reduced repeat victimization, not underreporting from fear of retaliation.
Amaral et al. (2023b)	Mexico	Rates of IPV	The unilateral divorce reform had no significant effect on IPV en the short-run. In the long term, IPV increased especially among women who remained married. The rise in IPV is attributed to "backlash" and the instrumental use of violence by men to prevent divorce.

Table 12. Impacts of violent crime on human capital accumulation

Study	Context	Outcomes	Key results
Sviatschi (2022)	Peru	School dropout	Coca industry expansion increased dropout rates by 26%.
Monteiro and Rocha (2017)	Brazil	Student test scores in math and language, teacher absenteeism, principal turnover, temporary school closures.	Violence triggered by drug gangs reduced math scores (-0.054 SD), increased teacher absences (+5.8 pp), turnover (+12.7 pp), and frequency of temporary school closures (+24 pp).
Padilla-Romo and Peluffo (2023)	Mexico	Test scores	Being exposed to new peers adversely affects incumbents' test scores; the negative effect on test scores is more than twice as large when new peers migrated from violent municipalities.
Michaelsen and Salardi (2020)	Mexico	Test scores	Nearby homicides negatively impacted student performance; with stronger effects for higher levels of violence and when the violence is geographically closer to the affected school.
Fergusson et al. (2020)	Colombia	Years of schooling	Exposure before/during schooling years led to a significant reduction in years of education. Affected cohorts were more likely to work in sectors requiring less human capital (e.g., agriculture) and less likely to transition to modern sectors like manufacturing and services
Brown & Velasquez (2020)	Mexico	Years of schooling, , completion of compulsory education, and employment status	Exposure to increased violent crime led to a significant reduction in educational attainment among young adults. The negative effects on human capital accumulation are persistent and may have long-term consequences for economic opportunities and social mobility.

Table 13. Human capital accumulation policies

Study	Context	Outcomes	Key results
Reynolds (2015)	Brazil	Adolescent school attendance, and participation in work and household chores	The conditional cash transfer program *Bolsa Familia* increased school attendance for 16-year-olds, especially among urban boys. There was little evidence that Bolsa Família influenced adolescents' time spent on paid work or chores.
de Brauw et al, (2015)	Brazil	School participation/enrollment, rade progression and promotion, and grade repetition/dropout rates	Bolsa Família increased school participation among all children aged 6–17. For girls, the program led to significant improvements in school participation increased and grade progression. In urban areas, the effect was particularly stronger among girls aged 15–17.
Fitz & League (2021)	Brazil	Child paid labor participation, school attendance and intensity, and grade progression	Rainfall shocks (as a proxy for income shocks) negatively affect child schooling by increasing child labor and reducing school attendance. Conditional cash transfers (CCT) partially mitigates these effects, though less so among boys and older children.
Sviatschi (2022)	Peru	Child labor participation in coca cultivation, school dropout, adult criminal outcomes (incarceration for violent/drug offenses)	Exposure to illegal coca labor boosted child labor: parents increased children's work on coca farms following higher returns to illegal labor. Conditional cash transfers that encourage schooling mitigate the effects of exposure to illegal industries.
Müller et al. (2024)	Global review	Education, labor force participation, entrepreneurship, and business outcomes.	Interventions that elevate aspirations (role models, mentoring) can significantly enhance educational achievement, labor market participation, and business initiatives. The most successful policies integrate psychological and structural approaches, enabling individuals to envision and pursue better futures.
Agurto et al. (2021)	Peru	Preference for engineering	Exposure to female engineering role models increased high-ability female students' preference for engineering programs.

			The intervention also increased self-confidence and reduced uncertainty about abilities among female students
Agurto et al. (2021)	Systematic review. Low- and middle-income countries, mainly from LAC	Overall paid employment, formal-sector employment, monthly earnings, and self-employment (where available)	Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) have small but significant positive effects on overall paid employment, formal employment, and monthly earnings for young people in LMICs. No specific TVET delivery model (e.g., classroom, on-the-job training, apprenticeship) consistently outperformed others
Dhar et al. (2019)	India	Adolescent gender attitudes (roles/rights of women)	Children are 15–20 percentage points more likely to hold discriminatory gender attitudes if their parent does. Parents exert significantly more influence than peers, with mothers shaping attitudes more than fathers. Transmission is stronger in Scheduled Caste communities.
Dhar et al. (2022)	India	Adolescent gender attitudes (support for gender equality), self-reported gender-equitable behaviors, and aspirations and implicit/revealed preference measures	Intervention engaging adolescent girls and boys in classroom discussions about gender equality made students more supportive of gender equality (effects persisted two years after the program ended). The program also influenced self-reported behavior. An index of gender-equal behaviors increased in both the short run and medium run.
Jayachandran (2020)	Global review	Female labor force participation and earnings	Social norms are a major barrier to women's employment, explaining why female labor force participation varies widely across countries at similar income levels. Policies that accommodate norms (e.g., supporting home-based work, women-only spaces) can increase women's employment in the short term. While, interventions that aim to change norms (e.g., media, education) show promise for longer-term shifts.
Fernández et al. (2004)	United States	Women's labor force participation	Wives of men whose mothers worked are significantly more likely to work themselves, suggesting a strong intergenerational transmission of attitudes and preferences.

			States with higher WWII male mobilization rates (and thus more women entering the workforce) saw not only immediate increases in female labor supply, but also higher female labor force participation in the next generation, as more men grew up with working mothers

Appendix 1: Literature Review

The first step in this literature review consisted mainly of searching articles, dissertations, and reports that directly or indirectly addressed the relation between the incidence of crime and economic results disaggregated by gender. To that end, we used Proquest Central, a multidisciplinary research database with access to publications on health and medical sciences, social sciences, business, arts, humanities, education, etc. Through this service, we designed the first version of a search equation that would allow us to get the first collection of publications on the topic of interest. After multiple iterations to refine the search equation we settled on the following equation in English and Spanish:

[abstract(violence) OR abstract(crime) OR abstract(conflict) OR abstract(war) OR abstract(IPV)) AND ((labor force participation) OR (labor market outcomes) OR employment OR (economic outcomes)) AND (summary(Latin America) OR summary(LAC)] [12]

In a next step, the aim was to expand the search through the use of Inciteful.xyz, a set of free online tools that help map academic literature on a specific topic. The first tool builds a network of articles from citations, finding the most similar, relevant, and most cited papers related to a seed paper. The second one connects two or more papers through citations. This is useful as it connects domains of research and allows the addition of more papers to the seed papers to refine the network. Both tools use network algorithm analyses and provide visual and interactive interfaces to make the search more user-friendly. Through the use of Inciteful.xyz we aimed to

[12] Spanish versión: (abstract(violencia) OR abstract(conflicto) OR abstract(crimen) OR abstract(guerra)) AND (empleo OR (mercado laboral) OR (participación laboral)) AND (summary(América Latina) OR summary(Latinoamérica) OR summary(LATAM))

find papers through the use of the network that might not have appeared through the Proquest search. Note that Inciteful.xyz, unlike Proquest, uses citations instead of keywords as search anchors.

This first broad search allowed us to identify papers that directly address the effects of crime on labor market outcomes and that disaggregated the results by gender, as well as those that explicitly focused on the effects of crime or violence on women's economic outcomes. Through an assessment of these papers, we assembled an initial list of mechanisms through which violent crime differentially affects the labor market outcomes of women and men: We then ran another iteration of the search equation, including terms referencing possible channels:

(abstract(violence) OR abstract(crime) OR abstract(conflict) OR abstract(war) OR abstract(IPV)) AND ((labor force participation) OR (labor market outcomes) OR employment OR (economic outcomes)) AND (summary(Latin America) OR summary(LAC)) AND ((stigma) OR (mobility) OR (commute) OR (depression) OR (anxiety) OR (education) OR (forced displacement) OR (migration) OR (IPV) OR (GBV))

In terms of methodology and results, we focused on articles that used robust empirical strategies that go beyond simple correlations. We mostly selected papers that implemented a methodological approach aiming at uncovering causal relations. We also included literature review papers as well as country and regional reports that give additional context. Finally, we emphasized the analysis of articles that were closely related to the topic, implemented a causal empirical strategy, and explored mechanisms when possible. Although the literature review is focused on LAC, we occasionally we reference papers focused on other regions to highlight some key topics.

Appendix 2: Overview of WBL with a Focus on LAC

WBL is a World Bank initiative that assesses how legal and policy frameworks impact women's economic opportunities in 190 economies worldwide. Since its launch in 2010, WBL has provided comparable and comprehensive data on laws, policies, and institutional frameworks that affect women's ability to work, own assets, and participate in the economy.

The WBL 1.0 dataset documents legal reforms from 1971 to 2024 across eight core topics relevant to women's economic participation: Mobility, Workplace, Pay, Marriage, Parenthood,

Entrepreneurship, Assets, and Pension. The WBL 2.0 framework expands this scope by introducing two new indicators—Safety and Childcare—while also assessing not just the de jure legal framework but also the de facto implementation of these laws. This includes evaluating supportive frameworks for legal implementation and gathering expert opinions on how laws impact women in practice.

The WBL index scores economies across three pillars:

- Legal Frameworks (de jure): Measures the existence of gender-equal laws.
- Supportive Frameworks: Assesses policies, institutions, and mechanisms that enable the implementation of laws.
- Expert Opinions on Enforcement (de facto): Captures real-world outcomes through expert assessments.

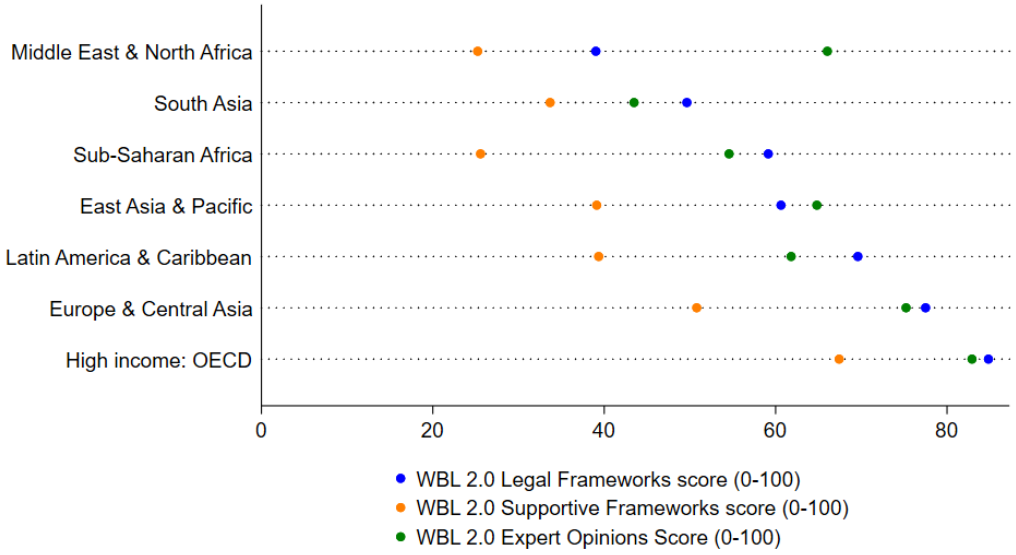
Each topic is scored from 0 to 100, with 100 representing full legal and policy equality. The overall score is the average of the ten topic scores, allowing for cross-country comparisons and policy benchmarking.

Figure A.1 shows that Latin America and the Caribbean exhibits a marked gap between formal legal equality and the broader institutional and social environment that shapes women's economic participation. While the region's legal frameworks score is relatively high—comparable to or above several developing regions—the supportive frameworks score remains substantially lower, pointing to persistent weaknesses in implementation, services, and enabling policies. Expert opinions fall between these two dimensions, suggesting that although progress in laws is widely recognized, experts perceive continued barriers in how those laws translate into real opportunities.

In addition, Latin America and the Caribbean exhibits moderate dispersion in WBL 2.0 legal framework scores. The lowest score in the region is 52.5, the average is 69.1, and the highest reaches 85.0. However, when it comes to supportive frameworks, scores vary widely, from as low as 8.3 to a high of 68.3, with an average of 39.3, highlighting gaps in implementation. Similarly, expert opinions on enforcement show significant variation, with scores ranging from 28.1 to 86.2, averaging 61.8. Notably, the gap between legal framework scores and supportive framework scores in LAC is substantial (30 points), underscoring the challenge of translating laws into effective policy action.

Legal protections are crucial for economic inclusion, as stronger laws correlate with more women entering and remaining in the labor force, as well as moving into managerial positions (Amin and Islam, 2022; Islam, Muzi, and Amin, 2019). However, gender disparities and mistreatment—including exposure to crime, harassment, and discrimination—continue to hinder women's participation (Bayraktar, 2022; Ibourk and Elouaourti, 2023; Love, Nikolaev, and Dhakal, 2023). In LAC, these challenges highlight the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms and integrated policies to ensure that laws effectively protect women from violence while also expanding their economic opportunities.

Figure A.1. Comparison of Averaged Legal Frameworks, Supportive Frameworks, and Expert Opinions Scores Across Regions



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Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024 database

Note: Regions and income groups are sorted by the legal frameworks score average, from lowest to highest. The sample size is restricted to the 164 economies for which expert opinions data are available. República Bolivariana de Venezuela is excluded from the income group analysis because it is currently not classified by the World Bank, owing to a lack of reliable data of adequate quality. OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; WBL = Women, Business and the Law.

Appendix 3: LAC Regional Findings – WBL Safety Indicator

The Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region stands out globally for its progress in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) through legal and supportive frameworks. The World Bank's Women, Business and the Law (WBL) project's Safety indicator evaluates these frameworks by analyzing laws, policies, and perceptions related to child marriage, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and femicide. Despite regional achievements, gaps remain in ensuring comprehensive protections for women and girls.

Globally, over 90% of economies lack robust legal provisions to address all forms of violence against women, as reflected in the average Safety indicator score of just 36.3. The LAC region leads with the highest regional score of 50.0, surpassing Europe and Central Asia (47.8). Yet, the need for legislative reform persists, as many economies in the region fall short of offering sufficient protections.

Legal Frameworks: A Mixed Picture: While six economies in LAC – Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, and Puerto Rico – achieved a perfect score of 100 on the Safety legal index, others lag significantly behind. Thirteen economies scored 25 or lower, with Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Haiti, and St. Lucia scoring zero. This disparity underscores the need for reforms to close the gap in legal protections.

Child Marriage: Legislation to combat child marriage remains inadequate across most of the region. Only seven economies, such as Panama, have laws setting the minimum marriage age at 18 without exceptions and include penalties for violations. In stark contrast, 25 economies lack adequate legal measures, leaving millions of girls vulnerable to this harmful practice.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment laws in LAC reveal both progress and deficiencies. Sixteen economies, including Costa Rica and Suriname, have enacted comprehensive legislation addressing harassment in workplaces, schools, transportation, and public spaces. However, the remaining half of the region either lacks these laws entirely or provides insufficient protections.

Domestic Violence: Domestic violence laws are more widespread, with 24 economies addressing physical, psychological, sexual, and financial abuse. For instance, Peru's Law 30364

provides not only criminal penalties for abusers but also critical support services such as free health care, legal aid, and temporary shelters for victims.

Femicide: Femicide, the intentional killing of women due to their gender, is explicitly criminalized in 17 economies. El Salvador, for example, imposes stringent penalties of up to 50 years' imprisonment for aggravated femicide. Despite this progress, nearly half of the region still lacks explicit legal protections against this grave form of violence.

Supportive Frameworks: Bridging Gaps in Implementation: While legal frameworks are essential, their effectiveness hinges on supportive mechanisms. The LAC region has an average supportive frameworks score of 46.1, higher than the global average of 38.2. Two economies, Peru and Uruguay, achieved perfect scores, but 14 economies, including Barbados and Suriname, scored 25 or below, reflecting substantial implementation gaps. Notably, 15 economies have comprehensive mechanisms for addressing GBV, such as action plans against child marriage, sexual harassment guidelines, and survivor support services. Uruguay exemplifies good practices with national programs offering psychosocial and legal aid, alongside local initiatives like "Montevideo Free from Sexual Harassment in Public Spaces."

Monitoring and Budgetary Commitments: Government entities in 16 economies monitor and implement services to combat GBV, such as Costa Rica's Instituto Nacional de la Mujer (INAMU), which oversees national gender equality policies. However, only 21 economies allocate specific budgets for violence prevention and response. Mexico, for instance, dedicated 348 billion pesos in its 2023 federal budget to gender equality programs, marking significant progress in resource allocation.

In summary, while the LAC region leads globally in the Safety indicator, challenges remain in ensuring comprehensive legal protections and robust implementation frameworks. Bridging these gaps will be crucial to safeguarding women and girls across the region.