

Motherhood and Violence

Abstract

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) imposes large psychological and economic costs for women worldwide, and it is positively correlated with motherhood. This paper explores why. I propose a model and an empirical test for two alternative explanations which look observationally equivalent if we use usual IPV data. The first is that having a baby triggers men's violent behavior; the second is that motherhood makes women more likely to stay with a violent partner. I use Mexican survey data with information on fertility, relationship history and violence history with current and *past* partners; this history allows me to disentangle the mechanisms. I find that motherhood is associated with a higher probability of current violence and a lower probability of leaving but I find no relationship between motherhood and men's violent behavior. Evidence for this selection channel is further supported by exploiting the fertility shock induced by the opening of pharmacies. My results suggest that policies which strengthen women's control over their fertility can reduce the incidence of IPV by enabling them to leave violent relationships before they are locked in by motherhood.

Gabriela Deschamps

Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Stone Centre at UCL