

**IGARAPÉ INSTITUTE**  
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PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR  
FORMULATING PUBLIC  
POLICIES TO **PREVENT**  
**VIOLENCE AGAINST**  
**WOMEN**

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# Introduction

Violence against women is a complex and devastating reality, manifesting in various forms, including physical, sexual, psychological, moral and economic abuse. Within this context, this guide presents programs and initiatives evaluated by renowned organizations such as the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (JPAL), the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, and UN Women, highlighting approaches that have shown high effectiveness and efficiency in preventing violence against women. The goal is to use these practical experiences as a foundation for evidence-based public policy formulation to prevent violence against women.

We begin by analyzing the risk and protective factors associated with violence against women. Using the "Pyramid of Gender-based Violence" by the Institute for Studies on State and Participation - Health as a framework, we explore the different forms in which these factors operate, from individual to structural. We also provide context for the legal landscape related to violence against women, emphasizing the role of Law nº 11.340, known as Maria da Penha Law, as a regulatory milestone in Brazil.

Based on examples of programs already implemented and evaluated worldwide, the guide underscores the importance of initiatives that promote women's financial autonomy through access to employment opportunities, professional training, and entrepreneurship. It also emphasizes efforts to challenge gender stereotypes and foster relationships based on mutual respect and equal rights.

The guide reaffirms the need for public policies focused on preventing intrafamilial and domestic violence while also recognizing the need to strengthen the protection network for women with specialized support services and effective security measures. Additionally, to transform environments where violence against women occurs more frequently, such as schools and homes, the guide suggests implementing educational and awareness programs on gender-based violence, promoting safe and inclusive environments.

Finally, the guide highlights the importance of involving all sectors of society in implementing these policies, including the government, civil society, the private sector, and the community at large. Only through coordinated, long-term efforts can we create an environment where all women can live free from violence and with dignity.

# Understanding the Context and Multiple Forms of Violence Against Women

Understood not only as a violation of human rights but also as a public safety and health issue, violence against women is a complex and pervasive manifestation of gender inequality that affects all areas of society. It is a multifaceted phenomenon that requires a comprehensive and integrated approach, not just for its mitigation but especially for its prevention. Ensuring that girls and women live safe and healthy lives without exposure to any form of physical or emotional violence should be a priority in effective, efficient, and gender-equal public administration committed to social development.

Violence against women originates from gender inequality, rooted in a belief system that posits women's inferiority to men in society. These beliefs shape the roles women play in society and societal expectations about their behavior, directly influencing the risks and vulnerabilities they face.

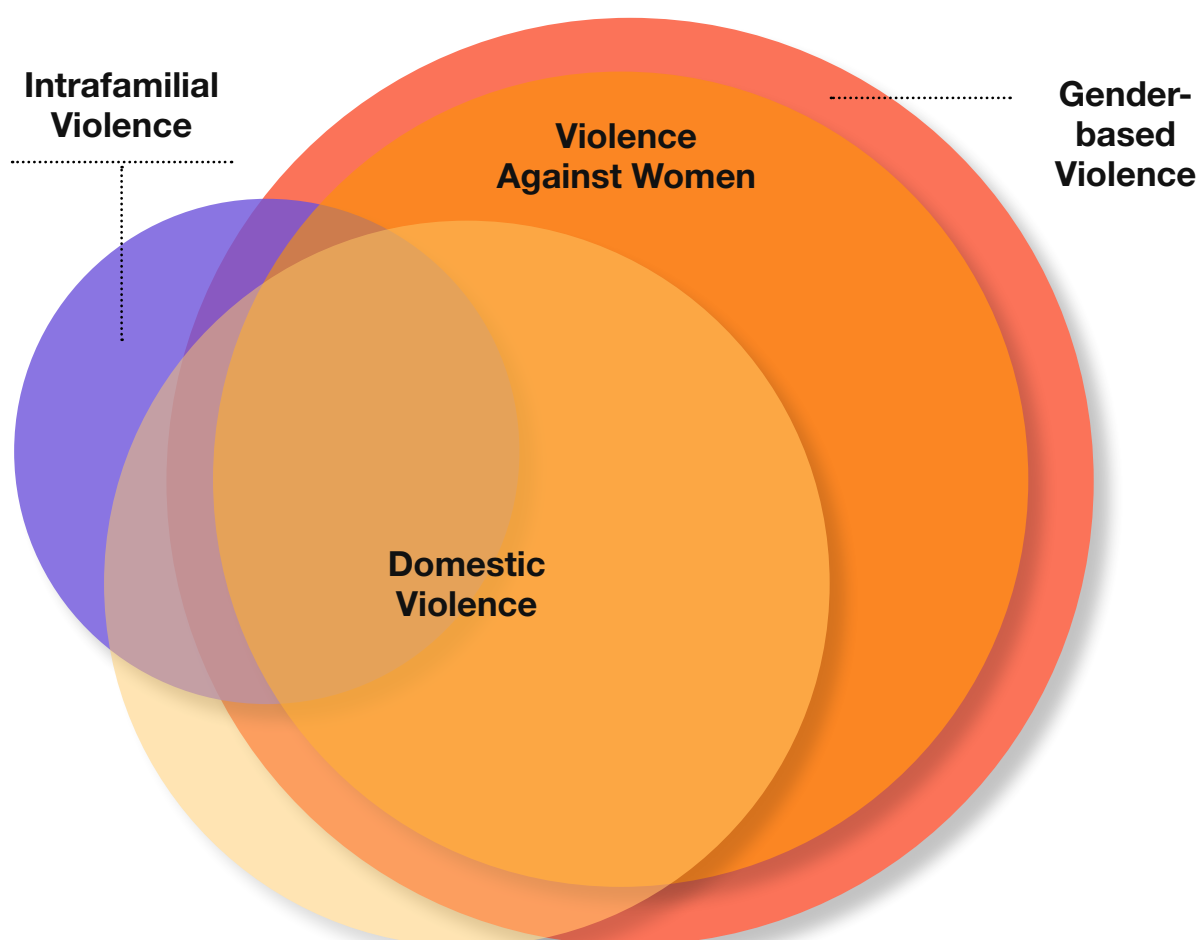
In this context, the concept of gender becomes fundamental. There is a set of historically constructed social beliefs and practices that shape the gender roles each of us assumes in society. These beliefs and expectations about how people should act and behave form the basis for **gender-based violence**.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that gender-based violence does not only affect girls and women but also other groups that tend to be marginalized and vulnerable to these beliefs and prejudices, such as the LGBTQIA+ community.

Similarly, **domestic violence** is also considered a form of gender-based violence. While this type of violence is not limited exclusively to women,<sup>2</sup> they often receive the most attention as they represent a significant majority of victims in Brazil. According to the Maria da Penha Law,<sup>3</sup> domestic violence against women includes any action or omission based on gender that causes death, injury, physical suffering, sexual or psychological harm, and moral or property damage.<sup>4</sup>

This type of violence can occur in the domestic environment, within the family, or in any intimate relationship, regardless of cohabitation.<sup>5</sup> It is essential to highlight that domestic violence is not confined to situations where people live in the same household. For instance, it can also occur in a relationship between dating partners who do not live together but share a private life.

Specifically, **family violence**,<sup>6</sup> also known as intrafamily violence, involves violent acts committed within homes by family members – such as partners, parents, siblings, uncles, and cousins – against women or relatives of any age and gender. It is important to consider this type of violence because it significantly contributes to the normalization of violence. Research indicates that exposure to such violence can influence the development of children and young people, sometimes leading to aggressive behaviors in the future.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 1.** Forms of gender-based violence

Source: Created by Igarapé Institute.

Violence against women is multifaceted and can be categorized into two main types based on the intent and the outcome of the violent act: lethal and non-lethal violence.

**Lethal violence** includes acts of aggression that result in the victim's death.<sup>8</sup> This form of violence is tragically common in various contexts, from domestic violence situations to honor crimes and femicides. In addition to being a grave violation of human rights, the murder of women often represents the final stage of a series of assaults.<sup>9</sup>

**Non-lethal violence**, on the other hand, encompasses a wide range of behaviors and actions that cause physical, emotional, or psychological harm to the victim without resulting in death. It includes physical violence, psychological abuse, sexual violence, as well as moral or property-related violence. Although the immediate consequences of non-lethal violence are not fatal, they can leave deep and lasting physical and emotional scars on the victims.

Law Nº 11.340 has been crucial in raising awareness about violence against women and ensuring protection and access to justice for victims since its enactment in 2006. This legislation is intrinsically linked to the efforts of activists, civil society organizations, and women's movements that have fought for the rights of women victims of violence for decades.

Maria da Penha Maia Fernandes, who became a symbol of the fight against domestic violence in Brazil, suffered physical abuse from her husband for years and survived two attempted murders. Her perseverance in seeking justice took her case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, resulting in the condemnation of the Brazilian state for omission and negligence in addressing violence against women.

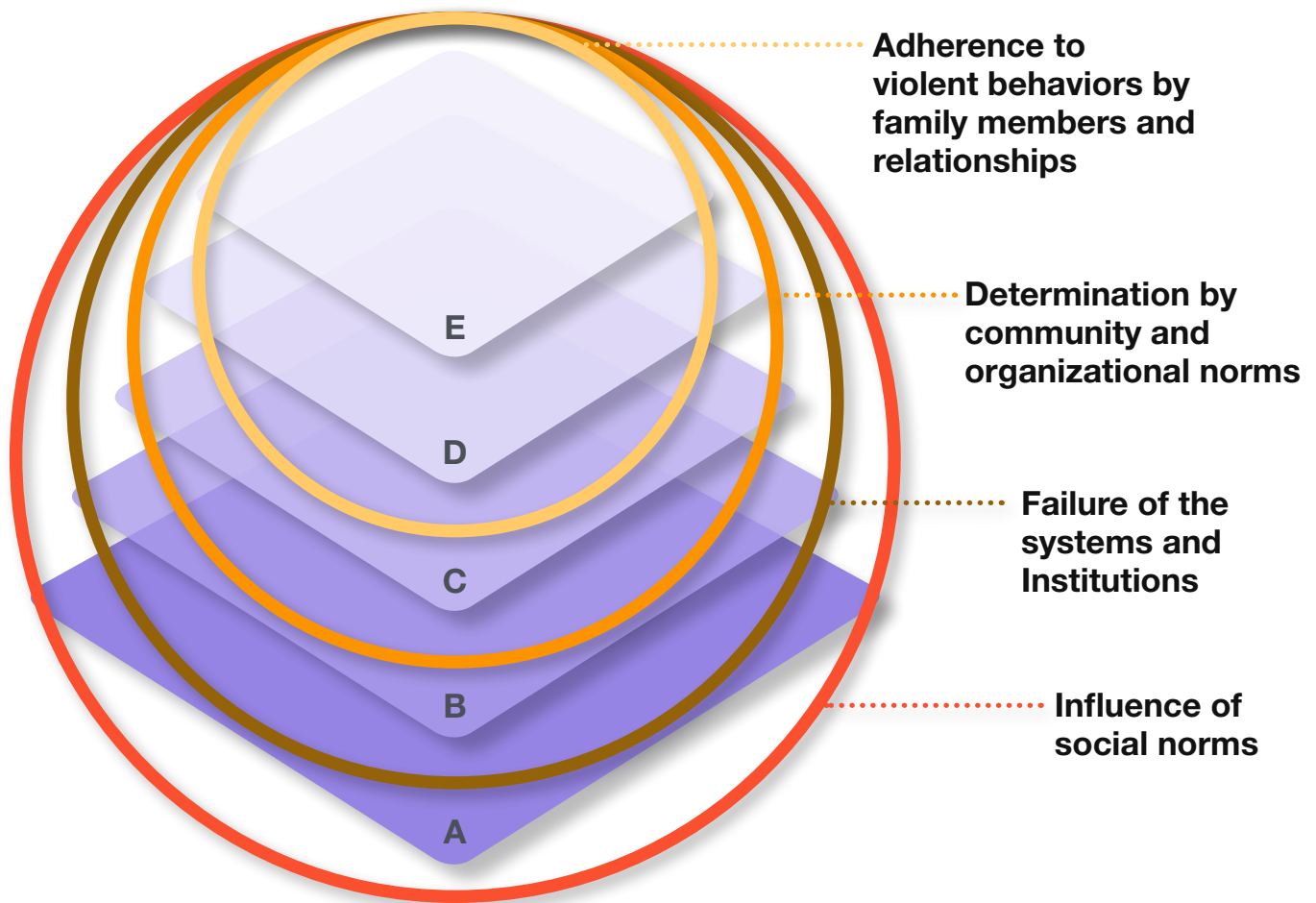
Key points of the Maria da Penha Law include the implementation of protective measures, the definition and expansion of forms of violence, the creation of specialized courts, the tightening of liberty restriction measures for aggressors, and the strengthening of the support network for women in situations of violence. This includes the creation of shelters and social, psychological, and legal assistance services.

The legislation also established mechanisms to curb domestic and family violence against women, recognizing different forms of violence and defining concepts for each one of them, such as:

- **Physical violence:** defined as any act that harms a woman's bodily integrity or health (as established in Article 7º, item I).<sup>10</sup>
- **Psychological violence:** defined as any behavior that causes emotional damage and a reduction of self-esteem, or that harms and disturbs her personal development, or seeks to degrade or control her actions, behaviors, beliefs, and decisions through threats, constraint, humiliation, manipulation, isolation, insult, constant surveillance, persistent stalking, blackmail, violation of privacy, ridicule, exploitation, and limitation of the right to come and go, or any other means that cause harm to her psychological health and self-determination (as established in Article 7º, item II).<sup>11</sup>

- **Sexual violence:** defined as any action that forces her to witness, maintain, or participate in unwanted sexual relations through intimidation, threat, coercion, or use of force; that induces her to commercialize or use her sexuality in any way; that prevents her from using any contraceptive method or forces her into marriage, pregnancy, abortion, or prostitution through coercion, blackmail, bribery, or manipulation; or that limits or annuls the exercise of her sexual and reproductive rights (as established in Article 7º, item III).<sup>12</sup>
- **Patrimonial violence:** defined as any action that constitutes the retention, subtraction, partial or total destruction of her objects, work tools, personal documents, property, values, rights, or economic resources, including those intended to meet her needs (as established in Article 7º, item IV).<sup>13</sup>
- **Moral violence:** understood as any action that constitutes slander, defamation, or libel (as established in Article 7º, item V).<sup>14</sup>

These forms of violence operate on multiple levels and have various consequences in women's lives, impacting their mental health, financial autonomy, and freedom of movement, among other aspects. Beyond these direct consequences, such violences reinforce a belief system that normalizes aggression against women, including girls under 18 and older women. The following figure illustrates the different types of violence against women and demonstrates how, at each level, these acts of violence interact with the social environment.

**Figura 2.** Violence Against Women Multidimensions

**A.** Structural prejudice and discrimination influence roles and social expectations, impacting women's participation in the public life and financial autonomy.

**B.** Community social expectations influence types of professions and roles, as well as access to private services and goods.

**C.** Psychological and moral violence reinforces beliefs about women's roles in society. Patrimonial violence restricts women's autonomy.

**D.** Physical and sexual assaults highlight the lack of autonomy over their bodies on an individual level and impact their overall well-being.

**E.** Femicide: Women lose their right to live simply because they are women.

Source: Developed by the Igarapé Institute based on the [Pyramid of Gender-based Violence](#) by the Institute for Studies on State and Participation - Health (IDEP SALUD)

The figure above provides a visual representation of the complex interactions between external and adjacent factors that shape various forms of violence against women. These variables are intrinsically related, contributing to the perpetuation of aggression and, eventually, adding new layers of violence to women's lives.

At the base, structural prejudices and discrimination significantly influence the social and gender roles assigned to men and women, as well as the expectations associated with these roles. These expectations, shaped by widely disseminated, internalized, and accepted patriarchal social norms, have historically determined the association of private space with femininity and public space with masculinity, directly affecting social relations, the division of labor, and access to services and resources. In this context, the role of public institutions in protecting women's rights and well-being becomes central.

Adding new layers of violence to women's lives are psychological, moral, and patrimonial violence, all determined by community and organizational norms that reinforce and perpetuate rigidly defined social roles. These forms of violence restrict women's opportunities and shape their life possibilities, consolidating the imposed social norms regarding the female role in society. Specifically, patrimonial violence limits women's financial autonomy by controlling their economic resources and other essential assets needed to meet their basic needs.

Physical and sexual assaults, in turn, highlight how the lack of women's autonomy permeates crucial aspects of their lives, reflecting a lack of control over their bodies and directly impacting their overall well-being. These violent behaviors, rooted in individual and family relationships, often play a central role in the emergence of these forms of violence. They are exacerbated by surrounding factors, such as social norms that define relationships between men and women and between public and private spaces, determining what is considered acceptable based on gender. Moreover, the inefficiency of institutions responsible for protecting and improving

women's living conditions, combined with community and organizational norms that incorporate sexist aspects, further deepens this scenario.

The murder of women often represents the final stage of a series of assaults, highlighting the importance of preventive policies in breaking these cycles of violence that affect women throughout their lives. Femicide, classified as aggravated intentional homicide, occurs specifically when a woman is killed because of her gender. This crime can involve domestic and family violence, as well as contempt and discrimination based on gender, standing out as the pinnacle of accumulated violence dynamics that ultimately deny women their right to life.

Addressing violence against women requires a continuous and coordinated commitment from public officials. In this regard, this publication has been created to provide practical guidance for developing and implementing public policies that not only prevent these forms of violence but also incorporate fundamental aspects of protective measures.

## Risk and Protective Factors

Identifying risk and protective factors related to violence against women is crucial for developing public policies that can intervene effectively and preventively. Table 1 outlines some elements to consider when formulating these policies to address violence against women. It is important to note that these relationships are not automatic or cause-and-effect but factors that can increase risks or mitigate vulnerabilities.



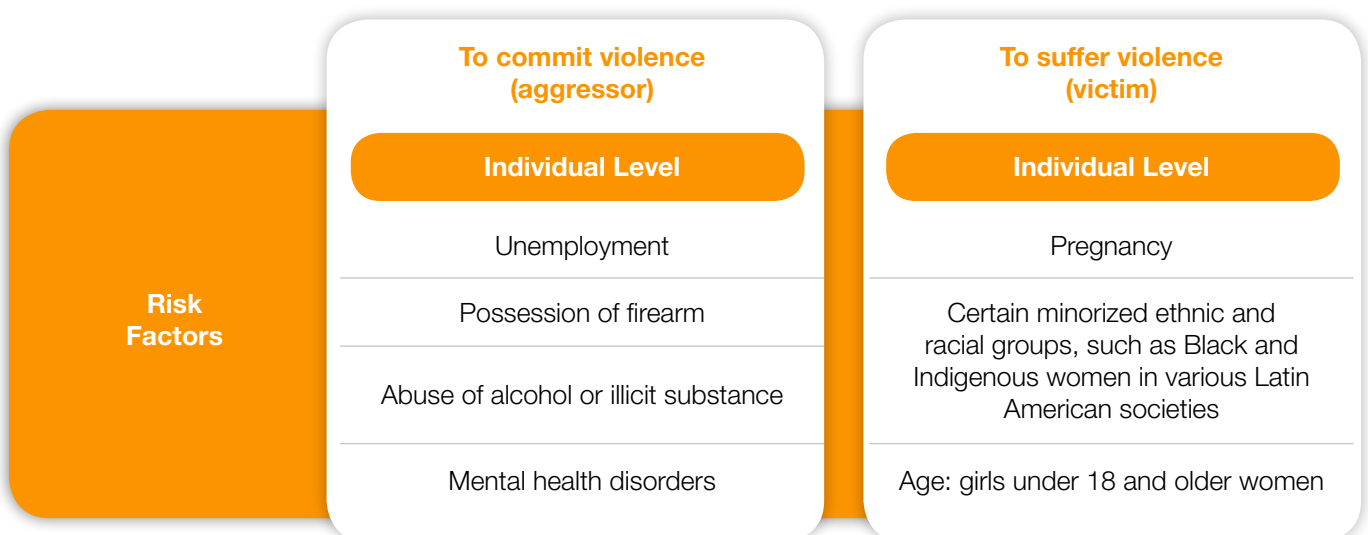
While violence originates from gender inequality, not all women are equally exposed to all types of violence. Some **risk factors** increase the vulnerability of certain women compared to others. Similarly, there are **protective factors** that, when strengthened, can help prevent violence.

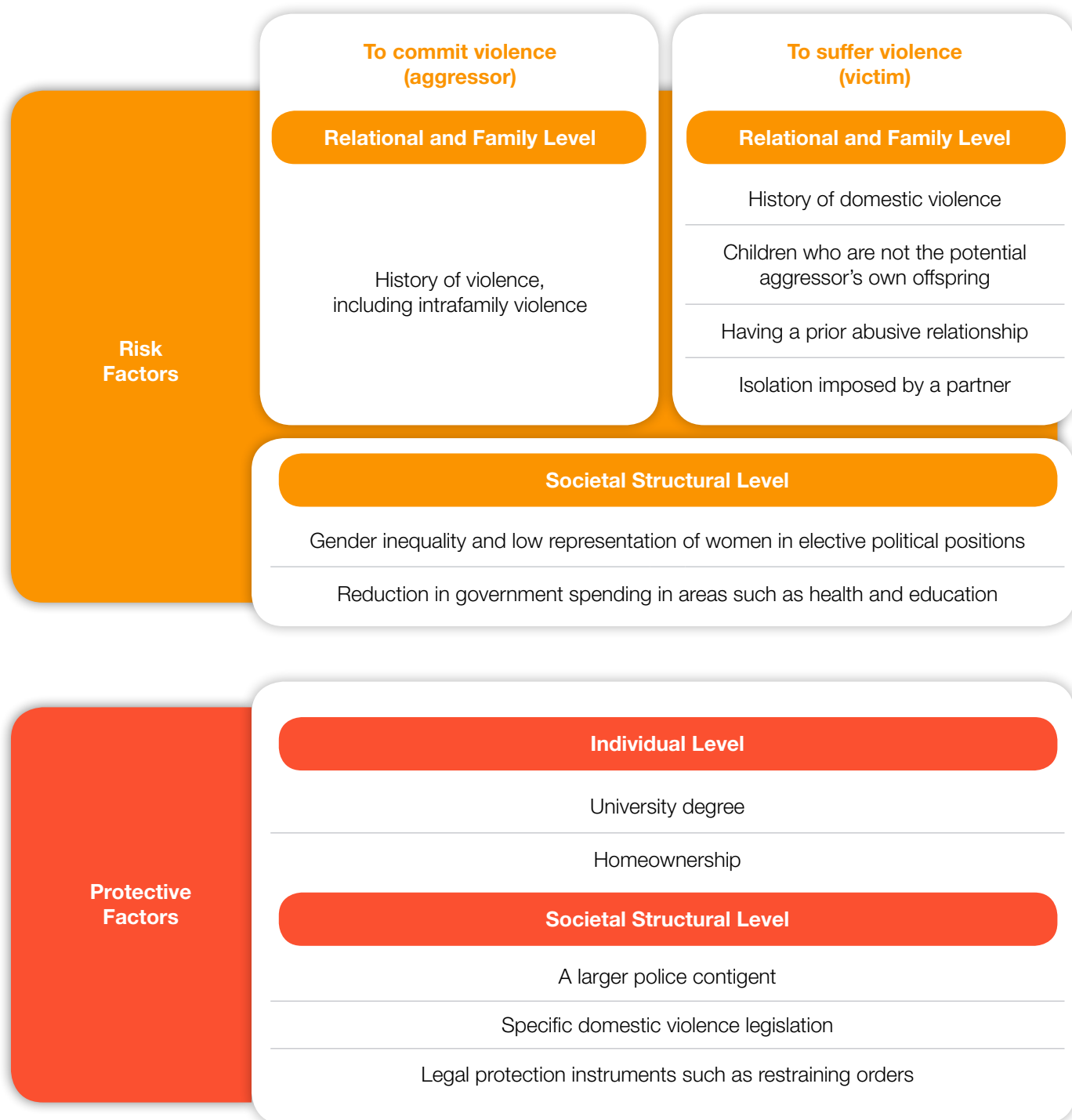
Risk factors contribute to creating an environment conducive to violent acts, while protective factors decrease the likelihood of involvement in violent behaviors, either as an aggressor or as a victim. Understanding and addressing these factors is essential to developing effective prevention strategies to create safer and less vulnerable environments.

- **Risk factors:** A risk factor is a characteristic, condition, or circumstance that increases the likelihood of involvement in violent behaviors, either as an aggressor or as a victim. These factors can contribute to creating a vulnerable environment conducive to violent acts.
- **Protective factors:** Protective factors are characteristics, conditions, or circumstances that reduce the likelihood of involvement in violent behaviors, either as an aggressor or as a victim. These protective factors, whether individual, social, economic, cultural, or environmental, serve as resources that strengthen individuals and communities, reducing their vulnerability to adverse situations.

The chart presented in Table 1 was based on studies to identify potential vulnerabilities or conditions that increase the likelihood of involvement in violent behaviors, known as risk factors. The illustration seeks to assist in developing more effective prevention strategies by identifying protective factors. It is important to emphasize that the identified elements are neither exhaustive nor determinative (causal) of violence occurrence. They are valuable indicators, based on studies and evidence, that guide the formulation of efficient and effective public policies.

**Table 1.** Risk and Protective Factors





Source: Developed by the Igarapé Institute based on the publication [Understanding and addressing violence against women](#)<sup>15</sup> by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The risk factors were divided into two categories: those affecting victims and those related to aggressors. They were organized into three levels of analysis: individual, relational, and societal structure. At the personal level, specific circumstances increase the chances of someone becoming an aggressor or victim. In the relational and family context, conditions influencing individuals to take on these roles are examined based on interpersonal interactions. Issues shaping these dynamics of violence at the societal structural level are explored, considering entrenched social norms and established institutions.

Regarding risk factors, studies identify variables that increase the likelihood of violence occurring. Individually, being unemployed, possessing firearms, using illicit substances or alcohol, and having mental health disorders are identified as risk factors for aggressors. For victims, being pregnant, belonging to marginalized ethnic or racial groups, and being at the age extremes – either minors or older women – are considered risk factors for suffering gender-based violence.

In the context of relationships and the family nucleus, having a history of violence or aggression is a risk factor for an individual becoming an aggressor. For victims, the risks include having previously experienced domestic violence, having children from previous relationships, having experienced abusive relationships in the past, and facing social isolation imposed by a partner.

At the societal structural level, the risk factors are shared by both aggressors and victims, reflecting the broader structural challenges that society must address. These include gender inequality, which perpetuates rigid and limiting gender roles, and reduced government investment in areas such as health and education, which hinders the implementation of awareness and prevention policies.

Regarding protective factors, studies show that specific characteristics or circumstances can reduce the likelihood of involvement in violent behaviors, both for aggressors and victims. Having a university degree and owning a home are considered protective factors at the individual level. At the societal structural level, factors such as police presence on the streets, specific legislation to combat domestic violence, and legal protective instruments, including restraining orders against aggressors, are essential.

## Public Policies for Preventing Violence Against Women

Understanding the landscape of violence against women, as well as the associated risk and protective factors, is essential for advancing the formulation of public policies that focus on both the prevention and protection against such violence.

The report "Tackling Violence Against Women,"<sup>16</sup> developed by the Igarapé Institute and published in November 2023, thoroughly analyzes initiatives and public policies implemented to combat violence against women. Combining this report with the present guide can offer valuable insights for formulating and implementing more effective programs and policies.

By examining 99 policies, interventions, and initiatives from respected organizations such as the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (JPAL), the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, and UN Women, the report identifies various approaches to addressing this issue. These approaches are categorized into prevention and protection, aiming to promote gender equality before violence occurs and support victims afterward.

The detailed analysis of existing policies helps direct efforts toward developing new strategies that effectively address the root causes of violence against women and offer compassionate and efficient responses to victims.

**Table 2:** Types of initiatives identified in the evaluation process

	Types	Description	Subtype
Prevention	Prevention of intrafamily violence	This type of initiative is based on the premise that violence within the family can contribute to the normalization of violence and influence the occurrence of future violence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on cognitive-behavioral skills (anger management, conflict resolution)</li> <li>• Focus on parenting skills (creating harmonious and loving family environments)</li> </ul>
Prevention	Women's empowerment	These initiatives aim to prevent violence against women by empowering them in one or more dimensions, excluding economic empowerment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social empowerment (through sports or self-defense, as seen in the evaluated initiatives)</li> <li>• Leadership and political participation</li> </ul>
Prevention	Financial autonomy	These initiatives focus on preventing violence against women by promoting economic or financial autonomy (economic dimension of empowerment).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to financial resources</li> <li>• Training and capacity building</li> <li>• Professional occupation</li> </ul>
Prevention	Focused on gender norms change	These initiatives aim to expand traditional gender roles and deconstruct violent masculinities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication campaigns (raising awareness about gender roles)</li> <li>• Training and capacity building (related to women's rights, violence against women, and gender roles)</li> <li>• Cognitive-behavioral skills (to end violent masculinities)</li> </ul>
Protection/ Prevention	Focused on facilitators	These initiatives target specific risk factors such as substance abuse and alcohol consumption. They also include measures to restrict the circulation of firearms, which are commonly used to murder women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing alcohol and substance abuse</li> <li>• Limiting access to firearms</li> </ul>
Protection	Focused on individuals	These initiatives target aggressors and survivors of violence. For survivors, the evaluations analyzed in this research focused solely on access to specialized services. Initiatives for aggressors aim to prevent the recurrence of acts of violence against women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survivors - Access to specialized services (related to support after experiencing violence)</li> <li>• Aggressors - Cognitive-behavioral skills (aiming to deconstruct violent masculinities and improve anger management and conflict resolution skills)</li> <li>• Aggressors - Punishments (legal penalties, such as imprisonment)</li> </ul>

	Types	Description	Subtype
<b>Protection/ Prevention</b>	Focused on institutions	These initiatives aim to enhance the responses of various institutions within the women's protection network. They also include preventive measures, such as the creation of legal instruments that criminalize violent behaviors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specialized legal assistance</li> <li>Comprehensive protection centers</li> <li>Legal framework (development/enhancement of legislation)</li> <li>Police (protocols, specialized units, etc.)</li> <li>Health sector (care and identification of new cases)</li> </ul>
<b>Prevention</b>	Focused on public spaces	These initiatives address risk factors related to public spaces, such as transportation infrastructure, lighting, and urban design.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public transportation (especially women-only spaces)</li> <li>Urban design</li> </ul>
<b>Prevention/ protection</b>	Multidimensional programs	These initiatives aim to include multisectoral public policies focusing on various aspects related to the protection and prevention of violence against women.	

Source: Igarapé Institute (2023). [Enfrentamento da Violência contra mulheres](#). Pg. 5.

No single intervention can fully resolve the issue of violence against women. The most effective approach combines various initiatives over an extended period. Strengthening protective factors and reducing risk factors are crucial. The table below illustrates the effectiveness of interventions by type and circumstances.

**Table 3:** Effectiveness Levels of Interventions by Type

Type of intervention	Main impacts	Effectiveness Level	Determining Factors
Financial autonomy	Financial autonomy and empowerment	Medium-High	Interventions with monetary transfers are more effective
Prevention of intrafamily violence	Aggressive behavior	High	Interventions focused on the children and youth's well-being yield the best results
Women's empowerment	Empowerment	Medium-High	In some strongly patriarchal cultures, empowerment initiatives face additional barriers, particularly within the domestic sphere. While these initiatives have been successful in the public sphere, they have not managed to impact women's decision-making power within their own households

Type of intervention	Main impacts	Effectiveness Level	Determining Factors
Gender norms change	Economic autonomy, gender norms change, and reduced violence	High	Interventions focused on educating about women's human rights, violence against women, and gender equality were more successful
Focused on aggressors	Violence reduction	Medium	Interventions focused on cognitive skills for anger management were the most successful. The duration of the intervention also influenced its impact
Focused on survivors	Violence reduction and improved well-being	High	Interventions that focused on at-risk groups, such as economically vulnerable women and pregnant women, had the most positive impact
Focused on institutions	Reduced violence, identification of new cases, and access to specialized services.	Medium	Interventions focused on developing legal frameworks on violence and creating comprehensive care centers were the most successful
Focused on facilitators	Violence reduction	High	Despite high incidence, they do not address the core of the violence but the facilitators. Therefore, they should be accompanied by other broader interventions
Focused on public spaces	Violence reduction and gender norms change	Medium-Low	Robust evaluations of this type of intervention focus on the separation of men and women in public transportation, especially trains and subways. However, such interventions can have side effects, such as increased violence in non-exclusive areas
Multidimensional programs	Access to specialized services and comprehensive empowerment.	Medium	The main challenge of this type of intervention is its effective implementation, given its multiple dimensions, limited resources, and long duration

Source: Igarapé Institute (2023). [Enfrentamento da Violência contra mulheres](#). Pg. 25.

Most of the evaluated initiatives, specifically 61 out of the 99 analyzed, focus on prevention. Of these, 29 evaluations were classified as highly robust, and 11 concluded that the programs were highly effective.<sup>17</sup> These initiatives cover different interventions and can serve as models for implementation in other countries, adapted to local characteristics.

Here are practical examples of highly effective public policies:

## Promoting Financial Autonomy

Generally, initiatives promoting women's financial autonomy do not directly measure the impact on the incidence of violence. These policies focus on factors contributing to prevention, recognizing that financially independent women are less likely to enter or remain in abusive relationships.

These programs are divided into three main formats:

- I. Access to financial resources.
- II. Training and capacity building.
- III. Job market insertion.

Below are examples of programs focused on access to financial resources and job market insertion.



### Women's Income Generating Support, WINGS (Uganda)<sup>18</sup>

The Women's Income Generating Support (WINGS) program, initiated by AVSI Uganda, aims to combat gender inequality and enhance women's economic performance through three main components: a brief business skills course, an initial business grant of approximately \$150, and regular follow-up by trained community agents. Additionally, the program offers optional components like group formation, training, and self-help initiatives, as well as encouragement for inclusion, training, and support for participants' spouses.

The business skills course lasts about five days and covers essential topics for planning, starting, and managing small businesses. Tailored to illiterate participants – the primary target group – the curriculum is delivered by experienced AVSI professionals who assist in creating business plans. Upon approval, participants receive the \$150 grant, payable in full or in installments.

Post-program follow-up includes three individual and group visits to ensure the success of the new entrepreneurs. AVSI agents provide direct support during the initial business cycles, guiding participants on market challenges and effective business practices.

Although not part of the core program, AVSI promotes the formation of business support networks among participants, encouraging information sharing and business practices within the same community. Family participation is also stimulated, recognizing its importance for the entrepreneurs' success.



Program results showed a significant increase in participants' income and savings, as well as poverty reduction. Generally, AVSI encourages women to use the capital they receive to start retail businesses while maintaining agricultural activities and other tasks. A year post-intervention, monthly earnings doubled from 16,500 Ugandan shillings (UGX) to 31,300 (from U\$6.60 to U\$12.52). Cash savings tripled, and short-term spending and durable assets increased by 30% to 50% compared to the control group. While these changes may seem modest in absolute terms, they represent significant progress given the starting point of these women. The gains were particularly impressive for those with the lowest starting capital and limited access to credit.

However, the need for greater effectiveness and efficiency in poverty reduction and women's empowerment programs is evident. Women's Income Generating Support proved highly effective in increasing participants' income and savings. Still, no significant changes were observed in women's empowerment, social status, or incidence of domestic violence. These findings underscore the complexity of the relationships among economic success, women's empowerment, and the reduction of domestic violence.



### **Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women, EPAG (Liberia)<sup>19</sup>**

The Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (EPAG) project, launched in 2010 by Liberia's Ministry of Gender and Development, aimed to boost the employment and income of 2,500 young Liberian women. This program is part of the Adolescent Girls Initiative (AGI), supported by the World Bank, Nike Foundation, and the governments of Australia, the United Kingdom, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. EPAG provides livelihood and life skills training to facilitate participants' successful entry into the labor market. The proposal includes six months of classroom training, followed by six months of placement and support, during which trainees receive assistance in transitioning to self-employment or paid work.





Data collected from two quantitative surveys conducted in 2010 and 2011 – six months after the classroom training phase ended – showed a 47% increase in employment and an 80% increase in participants' earnings compared to a control group. The impact assessment also highlighted improvements in empowerment measures such as access to financial resources, self-confidence, and reduced anxiety about the future. Although no direct impact on fertility rates or sexual behavior was detected, there were advances in food security and changes in attitudes toward gender norms within the household. Thus, it is clear that training programs play a crucial role in enhancing women's position in the labor market and strengthening their empowerment.

Positive results were further corroborated by favorable feedback from group discussions with program participants. A preliminary cost-benefit analysis indicated that the investment in EPAG's business development training was equated to three years of increased income for the beneficiaries. These findings provide a solid foundation for further investments and research in livelihood programs for young women in Liberia, serving as a model for similar initiatives in other countries, including Rwanda, South Sudan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Haiti, Jordan, and Laos.

## Changing Gender Social Norms

This type of initiative focuses on expanding traditional gender roles and deconstructing violent masculinities. They are developed in three main ways:

- Communication campaigns aim to raise awareness about gender roles.
- Training and capacity-building related to women's rights, violence against women, and gender roles.
- Development of cognitive and behavioral skills to combat violent masculinities and aggressive behaviors.

Next, we explore how Uganda's Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents initiative implemented these approaches.



### **Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents, ELA (Uganda)<sup>20</sup>**

The Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) program, focused on reducing gender inequality and improving the economic performance of adolescent girls in Uganda, is an initiative by the Bangladeshi NGO BRAC. The program offers mentorship sessions and life skills training, including information on marriage, sexual and reproductive health, vocational training, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship, to reduce the constraints participants face.

ELA clubs were established between June and September 2008, with intermediate surveys from March to June 2010 and final surveys from May to July 2012. In Uganda, the program increased the likelihood of adolescents earning their income, significantly reduced teenage pregnancy, and decreased early marriage rates. Four years after the intervention, participants were 4.9% more likely to engage in income-generating activities, a 48% increase from initial levels, primarily driven by higher engagement in self-employment. Additionally, the incidence of teenage pregnancy dropped by a third, and early marriage and cohabitation rates also decreased. There was also a notable reduction of nearly one-third in the proportion of girls reporting having had sex against their will, and the desired ages for marriage and starting motherhood increased.

The program was evaluated in 100 localities, with 50 serving as controls. The surveys addressed three themes: vocational training, livelihood skills, and economic and social empowerment. The randomized control trial revealed that the multifaceted program providing skills transfer is a viable and cost-effective policy intervention to improve adolescents' economic and social empowerment over four years. Thus, ELA contributed to changing social norms related to gender, increasing women's financial autonomy, empowerment, and overall well-being, including mental health. This model has already been replicated in Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda, demonstrating its scalability.

## Preventing Domestic and Intrafamilial Violence

This approach is based on the assumption that violence in the family environment can contribute to the normalization of violent behavior and perpetuate the incidence of violence in the future. These initiatives can be developed using two different approaches:

- Cognitive-behavioral skills that include anger management and conflict resolution practices.
- Parenting skills to promote a harmonious family environment.

The following initiatives aim to promote the well-being of children and adolescents to prevent intrafamilial violence.



### Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, PATHS (Switzerland)<sup>21</sup>

The Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program is a school-based initiative focused on strengthening children's resilience, reducing mental health problems, and promoting social skills, particularly in relation to children's behavioral disorders. It operates on the principle that comprehensive social development can reduce risk factors that induce aggressive behaviors, such as social, cognitive, and emotional difficulties.

The one-year program consists of 46 weekly sessions, each lasting 67 minutes. It covers various topics such as problem-solving, social skills, emotional self-control, understanding rules, empathy, and positive self-esteem. Teachers implementing PATHS receive training and are supervised throughout the course, with supervisors providing regular lesson discussions and feedback. Additionally, the program offers periodic newsletters to foster a sense of cohesion among teachers.

The prevention program was conducted in 28 out of 56 elementary schools in Switzerland, reaching 1,675 children. An evaluation based on surveys conducted by teachers before, immediately after, and two years post-intervention showed that the program had positive effects on reducing aggressive behaviors associated with violent masculinities in children. There was a significant reduction in impulsivity, attention deficit, and aggression, even after considering the demographic profile and initial characteristics of the children.



### **Safe Dates (United States)<sup>22</sup>**

The Safe Dates project stands out as a preventive program aimed at high school and middle school students, designed to interrupt or prevent the perpetration and victimization of domestic violence in teen dating relationships. It can be implemented independently or integrated into various curricula, such as health education, family education, or life skills. Given the frequent correlation between dating violence and substance use, the project integrates with drug and alcohol abuse prevention programs, as well as general violence prevention initiatives.

The program addresses a variety of aspects, from changing adolescents' social norms about dating violence and gender roles to developing conflict resolution skills and accessing community resources for those affected by dating violence—whether perpetrators or victims. The program encompasses psychological, physical, and sexual abuse that can occur among youth. To this end, Safe Dates relies on primary and secondary prevention activities to influence harmful behavioral changes in adolescents. While primary prevention aims to prevent the onset of dating violence perpetration, secondary prevention aims to stop victimization and violent aggression through both school and community activities.

The Safe Dates program consists of nine sessions, a theater play, and a poster contest among students. It covers topics ranging from defining acceptable treatments in relationships to strategies for dealing with abuse, overcoming gender stereotypes, effective communication, and sexual harassment prevention. Additionally, the program actively involves family members, providing them with information and resources to help adolescents deal with abuse and encouraging collaboration between schools and local communities to support affected youth.

Safe Dates conducts a randomized clinical trial to evaluate the outcomes of its activities. Results from one month after the intervention suggested that the program prevented and reduced dating violence and promoted positive changes in cognitive mediating variables based on the program content. However, the behavioral effects disappeared one year after the intervention, although the cognitive risk factor effects were maintained.

Three years after the implementation of Safe Dates, a booster was applied to a random half of the original treatment group of adolescents. This study determined the four-year post-intervention effects of Safe Dates on violence and the effects of the booster. Although the booster did not result in additional improvements in Safe Dates' efficacy, adolescents who participated in the program reported significantly less perpetration and victimization of physical violence, including severe physical violence and sexual violence, four years after its implementation, compared to control groups.



### **Schools and Homes in Partnership Program, SHIP (United States)<sup>23</sup>**

The Schools and Homes in Partnership (SHIP) program is a two-year intervention to reduce conduct problems among early elementary school children. It selected participants with aggressive behavior and reading difficulties, prioritizing Hispanic children to address cultural diversity. This includes adapting interventions to meet the specific needs of these communities, providing materials and assessments in Spanish, and ensuring efficacy for both Hispanic and European-American children in reducing problematic behaviors.

Based on extensive research, the program focuses on three strategies: parent training, socio-behavioral intervention, and academic instruction. This integrated and culturally sensitive approach aims to prevent behavior problems by encompassing home, school, and community interventions to achieve long-term positive outcomes.

Parent training proves effective in reducing behavior problems impacting home environments. It involves 12 to 16 weekly sessions of about two hours, with groups of 5 to 14 people, using videos on various educational topics, including parent-child interaction, praise, rewards, and setting boundaries.

The socio-behavioral intervention focuses on changing social and cognitive behaviors associated with aggression, providing children with alternative skills for handling challenging social situations. During 20 weekly two-hour sessions, problem-solving techniques and models of appropriate cognitive and social behavior are used, with practice opportunities. Videos featuring puppets explain appropriate behaviors to groups of 4 to 10 children. Additionally, practices are complemented with rewards for good classroom behavior over 30 days. This approach, while effective, complements other strategies in seeking better outcomes.

The third strategy, academic instruction, focuses primarily on developing reading skills among early elementary students. It adds at least 30 minutes of daily instruction for five months in the first year and nine months in the second year. Based on research, the initiative asserts that reading proficiency is directly linked to future academic success and a decrease in aggressive behavior in the classroom.

Researchers randomly selected 285 families from three distinct communities to evaluate the program's effectiveness. This included 116 European-American children and 168 Hispanic children, all exhibiting aggressive behavior and reading difficulties. Half of the families (141) participated in the SHIP program, while the other half (143) served as a control group. Evaluations were conducted at different intervals: before the intervention, at the end of the first year, at the end of the second year (post-intervention), and one year after the intervention concluded. The follow-up rates were 100%, 91.2%, 87.3%, and 86.3%, respectively.

The randomized controlled trial demonstrated the program's effectiveness in reducing violent behaviors associated with violent masculinity stereotypes. The results indicated a 31% decrease in the children's aggressive behaviors by the end of their participation in the program.

## Reducing facilitators (Risk Factors)

Programs that focus on facilitators address risk factors such as reducing illicit substances and alcohol abuse and implementing measures to restrict the circulation of firearms, one of the primary methods used to kill women. An initiative that has shown high robustness and effectiveness in reducing alcohol consumption is the Common Elements Treatment Approach, implemented in Zambia.

However, it is important to note that this intervention should be complemented with other actions to amplify its impact on reducing violence as it primarily targets risk factors.



### Common Elements Treatment Approach, CETA (Zambia)<sup>24</sup>

The Common Elements Treatment Approach (CETA) is a program designed to prevent gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence and substance abuse among perpetrators in Zambia. It combines treatments for various mental health issues into a single model, enabling expansion and sustainability in low and middle-income settings.

Its main components include (i) Substance abuse treatment, (ii) Positive parenting promotion, (iii) Encouraging healthy family relationships, (iv) Assessing attitudes and beliefs about violence, (v) Mental health care, (vi) Reducing traumatic experiences through education, conflict management, communication skills, engagement, and cognitive behavior change.

These interventions are conducted in group settings, involving approximately six participants each, separated by men, women, and children. Sessions last 10 to 14 weeks and occur once a week for one to two hours.

Results from an impact evaluation conducted 12 months after the program ended showed that CETA significantly reduced violence. The study used an experimental design involving 123 couples assigned to the treatment group (CETA participants) and 125 to the control group (participants of the usual treatment plus safety checks, known as TAU-Plus). Women who received the intervention experienced a significant reduction in domestic violence episodes compared to the control group. This finding was supported by an average decrease in domestic violence episodes of -8.2 (95% CI: -14.9 to -1.5;  $p = 0.02$ ). Additionally, statistically significant reductions were observed among men who participated in the program compared to those who received the usual treatment, with a decrease of -4.5 (95% CI: -6.9 to -2.2).

## Institutional Improvement of Women's Protection Networks

Programs focused on institutions aim to improve the responses of various entities within the women's protection network. This includes preventive measures such as creating legal instruments to criminalize violent behavior. Possible types include:

- Specialized legal aid.
- Comprehensive shelters.
- Legal frameworks with the formulation and improvement of legislation.
- Police, with action protocols, approaches, and specialized police stations.
- Health care and identification of new cases.

Below, we present the "Ciudad Mujer" Project, a comprehensive shelter in El Salvador.



### Proyecto Ciudad Mujer (El Salvador)<sup>25</sup>

The "Ciudad Mujer" (Women's City) Project, led by the government of El Salvador in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and coordinated by the Social Inclusion Secretariat (SIS), aims to improve the living conditions of Salvadoran women by offering essential services in comprehensive care centers. This innovative model promotes gender equality by addressing economic inequality, violence against women, and maternal health. It combines 18 state institutions in a single physical space, providing over 20 free services tailored to women's needs.

A randomized controlled trial (RCT) demonstrated the effectiveness of the program's integrated model, reducing barriers to accessing specialized services related to sexual and reproductive health and legal support for economic empowerment and combating gender-based violence. Women participating in the program used 43% more public services than non-participants and reported higher life satisfaction. Overall, the Ciudad Mujer Centers significantly impact women's well-being, increasing access to specialized services, including mental health support.

# Final Recommendations

Given the complexity and urgency of the issue of violence against women, it is evident that effective public policies prioritizing prevention and transforming the environments where this violence occurs are necessary. Implementing concrete preventive actions focused on reducing risk factors is key to addressing this issue comprehensively and sustainably.

Adopting preventive measures can help break the cycle of violence against women, aiming to reduce the long-term physical, emotional, and psychological harm to victims. Additionally, these measures can lower the costs associated with crimes of violence against women, considering not only direct costs like healthcare and security but also the social and economic costs resulting from the negative impact of these crimes on society.

Public policies should focus on programs that promote women's financial autonomy. This can be achieved through initiatives providing equal access to employment opportunities, vocational training, and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, these programs promote wage equity and offer direct financial support to women, especially those in economically vulnerable situations.

Another crucial area of intervention is promoting changes in social gender norms. Public policies should invest in educational programs that challenge harmful gender stereotypes and foster relationships based on mutual respect and equality.

This can be achieved by implementing inclusive school curricula and awareness campaigns addressing the importance of gender equality at all societal levels.

Furthermore, public policies must focus on preventing intrafamilial and domestic violence. This includes strengthening the protection network for women by creating specialized care centers, providing psychological and legal support services, and implementing security measures like restraining orders and safe shelters. Training professionals who handle cases of violence against women is also essential, ensuring they are equipped to offer sensitive and effective support.

Finally, transforming environments where violence against women frequently occurs, such as schools and homes, should be a public policy goal. This can be achieved through education and awareness programs about gender violence, promoting safe and inclusive school and family environments, and encouraging reporting and support for victims.

In summary, effectively reducing violence against women requires a long-term, coordinated effort involving the government, civil society organizations, the private sector, and the community in general. Only through comprehensive public policies and concrete preventive actions can we create an environment where all women can live with dignity and free from violence.



# Endnotes

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2. According to article 129, the [Brazilian Penal Code](#) (1940), domestic violence is defined as injury inflicted on an ascendant, descendant, sibling, spouse or partner, or anyone with whom the perpetrator lives or has lived, or by taking advantage of domestic, cohabitation, or hospitality relationships. The penalty is increased, according to §13 of the article, when the injury is inflicted on a woman due to her gender.
3. Maria da Penha Law (2006). [Law 11.340](#).
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5. Maria da Penha Law (2006). [Law 11.340](#), Art. 5º. Domestic and family violence against women includes any action or omission based on gender that causes death, injury, physical, sexual, or psychological suffering, and moral or patrimonial damage: I - within the household, understood as the space of permanent coexistence of people, with or without family ties, including those occasionally aggregated; II - within the family, understood as the community formed by individuals who are or consider themselves to be related, united by natural bonds, affinity, or expressed will; III - in any intimate relationship of affection, in which the aggressor lives or has lived with the victim, regardless of cohabitation.
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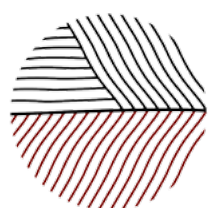
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