

LACGIL

Gender Innovation Lab

TURNING KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION

Addressing violence against women in Brazil

After two back-to-back attempts on her life, one of which left her partially paralyzed, Maria da Penha sought legal protection against her husband. It took 19 years before he was sentenced to a mere two years in prison. Appalled by the process, Maria da Penha became an advocate for new legislation and services to help women survivors of violence. The 2006 Maria da Penha Law created new mechanisms to prevent and fight domestic violence.

Brazil made progress since the Maria da Penha Law implementation. For instance, it created women's police stations with mostly women staff and the explicit mandate to make crimes against women their priority. Yet, at 4.8 deaths per 100,000 women, Brazil had the [5th highest female murder rate in the world](#) in 2013 and the national female homicide rate has not declined since.

What works to prevent violence against women?

A [study](#) by WBG Sr. Economist Elizaveta Perova and University of California, Berkeley, researcher [Dr. Sarah Reynolds](#) shows that **women's police stations halved the femicide rate for women aged 15-24 and reduced the overall rate by 17%.**

A [LACGIL brief](#) by Dr. Reynolds shows that **women's police stations and reduced wage disparities reinforce each other:**

- Improved wage equality led to reduced violence against women in municipalities with women's police stations
- In municipalities without women's police stations, the opposite occurred



Recent [LACGIL research](#) (see also [this webinar](#)) suggests that **improving gender wage equality reduces violence against women:**

- Homicides of working-age women are lower when wages are more equal
- More wage equality is associated with fewer cases of non-fatal violence

Much of the wage gap is driven by an unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities. **How to offset this motherhood penalty and improve wage equality?**



Extended maternity leave can help women stay in formal employment. In Brazil, nearly half of women in the formal labor market leave their jobs after giving birth.

Expand quality childcare. Recent studies find that childcare improved maternal employment, e.g., in [Rio de Janeiro](#). And childcare can be a pillar of broader plans for economic development and poverty reduction.

Promote programs that reconceptualize fatherhood and redefine masculinity to reduce gender-based violence and encourage equitable gender roles within the home.

Support women working in the informal sector. Substantial lump-sum transfers, such as the Rural Maternity Stipend provided to impoverished rural women upon pregnancy, have been shown to enhance [investment in women's productive assets](#).



Invest in quality jobs for women. As in other settings, in Brazil women are over represented in informal jobs offering low pay. [Gender-smart job strategies](#) open pathways to good jobs, foster job retention, and facilitate women's career progress.

The Latin America and the Caribbean Gender Innovation Lab (LACGIL) supports impact evaluations and inferential studies to find out what works to close gender gaps in human capital, economic participation, social norms, and agency. The LACGIL works in partnership with units across the World Bank, aid agencies and donors, governments, non-governmental organizations, private sector firms, and academic researchers. This work has been funded in part by the [World Bank Group's Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality \(UFGE\)](#), a multi-donor trust fund administered by the World Bank to advance gender equality and women's empowerment through experimentation and knowledge creation to help governments and the private sector focus policy and programs on scalable solutions with sustainable outcomes. The UFGE is supported by generous contributions from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

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