Pathways out of Violence: Evidence on the Role of a Temporary Cash Transfer to Victims of Abuse*

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Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) often traps women in abusive relationships through economic dependence, financial control, and persistent labor market scarring. A growing literature shows that exposure to violence has long-lasting negative effects on women's employment and earnings [Aizer, 2010], partly driven by mechanisms of economic control and labor market sabotage within abusive relationships [Adams-Prassl et al., 2024]. While policy responses have traditionally focused on emergency protection and immediate safety, much less is known about whether economic support can help survivors rebuild stable labor market trajectories and achieve durable exits from violence, especially in high-income countries.

An expanding body of evidence—primarily from low- and middle-income countries—finds that cash transfer programs can reduce intimate partner violence by strengthening women's bargaining power and relaxing financial constraints [Buller et al., 2018, Hidrobo et al., 2016]. However, existing studies largely focus on short-run effects and direct measures of violence, and provide limited evidence on how income support shapes survivors' labor market trajectories and long-term pathways out of abuse in advanced economies.

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This paper studies the causal effects of a targeted income support program for survivors of domestic violence in Italy, the *Income of Freedom* (*Reddito di Libertà*). The program provides a temporary cash transfer of 400 euros per month for up to 12 months to women certified as victims of domestic violence by accredited Anti-Violence Centers and engaged in structured recovery pathways. The policy was implemented through staggered funding waves across regions, with applications financed on a strict first-come, first-served basis and subject to budget exhaustion. This institutional design generates plausibly exogenous variation in access to income support among observationally similar applicants.

We combine administrative data from the Italian Social Security Administration (INPS), covering the universe of applicants between 2019 and 2024 (approximately 5,500 women), with a panel dataset of Anti-Violence Centers belonging to the *D.i.Re.* network. The INPS data provide detailed monthly information on employment, earnings, contract type, and working time, both before and after application. The staggered and budget-driven allocation of funds creates quasi-random variation in treatment timing, which we exploit using a staggered difference-in-differences framework with heterogeneous treatment effects following Callaway and Sant'Anna [2021]. Extensive balance tests and pre-trend analyses support the validity of the research design.

We find that access to income support leads to substantial and persistent improvements in labor market outcomes. Treated women experience an increase in earnings of approximately 15 percent, with effects concentrated in the first 12–15 months after treatment. We also find positive effects on employment (+1.4 percentage points) and, more importantly, significant improvements in job quality: the probability of holding a permanent contract increases by about 4.8 percentage points, while the probability of full-time employment rises by 2.5 percentage points. These results suggest that income support not only affects labor supply at the extensive margin, but also facilitates transitions into more stable and higher-quality employment relationships.

In a second step, we examine whether these labor market gains translate into more durable exits from violence. Since direct measures of violence are not available in administrative data, we use repeated access to Anti-Violence Centers as a proxy for continued or cyclical exposure to abuse. This approach is consistent with a broader literature that studies institutional interactions as indicators of violence dynamics [Bhalotra et al., 2019]. We construct a continuous measure of local exposure to the program by combining information on funded applications with the geographic catchment areas of centers, and exploit variation in both the timing and intensity of funding across areas. Using a continuous-treatment difference-in-differences framework [de Chaisemartin and D'Haultfœuille, 2020], we find that higher local program coverage significantly reduces recurring access to centers. Our preferred estimates

indicate a decline of approximately 24% of recurring cases, with no corresponding effect on first-time users, supporting the interpretation that the program reduces re-victimization rather than initial help-seeking.

Taken together, these findings provide evidence that temporary income support can play a key role in enabling survivors of domestic violence to achieve economic independence and break the cycle of abuse. By relaxing short-run financial constraints and improving access to stable employment, the program strengthens women's outside options and mitigates economic mechanisms that sustain violence. More broadly, the results highlight the importance of integrating income support into policy responses to domestic violence, complementing existing interventions focused on protection and services.

Keywords: Violence against Women, Income Support.

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