Applying behavioral science to improving survivor services

Evidence from Honduras and Chile

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Why apply behavioral insights to prevent and respond to intimate-partner violence?

Behavioral sciences provide innovative tools to respond to intimate partner violence (IPV).

They provide a lens to identify the barriers and motivations for behavior change in a given context, and develop evidence-based solutions to address them.

We present results from two interventions that leverage behavioral insights to a) encourage survivors to seek help; and b) improve the criminal justice response to IPV.
Help-seeking for survivors of violence against women

Evidence from Honduras
Honduras has high rates of violence against women. Few women seek help and face multiple barriers to do so.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Uncertainty Aversion</th>
<th>Sunk Costs Fallacy</th>
<th>Availability Bias</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>People’s tendency to favor known risks (e.g., their intimate partner) over unknown factors or benefits (e.g., accessing support services)</td>
<td>When people continue a behavior (e.g., a relationship with a violent partner) because of previously invested resources (e.g., time or effort), despite the costs to one’s well-being</td>
<td>The tendency to judge the frequency of an event or behavior by how easily it comes to mind (e.g. physical violence is easier to identify than psychological violence)</td>
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We tested 4 messages informed by behavioral science against a business-as-usual message.

Treatment A: Uncertainty aversion

Treatment B: Availability bias
We tested 4 messages informed by behavioral science against a business-as-usual message.

Treatment C: Sunk costs

Treatment D: Intention-action gap

Control
Two messages increased visits to Ciudad Mujer. Showing survivors what it’s like to get help worked best.

- Randomized Controlled Trial on Facebook
- Sample size = 829,445 women

Women who saw the version of the ad showing a survivor speaking on the phone with Ciudad Mujer personnel and described the support she would receive were almost 20% more likely to visit CM’s website.
Reducing victim drop-out in criminal proceedings
Evidence from Chile
Few women pursue legal action, and among those who do, one in three drop out of criminal proceedings

1 in 4 women suffered violence at the hands of an intimate partner in the past 12 months

2 in 10 file a criminal complaint against their aggressor

1 in 3 victims drop out of the criminal proceedings

Saavedra, T. (2020) Violencia contra la mujer infligida por la pareja: prevalencia, denuncia y factores de riesgo en Chile. World Bank Group
Data on intra-family violence cases from Fiscalia Regional Centro Norte for the year 2018.
Victims face multiple barriers to engagement in criminal proceeding

I went to verify injuries and they told me it was not credible, as if I had nothing (...) 

Victim testimonial

The process can be demanding and re-victimizing

Proceedings are lengthy and victims may not receive any updates for long periods of time

I haven’t heard anything, I found out because ... my mother-in-law told me that he had gone to court, and I said “but how come if they haven’t told me anything?”

Victim testimonial
We designed behaviorally-informed calls and SMS to support victims throughout the process.

Call 1 Excerpt (saliency of immediate benefits)
You know, the judicial process can be long and we are going to need your participation and perseverance. Some benefits are immediate and others take longer. For example, from now on we can inform you that we’ve put in place [XYZ] protection measures.

Now I'm going to give you a little information about the process:...
Each interaction aimed to address different barriers that victims may face

Preliminary hearing (only for the most serious crimes)

SMS after one month without updates (*personalization, foot-in-the-door, reciprocity*)

[Guadalupe] Breaking with violence takes a lot of courage and you have already taken the most important step. At the Prosecutor's Office we continue working on your case [Carolina]

SMS every 4 weeks to provide updates on case progress (if there is no other communication)
The intervention reduced victim dropout by 30%

- We rigorously evaluated the impact of the intervention through a randomized control trial.
- The intervention reduced victim dropout by 12 percentage points.
- Prosecutor’s Office pressed charges in 16% more cases and the rate of provisionally archived cases decreased by 43%.
Behavioral insights provides new tools to address difficult policy challenges

- These trials illustrate **core aspects of a behavioral approach**: (1) drawing on evidence; (2) tailoring interventions to address context-specific barriers; and (3) rigorously evaluating what works.

- Findings from behavioral insights projects provide **evidence-based guidance for policymakers**.

- BIT is working with agencies (e.g. hotlines, police forces, public transport) around the world to apply behavioral science to respond to GBV.
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