

“Don’t Leave Me Alone”: Unilateral Divorce and Intimate Partner Violence

Abstract

The paper investigates the dynamic effects of unilateral divorce legalization on intimate partner violence (IPV) in Mexico, building upon existing evidence. It adopts a heterogeneous-robust event study, leveraging data from a repeated cross-sectional survey and exploiting the staggered implementation of the reform across Mexican states. The policy led to a 7.2% increase in physical IPV in the medium term, specifically between 5 to 9 years after its introduction. No significant effects were observed in shorter or longer time frames, nor on other forms of IPV. The main findings are robust across various sensitivity analyses, addressing implementation date discrepancies, potential confounders, and alternative estimation methods. The rise in physical IPV is primarily driven by women who remained married, with suggestive evidence indicating both a backlash effect and an instrumental use of violence. The analysis contributes to the literature by looking at long-term impacts, increasing the external validity of shorter-run effects, adopting a new methodology, and deeply investigating the underlying mechanisms. Overall, it underscores the importance of addressing gender norms together with enhancing women's outside options.