HIGHER PAY AND LOWER CHILDCARE COSTS WOULD REDUCE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: UK evidence

An increase in the returns to full-time work for women would dramatically reduce the incidence of domestic abuse, according to research by Noemi Mantovan and colleagues, to be presented at the annual congress of the European Economic Association in Geneva in August 2016.

Their study finds that a 10% increase in the full-time wage would result in a 14% reduction in the overall abuse rate and a 41% increase in the divorce rate following an incidence of domestic abuse. The greater returns to work allow women to overcome the loss of the partner’s income net of the disutility of domestic abuse.

Similarly, a reduction in childcare costs would also empower abused women. A 10% reduction in childcare costs would decrease the overall abuse rate by 2% and increase the divorce rate for abused women by 12%.

The researchers analyse data from the 1990s in the South West of England for the seven years after women give birth to explore how women gradually learn about their partners’ violent nature, and base work, divorce and fertility decisions on this knowledge.

They conclude: 'If the nearly one in ten women who are physically or emotionally abused victims each year had not experienced this abuse, the divorce rate would decrease drastically, the proportion of women choosing to be in a partnership would substantially increase, and women would more often choose not to work to care for young children.'

More…

Each year in the UK there are an estimated 13 million incidents of domestic abuse, accounting for 20% of all violent crimes. Violence from a current or former partner is likely to have a huge impact on a woman’s wellbeing and life choices. But there is still limited empirical evidence on the consequences of domestic abuse.

The authors explain their study: we measure the effect of domestic violence on a woman’s labour market, marital and fertility outcomes using unique data from the South West of England. The ALSPAC data record these outcomes, as well as incidents of domestic abuse, for seven years after a woman gives birth in the early 1990s.

According to the ALSPAC data, 9.8% of women are physically or emotionally abused each year. Women who stay at home are 18% more likely to suffer domestic abuse compared with women who work part-time, and 10% more likely compared with women who work full-time. Less educated and younger women are also more likely to suffer from domestic abuse. Women who experience abuse are 37% less likely to have a child and 80% more likely to leave their partner. But nearly 90% of abused women still stay with their violent partner.

To get a better understanding of the mechanisms that underlie a woman’s labour market, partnership and fertility choices in the face of potential domestic abuse, we formulate and estimate a dynamic choice model that recognises the uncertain violent
nature of one’s partner. That is, the model explicitly allows for learning of the partner’s violent nature depending on incidents of abuse while married.

The results of the study indicate that women gradually learn about their partners’ violent nature and the learning process has important consequences for the timing of work, divorce and fertility decisions. In particular, if women were never to experience any domestic abuse, the divorce rate would decrease drastically, and the proportion of women choosing to be in a partnership would substantially increase. In addition, women would more often choose not to work in order to care for young children.

Interestingly, an increase in the returns to full-time work for women would dramatically reduce the incidence of abuse. A 10% increase in the full-time wage would result in a 14% reduction in the overall abuse rate and a 41% increase in the divorce rate following an incidence of domestic abuse. The greater returns to work allow women to overcome the loss of the partner’s income net of the disutility of domestic abuse.

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