



# HHS Public Access

Author manuscript

*Soc Forces*. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2025 December 19.

Published in final edited form as:

*Soc Forces*. 2024 March ; 102(3): 1004–1025. doi:10.1093/sf/soad111.

## Gendered Family Violence Among Migrants Seeking International Protection: A Life Course Perspective

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### Abstract

Although family and migration scholars recognize that intimate partner violence (IPV) can motivate women's movement between countries, little research considers IPV or other gendered family violence further back in women migrants' life histories or explores the legacy of gendered family violence in cases where such violence is *not* the primary push factor. Here, we analyze in-depth interviews conducted among 34 Latin American women seeking asylum or international protection from a diversity of threats to comprehensively understand their experiences with childhood and adult family violence prior to migration. Our analysis reveals three key takeaways. First, IPV, incest, abandonment, and other forms of gendered family violence can characterize women's family dynamics across the life course even when these experiences do not directly prompt migration. Second, amidst pervasive patriarchal norms, family violence has the power to destabilize women's social circumstances and fracture their ties to family members in ways that *indirectly* encourage migration. Third, owing to these same gender norms, even when gendered family violence directly prompts migration, women may conceptualize their primary motive as protecting their children rather than themselves. These findings move beyond common conceptualizations of the family violence-migration nexus and highlight the breadth and implications of gendered family violence among migrants seeking protection from a broad spectrum of intra- and extra-familial threats.

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Inez<sup>1</sup> escaped from El Salvador with her children in tow, crossing through Honduras and Nicaragua without documentation for her children, before arriving to Costa Rica. They were fleeing years of horrendous abuse from her husband who repeatedly left her hospitalized. Although Inez's family and neighbors were aware of his abuse, as were the police, none had intervened or protected her. Once in Costa Rica, she and her children sought asylum as a means of permanent protection from him. Inez's situation mirrors thousands of cases of intimate partner violence (IPV) that are heard in asylum courts across the Americas and that

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<sup>1</sup>All names are pseudonyms.

receive careful consideration from legal, migration, and family scholars (Baranowski et al. 2019; Cook Heffron 2019; Obinna 2021; Shiff 2020).

Beatrice, on the other hand, was physically and sexually abused by her husband for years, but he nonetheless accompanied her and her children to Costa Rica as they fled politically motivated death threats in Nicaragua. Together, they applied for asylum as a family unit. Although Beatrice had been abused in Nicaragua, IPV was not what directly prompted her exodus. Cases like Beatrice's, where a woman is abused by her spouse but does not seek asylum based on that abuse, receive far less attention from scholars and policymakers than do cases like Inez's. Resultantly, we know little about the role of IPV in shaping the life course trajectories and migration pathways of women refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants in need of international protection (MNP) broadly.<sup>2</sup>

We know even less about the role of other types of gendered family violence, especially when they occur very early in MNPs' lives. Elena, for instance, left her country of origin<sup>3</sup> with her loving and supportive husband also to flee political persecution. As a child, Elena had been extensively abused by her father and witnessed him abuse her mother multiple times. As an early adolescent, she ran away from home and moved to a big city where she spent years bouncing between jobs and temporary residences. It wasn't until many years later that Elena became politically persecuted and, fearing for her life, migrated to seek safety abroad.

Inez, Beatrice, and Elena each experienced gendered family violence but only Inez migrated abroad to escape it. In this study, we take a life course perspective (Elder Jr. 1998) to describe and understand pre-migration gendered family violence as a prominent theme in the lives of many Latin American women refugees and MNP *writ large*. By gendered family violence, specifically, we mean emotional, physical, sexual, and economic abuses that stem from and reinforce the gendered status quo (Menjívar 2011), undermine women's wellbeing (Campbell 2002; Goodman et al. 2009) and, in extreme cases, threaten women's survival (Menjívar and Walsh 2017; Walsh and Menjívar 2016b). This includes situations of neglect and abandonment where men physically and monetarily desert their spouses and children (Gutmann and Viveros Vigoya 2005; Klevens and Ports 2017; Menjívar 2011).

Rather than examining histories of gendered family violence exclusively among women who seek asylum to protect against it, we explore pre-migration gendered family violence among women seeking protection from a range of threats, including IPV but also non-partner stalking, gang violence, political persecution, civil conflict, and severe public disturbances like medical and food shortages. We use life course theory to understand how violent family and patriarchal contexts, the timing of family violence, and linkages between family members each affect women's sense of agency and perceptions that they need to leave the home and move abroad. In doing so, we expand existing scholarship in three ways. First, our approach recognizes that the prevalence of gendered family violence (Menjívar and Salcido 2002; Bott et al. 2012) combined with inadequate institutional responses to

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<sup>2</sup>According to UNHCR (2021), MNP include asylum seekers, refugees, stateless and displaced persons, and other "persons of concern."

<sup>3</sup>Withheld per her request.

it in a number of Latin American countries (Menjívar and Walsh 2017, 2019; Neumann 2017; Walsh and Menjívar 2016a) mean that many women migrating from these countries—including those who are *not* fleeing IPV—have likely experienced and/or been exposed to some form of gendered family violence prior to migrating. By exploring these cases, our analysis raises new questions about the meanings and implications of this violence for Latin American women migrants beyond just those fleeing it. Second, our integration of life course theory helps illuminate connections between gendered family violence and women's perceived pathways toward migration in cases where IPV or other gendered family violence is *not* the primary reason women report migrating. As we show, women articulate many ways that gendered family violence exacerbates their sense of precarity and atrophies their social support networks, limiting their options to remain in-country in times of crisis. Third, our theoretical lens and highly detailed life history data reveal how women frame gendered family violence as a direct push factor for migration when entrenched patriarchal norms run counter to their decision to leave. In these cases—when abused women perceive they have little agency to protect themselves—gendered notions of motherhood can validate their decision by socially positioning them as responsible for protecting *others*, especially children. Collectively, our results highlight how abusive familial relationships substantially alter women's life trajectories and exacerbate the precarities they and their children face, thereby playing an indirect yet ultimately central role in their international migration.

## Background and Theoretical Motivation

### Gendered Family Violence in Latin America

Gendered family violence is a highly prevalent phenomenon across the globe (Sardinha et al. 2022), including in Latin America. According to nationally representative Demographic and Health Surveys in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, and Peru, as well as the Reproductive Health Surveys from El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Paraguay, between 24% and 48% of women in these countries have experienced emotional IPV; 17% to 37% have experienced physical IPV; and 5% to 13% have experienced sexual IPV (Figure 1a). Moreover, an estimated 4% to 13% have been physically abused by family members other than intimate partners since age 15 (Figure 1b); and 15% to 43% recall their mothers experiencing IPV (Figure 1c).

As prior literature illustrates, gendered family violence is closely linked to patriarchal gender norms (Gibbons and Luna 2015; Obinna 2021; Saunders et al. 2022). Much like in other regions of the world, in Latin America, gender expectations imposed by and at least partially inherited from European colonial powers imply that men should be aggressive, domineering, and virile (Gutmann and Viveros Vigoya 2005; Obinna 2021), while women should be docile, deferential, and family oriented (Gibbons and Luna 2015). These gendered expectations, together with decades of civil wars and ensuing social instability in much of Latin America, have created a situational logic in which male-perpetrated violence is interpreted as normal and routine (Gibbons and Luna 2015; Menjívar and Salcido 2002), abusive intra-familial relationships are kept hidden rather than formally addressed (González-López 2015), and women are expected to sacrifice freedoms in the name of

family unity—an ideology commonly referred to as “familyism” (Diossa-Jimenez and Menjívar 2021:4-6; Velásquez Díaz et al. 2016:74).

Patriarchal and familyism ideologies not only shape how heterosexual couples interact, but also how family, friends, and public institutions respond to abuse (Menjívar 2011). In the case of legal institutions, entrenched gender and family norms can lead judges, police officers, and lawyers to discredit or blame women victims, despite laws specifically designed to protect women from family violence (Adamson, Menjívar, and Walsh 2020; Neumann 2017; O’Brien and Walsh 2020; Roychowdhury 2021).

Data from the Americas Barometer surveys also indicate that in every Latin American country where data are available men are more likely than women to report that “physical violence between members of a couple is a private matter” (Figure 2). Moreover, when asked if an incident of a man beating his wife or girlfriend is reported to the police, men are always more likely than women to report that it is “very likely” that “the police would take it seriously” (Figure 2). These attitudinal gender disparities mirror differences in men and women’s social positionality: it behooves men to keep violence private, but if it is brought to the attention of legal authorities, men are accustomed to being treated favorably (Diossa-Jiménez and Menjívar 2021; Tavares et al. 2019). When patriarchal norms undermine women’s options for recourse (Menjívar and Walsh 2017; O’Brien and Walsh 2020; Walsh and Menjívar 2016b, 2016a), simply leaving the relationship may not be enough to ensure women’s perceived or objective safety: women may feel the need to seek asylum abroad to ensure their survival.

### **Conceptualizing Gendered Family Violence as a Direct and Indirect Push Factor for International Migration**

Although scholars increasingly recognize that gendered family violence, especially IPV, can push women to migrate (Cook Heffron 2019; Obinna 2021; Saunders et al. 2022; Shiff 2020), the vast majority of work in this area focuses on violence in the post-migration period (for a review, see El-Moslemany et al. 2022). Although this literature has made important strides toward identifying migrant women’s risk factors for victimization abroad (Timshel et al. 2017), it tends to overlook MNPs’ *histories* of gendered family violence prior to migration, including intergenerational abuse. Such biographical details are essential to fully comprehending the scope of MNPs’ exposure to gendered family violence, how these exposures shape migrants’ perceived agency and resources, and relatedly, how they shape their pathways toward migration.

Moreover, the small but growing body of literature exploring gendered family violence in the pre-migration period typically conceptualizes this violence as a *direct* push factor (Cook Heffron 2019; Saunders et al. 2022). This literature illustrates that gendered family violence becomes an immediate push factor when it is severe enough to be life-threatening (Obinna 2021) or to jeopardize children’s wellbeing (López Ricoy, Andrews, and Medina 2022) and when the legal, economic, and social resources available to women in their countries of origin are insufficient to protect them from violence (Menjívar and Walsh 2019; Saunders et al. 2022). What these studies typically leave open, however, are questions about how gendered family violence can serve as an *indirect* push factor for international migration.

Considering that IPV often restricts women's economic and social capital (Showalter 2016; Showalter and McCloskey 2021; Snyder 2019) and exacerbates residential instability and risk of homelessness (Gilroy et al. 2016), and that IPV victimization of mothers has negative implications for their daughters' socioemotional development and resource accumulation (Ferro, Justus, and Aransiola 2019; Yetter 2022), it logically follows that gendered family violence may indirectly tilt women toward international migration in the long-run. Even when it does not, being surrounded by a high prevalence of gendered family violence increases women's likelihood of exposure to it at some point in their lifetimes, with sustained implications for their health and wellbeing, social support networks, and family dynamics before and after migration.

### **A Life Course Perspective on Gendered Family Violence Among Women MNP**

To make sense of women MNPs' histories of gendered family violence in the pre-migration period, we rely on life course theory (Elder Jr. 1998). This framework has four major tenets: that historical contexts shape social pathways; major life events affect the timing and nature of following life events; family members share "linked lives" where each other's trajectories influence one another; and individuals make consequential choices but those choices are predetermined by social and historical circumstances.

First, the notion of historical context recognizes that living in a particular time and place shapes a person's attitudes and expectations in ways that inform her behaviors and experiences (Elder Jr. 1998). Residing in a context where patriarchal norms and family violence are prevalent and normalized should thus lead many women to experience or be exposed to violence in their families. It should also lead to normative expectations of gendered family violence, which in turn, should dictate the logic by which people and institutions respond to it.

Second, life course theory's emphasis on the sequencing of life events implies that, for some women, gendered family violence may spur migration. The most obvious evidence of this is when women flee gendered family violence in their country of origin to seek asylum abroad (Obinna 2021). Yet gendered family violence may have less obvious, indirect effects on women MNPs' migration trajectories. For instance, family violence may weaken women's ties to other family members, thereby diminishing their social support system over the long-run (Denham et al. 2007; Snyder 2019). When *another* event like gang violence or political persecution threatens their survival (Cook Heffron 2019; Galli 2023), women with little to no social support will have fewer people to turn to, and consequently, may feel that migration offers their only means of protection.

Third, the concept of "linked lives" implies that events jeopardizing other family members' wellbeing can push women to migrate (López Ricoy et al. 2022), such as when gendered family violence threatens women's children's wellbeing. Even if women don't believe they can protect themselves from abuse, or if they receive social messaging that they should tolerate an abusive partner (Menjívar 2011), widely held notions of motherhood ascribe women as caretakers (López Ricoy et al. 2022). In this vein, women who feel responsible for safeguarding their children's wellbeing may view migration as a means of protecting them or may use motherhood to validate their migration decisions.

Finally, although individuals make choices that cumulatively shape their life course trajectories, these choices are influenced by their earlier life events and current social circumstances (Elder Jr. 1998). For example, whether and how women leave abusive partners is determined partly by their perceived ability to safely and successfully leave them (Simmons et al. 2011). These perceptions are influenced by the nature and extent of social and institutional support for women victims (Obinna 2021; Simmons et al. 2011). Similarly, women who enjoy more social support—particularly from family members—should have more options for remaining in their country of origin when they or their loved ones come under threat. This wider array of options, should in turn, affect women’s migration calculus.

### Case Background and Methodology

We interviewed 34 adult female MNP ( 18 years) who had migrated to Costa Rica within five years prior. Costa Rica is a small Central American country of about five million people (INECCR 2021) that has experienced a twelve-fold increase in its number of MNP since 2016 (UNHCR 2021a). It’s hospitable immigration policies and political stability are both important pull factors for those seeking international safety from worsening political conflict, gang violence, and major economic downturns in neighboring Latin American countries (Weitzman et al. 2022).

With the approval of institutional review boards in Costa Rica and the United States, we recruited MNP in San José and the surrounding Central Valley and in Upala, a town along the Nicaraguan border (see Appendix B for ethical considerations). To purposively recruit a diverse sample that varied with respect to national origins, educational attainment, time in-country, and direct push factors, we worked with an NGO known as Fundación Mujer, who leads MNP assistance efforts in conjunction with the UNHCR and Costa Rica’s national government. Because Fundación Mujer collects basic information about its clientele, it was able to identify and recruit a diverse set of eligible women who were in Costa Rica because of imminent or persistent threats in their country of origin. A point-person from Fundación Mujer distributed informational flyers or read information from these flyers to potential participants in-person or by phone. Ultimately, participants represented a diversity of countries of origin, relationship statuses, and educational backgrounds (Table 1). Eighteen percent arrived within the past year; 56% had been in Costa Rica for at least one but less than two years; 15% had been there for two years; and 12% for three or more years (not shown).

The first author and her Costa Rican research assistant conducted all interviews in Spanish in-person between January and March 2020. Because many MNP live in crowded or insecure conditions with limited privacy, we conducted interviews in private rooms located within Fundación Mujer’s office buildings. With participants’ informed consent, we audio recorded interviews, transcribed and redacted them to remove identifying information, and assigned participants pseudonyms, which we use throughout our results.

Interviews lasted between 1.5 and 2.5 hours and were based on an interview guide that was designed to uncover how family life and family member wellbeing evolve over the course of international displacement. This guide was organized as a life history with an emphasis on family dynamics and interpersonal relationships at different points in time. Although

gendered family violence emerged as a central theme in our analysis, the interview questions themselves did *not* ask about it. The topic of gendered family violence thus arose organically during the interview process. All interviews began by asking participants open-ended questions about their childhood and family of origin. The ordering of subsequent questions varied from one interview to the next, depending on the flow of conversation; however, most followed with questions about participants' own family formation and relationship history with the father(s) of their children, before asking about important events that precipitated and followed migration. These life histories, with an emphasis on family dynamics, revealed a wide range of exposures to gendered family violence and featured ample details, enabling us to draw connections between these exposures and subsequent events in women's lives.

After transcription, the first author and two research assistants iteratively coded and analyzed the transcripts in Spanish, constructing a set of thematic codes to derive theoretical and analytical interpretations of the data (Charmaz 2006). To begin, we read all transcripts, took extensive notes on them, and discussed our notes as a group. We then carefully coded all transcripts and identified salient passages using QSR International NVivo 12, meeting regularly to compare our coding. Following, we analyzed passages within each theme to develop hierarchically-organized sets of more nuanced subcodes. For example, we refined a broad category like "pre-migration stressors" into "precipitating threats" and "earlier life stressors," based on their temporality. Within each, we then devised a more detailed set of subcodes capturing individual stressors like violence and poverty, which we further refined once more. "Earlier life violence" for example, was coded into sub-categories like "sex trafficking," "IPV against respondent," and "witnessing IPV against a parent." Once coding was complete, we compared the major events in women's lives following different types of family violence. Doing so illuminated when and how gendered family violence was linked, either directly or indirectly, to their migration calculus, including instances in which women did not personally recognize (or expressly articulate) its contribution to their life trajectories.

## Results

### Gendered Family Violence as a Prominent Theme Among Women MNP

Participants experienced a substantial amount of gendered family violence prior to migrating (Table 1). Five women recounted incidents where a parent physically or sexually abused them and six described experiences when their partner hurt them, often in brutal detail. Nine volunteered stories about when their father stopped supporting or completely abandoned them when they were young, and ten talked about how their partner left them and their children without continuing to provide any financial support. Others reported secondhand exposures to gendered family violence among their immediate or extended family, including witnessing their father abusing their mother, incest, and child abuse. Although women occasionally referenced being abused or abandoned by a woman in their family, men were the perpetrators in the vast majority of stories women recounted.

Women's recounting of gendered family violence was highly prevalent across all countries of origin and education levels in our sample, with one exception: Women who held a university degree referenced gendered family violence less often than did others, including women who had partial but incomplete university education (Table 1). That women with

university degrees less often referenced primary and secondary exposure to gendered family violence is consistent with the notion that early-life exposure to such violence can inhibit women and girls' resource accumulation (Ferro, Justus, and Aransiola 2019) and that high economic and human capital accumulation can potentially deter such violence in adulthood (Weitzman 2018). Nevertheless, one-third of women with university degrees described experiencing or witnessing some form of gendered family violence (four out of twelve). Moreover, not *all* of the women whose interviews omitted gendered family violence had a university degree—half who made no reference to the theme had less than complete secondary schooling.

Collectively, women's accounts revealed a wide spectrum of gendered family violence, ranging from events that immediately precipitated women's migration to experiences further back in time that colored their memories of childhood. As such, experiences of family conflict and violence oftentimes contributed to women's exodus, either directly or indirectly. Even when the connection between gendered family violence and subsequent migration was unclear, this violence was still an important theme that respondents frequently brought up on their own and elaborated in-depth.

Notably, women often cried, took long pauses, or laughed awkwardly through their discomfort while describing these incidents. A few hinted at violence rather than going into detail. Sofia, for example, stated that she left her husband after they "had problems." Likewise, Luna said that she and her spouse had "a lot of arguments." As the interview progressed, however, Luna opened up and eventually explained that her spouse had physically abused her. Constanza made a point to explain that her "good husband" shares "cooking and cleaning" responsibilities and spends time with their children but when describing their relationship also hinted at darker undertones, at one point quickly stating as an aside, "the subject of *machismo*—I am very aware of that, but we are not going to go there."

Toward the end of their interviews, many women expressed that sharing their family stories left them feeling "relieved" of their bottled-up emotions. Inez told us that it was her first time ever talking in-depth with someone about the details of her partner's violence. Others told us about times they had confided in others, but with mixed results: While some felt supported and understood, others felt this divulgence was met with invalidation. This was the case for Antonella, for example, a mother from Nicaragua. She was the only interviewee who mentioned seeking professional mental health counseling prior to migrating. Yet, Antonella did not feel supported by her psychologist when she recounted a memory of being knocked unconscious and raped:

"I went to a psychologist and she blamed me... She hurt me instead of helping me. ... I cannot talk about this with my family. I can't. I feel embarrassed. I don't want them to hurt me. How do I talk about it to someone? It feels terrible to have no one to talk to."

Like Antonella, many participants learned to carry their experiences silently and alone. This silence surrounding gendered violence reinforced patriarchal gender norms and familyism

ideologies that left women feeling powerless and sometimes destabilized women's lives to the point of migration, as we discuss below.

### **Patriarchal Norms, Familyism, and Women MNPs' Experiences with Gendered Family Violence**

Patriarchal gender norms were a common thread stitching together the stories of gendered family violence that emerged during our interviews. Often, women's family members told them to tolerate men's hurtful behaviors. Beatrice, who relocated to Costa Rica with her abuser, detailed why she did not speak with her family in Nicaragua about her husband's alcoholism and physical abuse: "they told me that I shouldn't have left him since he's a good man. ... They pressured me to stay with him and always be with him. ... They told me he would change." The notion of tolerating men's disingenuous actions was also evident in Lola's mother's advice to her about her fiancé's infidelity: "be calm and forget about it." Likewise, her friends told her that his actions were normal and that she just needed to pray. In addition to this kind of advice, women commonly encountered silence from family members, friends, and neighbors who knew about their abuse. This silence further affirmed the notion that women must tolerate partners' actions at all costs. For instance, Inez described how her neighbors must have heard her spouse yelling and beating her up, yet no one ever interjected. When she called the police, they would temporarily arrest him but always let him go shortly thereafter.

In hindsight, Beatrice and Lola looked back negatively on others' advice to tolerate their partners' actions. Inez also expressed frustration at others' lack of intervention. However, some women came to forgive or accept their partner's hurtful actions. Lorena, for instance, expressed satisfaction in her relationship with her husband even though she described herself as a "single mother" and her husband started another family while still married to her. Juliana, too, explained that her mother welcomed her abusive father "with open arms" whenever he came home. Juliana herself, however, openly disliked her father's behavior, especially his alcoholism, the fact that he had multiple children with another woman, and always demanded she and her sister "go clean." "Even today I ask [my mother], 'how can you endure so much? Why?' Because she does it for us, she tells me. But no, because he's mistreating us too. ... She told me, 'You're going to get married and then [whoever it is] that's your spouse.'"

Juliana's mother's defense of her father also reflected an additional component of familyism, namely that women are considered most responsible for keeping the family unit together, a gender expectation that women themselves often enforced. This norm was evident when Adriana's mother-in-law blamed her for her husband's alcoholism because she "didn't say anything" about it earlier. She demanded that Adriana, who lived in El Salvador at the time, "go find him out on the streets in the middle of the night," while he was drinking with his friends, and that she bring her children along because "when he sees the kids, he will come." Lola's mother warned her that if she did not get over her partner's infidelity, "you will make him leave you for that woman." Moreover, once Lola and her partner were married and had a child, she recalled that, "every time I would discover something, he

would begin with ‘Look, we have a son...’” as a means of keeping her committed to the relationship.

Elena offers another case in point. Her former husband once tried to rape her. Despite this, Elena felt “immensely hurt” when he later presented her with divorce papers: “I didn’t want to get divorced, honestly... Deep down I thought I had fallen in love with him. Then I said, ‘I am married to him. I will have to get to know him more and forget everything he has done to me.’” Others, like Flor, were told by their partners that their activities outside the home were improper or detrimental to their children. The pervasive ideology of keeping a marriage afloat and a family intact often hurt women by prolonging their decisions to leave abusive relationships.

In contrast to the pressure women received to stay with their husbands and sacrifice to keep their families together, many men hastily abandoned the women we interviewed. Belén and Beatrice both were abandoned by their first and second partners in Nicaragua despite having children with each of them. Martina’s partner started coming home late and leaving early in the morning, causing her to worry: “I asked him ‘Is there another woman or do you have another family? Tell me.’ No, he never told me anything. And from that moment on things became more serious because he stopped coming home... Then he completely disappeared... He never called our daughter... He just disappeared.” Emilia likewise recounted: “the father of my son never took care of him, never. This is very common. ... It’s incredible. Men in [El Salvador] sometimes... have a house here and another life there.” Thirteen of the women we interviewed were no longer in a relationship with the father of at least one of their children. Twelve of these women said their ex-partner did not financially support nor regularly communicate with their child. In this way, patriarchal norms had the power to upend women’s lives, oftentimes leaving them socially and economically vulnerable and increasing the physical, emotional, and economic demands imposed upon them as sole caretakers and breadwinners.

General expectations that women should tolerate men’s harmful behaviors and be responsible for maintaining family unity culminated in deeply patriarchal social environments. Legal and institutional recourse for women grappling with gendered family violence was limited; only Celestina saw her abuser go to prison for more than a few days, and even her story illustrates the normativity of patriarchal control. When she was a young woman, her mother warned her about a dangerous man she noticed following Celestina around. He was rumored to have “abused women.” Her mother exhorted her but did not report the man to the police in El Salvador despite her worries, likely because this was not a reliable source of protection. Several weeks later, the man snuck up behind Celestina and forced her with a machete to walk into the countryside, where he began to sexually assault her. “I fought, and, well, I can say it wasn’t my strength but God that gave me the power to defend myself. And with the same machete that he was going to hurt me with—I don’t know where I got the strength—I fought him, I struggled... and the machete managed to [severely injure him].” But her attacker survived. Upon his release from prison, people in town told Celestina that “he said, ‘a woman will never hit me...I will get revenge.’” Still, Celestina was offered no legal protection. Shortly thereafter she saw him near her work: “I spotted him... When he turned to look, I—[takes a deep breath]—I stopped like this—[motions]—

so that he wouldn't see me, and I was able to get out into the street and hide. I said to myself, 'he is looking for me where I work. Now it is serious.'"

Women who faced extreme violence like Celestina, but in the home—whether from parents when they were young or from partners later in life—lacked the necessary support to recover from these experiences. The police were not helpful, especially with perpetual abusers they knew like Inez and Beatrice's partners. Neighbors also looked the other way. Other family members tended to victim-blame them. Tellingly, none of the women that experienced child abuse mentioned ever reporting their parents to the police or anyone else. Instead, many refrained from talking with others about abuses they faced. Pervasive gender norms—viewing men as rough and uncontrollable and women as responsible and nurturing—constrained their opportunities for talking about, changing, or ending abusive interpersonal relationships.

In sum, pervasive patriarchal norms and familism perpetuated men's harmful behaviors and women's internationalization and justifications of them, in addition to eroding support for women from their families, friends, and public institutions. Women's family relationships were destabilized as a result, leaving them constrained and vulnerable to further challenges.

### **No One to Turn to: Severed Family Ties and Women's Uprooting**

Family violence that women experienced prior to migration strained their familial relationships. In some instances, this strain resulted in a severing or fracturing of ties that left them untethered to their natal networks and with little familial support during difficult economic or political times. With no one to turn to, women perceived international migration as their only means of survival.

Fracturing familial violence happened very early in some women's lives, which subsequently led to a series of destabilizing events. Gabriela had a permanently strained relationship with her parents. As an early adolescent, her father attacked her and chased her out of the house after she opposed his incestuous relationship with her older sister. She fled to a different city where she found a job and place to stay. Elena similarly severed ties with her physically abusive father, also running away from home as an adolescent after trying to stand up to him for beating her mother. "I remember that my dad went to attack my mom with a machete and...I hit my dad and told him to stop beating my mom. That was when my dad kicked me out."

The destabilizing effects of gendered family violence early in life lingered for these women and likely contributed to their desire for new beginnings. Elena and Gabriela explained that they only gradually came to understand their father's actions as abusive. Gabriela recalled, "in our house a lot of things happened, things that, when one is a child, she doesn't understand why. But when she becomes an adolescent she starts to figure out why things happened." Elena expounded upon how the events of her childhood continued to haunt her:

"I have tried to get past this, to get over—how would you say this?—to not remember these things of my youth, but to just move forward. To forget about it. To move on and try to be a different type of person and not have to recall the violence

I suffered, what I went through. But instead to try to understand—to understand myself.”

Elena’s recollection poignantly captures how she simultaneously could not forget about the incident, yet she did not want to let it define her. Adriana similarly recalled being abused by her father as a child but said it was difficult to remember because she was so little. She had little contact with her father except when her mother tried to drop her and her brothers off with him for a few weekends: “My father wanted to rape me. ... Of what I can remember, I was really little and, yes, I remember that he—he was abusing me.”

Strained parental ties left young women grasping for other sources of stability. For instance, as a teen, Gabriela moved in with her boyfriend at his parents’ house. That arrangement did not last long since, as she explained: “they threw me out. ... They are racists, because my skin is brown and they are white. They called me ‘negra.’ ... He abandoned his family and we left to rent. His family told me when I left with him that I would die of hunger.” In Elena’s case, when she left her parents’ home, she bounced between random families that took her in or gave her employment rather than entering into an early romantic relationship. Multiple times, however, she faced unwanted sexual advances. Later, she married an abusive man she did not love or even know well: “It was an escape, not something I did for love. I thought it would heal me.”

However, it was not these experiences that directly prompted Elena and Gabriela’s migration to Costa Rica. Rather, it was the political persecution they faced much later in life, combined with the fact that they did not have reliable support networks or elsewhere to escape to within their countries of origin. In Gabriela’s case, she became persecuted for her husband’s political activities. After their house was attacked by a mob, she and her husband turned to his estranged family for help, but “it was a disaster.” His sister started a rumor that Gabriela and her husband wanted to kill their community leader. Soon thereafter, her husband was arrested for alleged terrorism. When an attorney got him released, he and Gabriela immediately left for Costa Rica. As for Elena, the military stopped and captured her and a group of female activists during a protest. Elena was convinced they would be raped. When the armed men tried to transfer them between vehicles, the women successfully made enough noise to garner public attention that interrupted the wrongdoing. Shortly thereafter, Elena and her second husband left for Costa Rica.

Though Gabriela and Elena had supportive partners at the time of their political persecution, they lacked other family members or friends that could help them find safety within their countries of origin. A few women did have such support and it helped them remain in their countries of origin, at least temporarily. For example, when mobs started attacking Estella’s house because she refused to participate in marches supportive of the incumbent government in Nicaragua, her husband took their children to his parents’ house in a rural area for several months. This strategy only worked temporarily, though, since his parents were elderly. Meanwhile, Estella had migrated to Costa Rica where she could stay with her sister. Eventually the rest of her family joined her there instead of returning to their original home, where the danger never subsided.

Many women's lives had been uprooted so many times that their life trajectories hit an inflection point such that moving domestically, rather than abroad, no longer seemed viable. For Elena and Gabriela, the combination of gendered family violence they experienced as children, the subsequent destabilizing events as they struggled to make their way alone, and then their political persecution contributed to their loss of faith in a better future for themselves if they stayed in their countries. "One supposes that [my country] is a calm place, right?" Elena lamented, "but no, it is a country with problems...a country of violence." When considering why Gabriela and Elena moved, overlooking gendered family violence they experienced early in life and focusing exclusively on the political persecution they faced later misses how family instability compounded in their lives, placed them in repeatedly precarious situations, and picked away at their general trust in others.

Gendered family violence had a similarly corrosive effect in adulthood. After Gracia separated from her partner, she gave up her lucrative business and moved across Nicaragua to her parents' town to raise her children near them and her siblings. She began working in her sister's store. Things deteriorated quickly, however, as her brother-in-law became a violent political vigilante. He began threatening her at a time when her community was experiencing multiple disappearances and murders. He would come into her store with a group of heavily armed friends and tell them that she opposed their politics. Her sister, with whom Gracia historically had a trusting relationship, sided with her husband and tried to justify his actions. Gracia wondered if this was out of sincere belief, brainwashing, or fear of him.

"He has always been a fanatical supporter of the government. The thing that surprised me most was my sister...she always defended him. ... She wasn't always like that. There was a change. Maybe it was strategic of her to not challenge him and take on that risk because she has a child. He is one of those guys that says, 'if you leave me, I will take [our child],' so I think that was related to it and that caused her to betray me."

Losing hope with her sister and feeling threatened by her brother-in-law, Gracia turned to her other siblings for help. Some sided outright with her sister. Others worked for the government and were reluctant to get involved. Her father was deceased and her elderly mother, while aligning with Gracia politically, was unable to persuade her siblings. With no partner to fall back on and her own natal family outright threatening her or otherwise unsupportive, she left for Costa Rica. Considering that Gracia had attempted to rebuild her life around her natal family at great personal sacrifice after becoming divorced, their rejection came as a terrible blow. Her brother-in-law's threats directly influenced her choice to flee her community, but the way she discussed—at length—her sister's and other siblings' political justifications and lack of support for her underscores that their familial fracturing was a key part of her complicated decision to migrate out of the country.

For each of these women, violent family experiences piled up across the life course and uprooted their lives, making political persecution and economic challenges even more perilous. They described political problems and the accompanying economic fallout as their primary push factors, but it was clear from their interviews that limited family support networks left them with few resources to overcome such challenges amidst worsening

conditions in their countries of origin. For many, there was no one to turn to, prompting a move to Costa Rica.

### **To Save My Children: Women’s Framing of Intimate Partner Violence as a Direct Push Factor for Migration**

Although gendered family violence was a pervasive pre-migration theme, only three women directly stated that such violence was *the* reason they moved abroad. When asked why she left El Salvador, Adriana succinctly stated, “I am here because of [my husband’s] violence.” After her husband turned from alcohol to drugs, he began recklessly abusing her and threatening to turn his gang member friends against her if she told anyone. Inez similarly explained: “I came to Costa Rica because I am a victim of family violence perpetrated by my spouse.” Her husband was horrendously abusive from the day of their wedding until she left him a decade later. He repeatedly beat her, and in several instances, she lost consciousness. Luna, from Nicaragua, moved twice because of gendered family violence. The first time was because her partner beat her while she was pregnant. They were living with his family in Guatemala at the time and she decided to move back to Nicaragua alone. Later, her daughter became impregnated by a relative three times her age. As Luna explained, “I had to bring her here [to Costa Rica] so she wouldn’t hear what people were saying about her and all that. . . . The man was [related to my mom]. So, a bunch of problems resulted. [Migrating] was the only way to avoid putting my mom in the middle of those arguments.”

Adriana, Inez, and Luna’s experiences of IPV are of particular interest because they match the “well-founded fear of persecution” (UNHCR 2002:5) standard in the UNHCR’s Guidelines on International Protection that many nations reference when considering who is worthy of asylum. Each described gender-based violence as directed toward them individually, pervasive in their countries of origin, and having nowhere to turn for help. Inez recounted how everyone knew that her husband abused her, and Adriana’s mother-in-law told her that it was her responsibility to stop her husband from drinking and abusing her. Both researched their legal and social protections online and found no institutional recourse, particularly when it came to legally taking their children abroad without their abusive spouses’ permission. Luna had little recourse when her mother’s kin sexually abused her daughter, meaning she needed to get her daughter *away* from her family rather than turning to them for support.

Luna’s perception that she had to move abroad to remove herself and her daughter from family problems resembles Adriana’s deliberations about “leaving,” for whom leaving her husband was intrinsically tied to migrating abroad. She lamented, “He was always telling me that the day that I leave, he wasn’t going to let me go. . . . So, if I went to my family... he was always going to find me. . . . I always lived in fear of what he told me: that if I left, he would find me.” Adriana’s fear of being discovered by her abusive husband after trying to flee was heightened because of his gang acquaintances, who would grant him “whatever thing he needed... whatever favor he asked for.” Moreover, as previously recounted, Adriana’s relationships with her family were strained in part because they blamed her for her husband’s abuse, which over time, led her to abscond her violent circumstances

from others: “According to my family, I lived well, I lived happily, because I have never liked to tell anyone about my problems. Because nobody was going to help me. Nobody was going to give me a hand. ... I never recounted things to [my friends] for the same reason.” Without family or friends to turn to, or a dependable state to protect her, she felt that her husband’s threats carried great weight. Moving away—from her husband as well as patriarchal norms expressed by her family, friends, and others—seemed like her only hope.

Yet, a deeper reading of Adriana, Inez, and Luna’s life histories shows that their breaking points—when they decided that they had no choice but to flee abroad—came because of threats toward their children or future children. It was their hope of saving their children that drove them to try escaping from abusive husbands and family members. Luna worried that, in Guatemala, her husband’s physical abuse toward her could injure her fetus. Later, when she migrated to Costa Rica, her motivation again stemmed from her desire to protect her child. In Adriana’s case, she ultimately felt she must flee to Costa Rica when her emotionally, physically, and sexually abusive spouse began targeting their daughter: “The straw that broke the camel’s back was that my daughter told me that he was touching her.”

Similar to Adriana, Inez’s motivation to leave peaked when her partner drove their daughter home drunk, crashed into a tree, and abandoned her at the crash scene:

“I had lived this experience too: the tremendous fear of being driven in a car by a drunk, when you don’t know how the moment is going to turn out. I said, ‘this—no. I have already lived this. My kids don’t have to live this.’ ... I believe it was this day that I gathered the strength [to leave].”

Shortly thereafter, she and her children escaped to Costa Rica. When the interviewer asked her why she left, Inez invoked her children: “I looked back on everything I lived through with my kids, the humiliating experiences. He also mistreated my children. ... My children feared him. My daughter got to a point where... ‘My God,’ I said, ‘Is my daughter going to go crazy or what?’”

Thus, although all three women suffered severe violence themselves, it was worrying about their children’s suffering that prompted them to migrate. Given patriarchal norms in their countries of origin, Adriana, Inez, and Luna saw little hope for themselves. In their role as mothers, however, they felt responsible for protecting their children.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Gendered family violence, and its connections to recent changes in migration flows, have become the objects of substantial social inquiry. Adopting a life course perspective, we moved beyond common conceptualizations of gendered family violence as direct push factors for migration by drawing attention to the broader substantive importance of this violence in the pre-migration period. Analyzing rich qualitative data collected among hard-to-reach asylum seekers and other Latin American MNP in Costa Rica, we illustrated that even when gendered family violence does not immediately precipitate a woman’s migration, it can constitute an important part of her biographical history, and in some cases can have cascading consequences that, over the course of many years, *indirectly* push

her toward viewing international migration as her only viable option. Our analysis further revealed that even when women did attribute their need to migrate to family violence, they framed their motivation around safeguarding their children rather than themselves. Gendered family violence thematically characterized interviews with women from *all* countries and education levels in our study, though somewhat less so with women who had graduated from university. Taken together, these findings extend existing migration, family, and legal scholarship by offering a more expansive understanding of the way gendered family violence plays out in the lives of women MNP prior to migration.

By exploring pre-migration family violence among women MNP seeking to evade a diversity of threats—not just IPV or other gendered family violence—our study illuminates the prominence of patriarchal norms in the pre-migration lives of Latin American women MNP, regardless of their stated primary motivation for migration. Detailing how women reflect on these norms and perceive them to have influenced their lives is an important step toward developing more empirically-informed understandings of MNPs' family histories and cultural expectations, both of which can influence their incorporation in destination settings (Calzada, Fernandez, and Cortes 2010; Pantoja 2005). Recognizing the pervasiveness of past experiences of gendered family violence among this population also brings to light that some women who don't seek asylum on the basis of this violence are likely to still qualify for it. It is therefore imperative for legal practitioners, migrant advocates, and other service providers to take stock of women's pre-migration family violence histories (Galli 2023; Saunders et al. 2022).

Our analysis of gendered family violence among a diversity of MNP also illuminated key ways in which this violence may *indirectly* push women to migrate abroad. Namely, when gendered family violence destabilizes women's lives and fractures their social ties, it winnows their social resources and constrains their options for remaining in-country. As their feelings of vulnerability grow, they lose hope that their lives can improve or that they can be safe in their countries of origin. These findings dovetail with the well-documented, pernicious effects of gendered family violence on women's employment, residential instability, and access to friends and family, which have been observed among non-migrant populations (Gilroy et al. 2016; Pavao et al. 2007; Showalter 2016; Showalter and McCloskey 2021; Snyder 2019), and indicate that such destabilizing effects can culminate in international migration, particularly in settings with insufficient institutional protections for abused women. In these ways, our findings underscore the need for more expansive theoretical models of how gendered family violence and its constituents—gender norms, family dynamics, and violent contexts—can serve as a reinforcing web of push factors for migration over the long-run.

Relatedly, our analysis of women fleeing a diversity of threats enabled us to closely compare cases of pre-migration gendered family violence that did and did not directly prompt migration. We found that, in the context of pervasive patriarchal norms and familism ideologies, women rarely experienced social messaging that encouraged them to act on their own behalf. In the absence of such messaging, women who sought asylum on the grounds of IPV or other gendered family violence voiced primary concerns for protecting their *children* rather than themselves from male family members. That is, the endangerment of

children invoked gendered expectations of women in their roles as mothers—and therefore as protectors—in a way that became the catalyst for their migration. Case comparisons with women who also experienced gendered family violence but did *not* migrate directly because of it, like Beatriz, Camila, and Elena—who did not detail threats to their children—further bolstered our conclusion that patriarchal norms and familism constrained women’s sense of agency in a way that informed their migration calculus.

Several limitations are worth noting. First, participants may have forgotten or misremembered select details of their life histories given that they were recounting events from years earlier, or their sentiments about the events may have changed over time. Second, our interview data are subjective. Although women’s narratives are perceptual, their perceptions have meaningful consequences for how they view their communities of origin, themselves, and their opportunities, constraints, and agency. Moreover, understanding *how* women reference and conceptualize gendered family violence is especially important given that asylum criteria and interviews do not necessarily take these nuances into account.

Third, because we did not explicitly inquire about family violence, potentially more participants had experiences with such violence than those we were made aware of. On the other hand, *not* asking about violence allowed women to disclose experiences of gendered family violence on their own terms. Not inquiring about violence may thus have improved women’s comfort talking about the subject. Fourth, our sample consists exclusively of cisgender women. We are therefore unable to conjecture about pre-migration family violence among cisgender men or among non-cisgender MNP. Finally, our interview-based sample is small and not representative of all women MNP in Costa Rica or elsewhere. We nevertheless successfully interviewed women who had migrated from a diversity of countries, demographic backgrounds, and precipitating threats.

Gendered family violence is likely a common biographical experience and/or historical contextual factor for many MNP leaving select countries in Latin America, regardless of whether this violence is what immediately precipitates a woman’s exodus from her country of origin. Tracing the life course trajectories of women MNP in Costa Rica and understanding when and how gendered family violence appears along their trajectories presents a novel opportunity to glean insights into the meanings and implications of this violence for Latin American MNP and to further unearth connections between family violence and women’s pathways toward migration. As we show, gendered family violence can both directly *and* indirectly push women to migrate, and even when it does not, it can characterize women MNPs’ family dynamics across the life course.

## Acknowledgements:

This research was made possible with funding from grants from the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (K01HD099313, PI Weitzman; T32HD007081, Swindle) and with a population center grant from the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development to the Population Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin (P2CHD042849). The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health. The authors are grateful to the study’s participants for generously sharing their experiences with us and to Fundación Mujer for their instrumental role in the recruitment process. The authors also thank Luis Zayas, Robert Crosnoe, Arodys Robles, Javier Auyero, Kammi Schmeer, Matthew Blanton, and Katarina Huss for their highly instructive comments on this study’s development and design.

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## Data Availability

The data analyzed in this article contain highly sensitive information and cannot be shared publicly due to ethical concerns and potential breaches of confidentiality. Moreover, the informed consent form that participants signed specifically stated that only the research team would have access to the interview data that participants provided.

## Appendix A: Comparison of survey questions in the DHS and RHS used to calculate the totals reported in Figure 1

	DHS	RHS
Emotional IPV	Now, if you will allow me, I would like to ask you some questions about your relationship with your husband/partner. If I ask you any question you don't want to answer, just let me know and I will go on to the next question. Did your (last) (husband/partner) ever:	I would like it if you could tell me if your spouse/ life partner or other person with whom you were married or partnered ever did any of the following things to you:
	Insult you or make you feel bad about yourself?	Insult you or make you feel bad about yourself?
	Say or do something to humiliate you in front of others?	Belittle or humiliate you in front of others?
	Threaten to hurt or harm you or someone you care about?	Threaten to hurt or harm you or someone you care about?
		Do something with the purpose of scaring or intimidating you (for example, in the way they looked at you, yelled at you, or broke things)?

	DHS	RHS
		Threaten to take your children away from you?*
Physical IPV	Did your (last) (husband/partner) ever do any of the following things to you: Slap you? Push you, shake you, or throw something at you? Punch you with his fist or with something that could hurt you? Kick you or drag you? Try to choke you or burn you on purpose? Threaten or attack you with a knife, gun, or other weapon? Twist your arm or pull your hair?	At some point in your life, did any spouse/ partner or ex-partner do the following to you: Slapped or thrown things that could hurt you? Pushed, trapped, or pulled your hair? Punch you with his fist or with something that could hurt you? Kicked, dragged, or punched you? Tried to choke you or burn you on purpose? Threatened or has used a gun, knife, or other weapon against you
Sexual IPV	Did your (last) (husband/partner) ever do any of the following things to you: Physically force you to have sexual intercourse with him when you did not want to? Physically force you to perform any other sexual acts you did not want to?	At some point in your life, did any spouse/ partner or ex-partner do the following to you: Did you feel compelled, out of fear, to have sex when you did not want to? Physically forced you to have sexual intercourse when you did not want to?
Physical violence by other family members	From the time you were 15 years old, has anyone other than (your/any) (husband/partner) hit you, slapped you, kicked you, done anything else to hurt you physically? If “yes”: “Who has hurt you in this way?”	Now I have some questions about your childhood. ...Since you turned 15 years old until now, have you ever been hit or physically abused by another person, including family members? If “yes”: “Who hit or abused you since you turned 15 years old?”
Father beat mother	As far as you know, did your father ever beat your mother?	Thinking about your childhood before you turned 15 years old, did you ever see or hear your father or step-father physically abuse your mother or step-mother?

\* Question only asked in the 2008-09 Guatemala RHS

## Appendix B

Working with vulnerable migrant populations, such as MNP, raises multiple ethical considerations. These considerations vary from one study to the next, depending on the legal, social, and historical contexts of origin and reception; and on the vulnerabilities of different migrants within those contexts (Bloemraad and Menjívar 2022). Below, we describe the ethical considerations of working with Latin American MNP in Costa Rica, considering our positionality as researchers from the context of reception (Costa Rica) and from a foreign setting (the United States).

### Researcher training and responsiveness.

Knowing that most MNP have migrated because of imminent threats to their survival, working with MNP in Costa Rica necessitated specialized expertise in trauma and trauma response. To that end, the study PI completed coursework in the Assessment and Treatment of Traumatized Populations; assembled a study advisory board that included social workers and developmental psychologists who specialized in working with migrant

populations, including MNP; and conferred with an NGO in Costa Rica—RET international—that provides free psychological counseling for MNP. In the event of an unanticipated emergency, the PI and her research assistant always kept RET’s emergency hotline number on-hand. Prior to commencing with data collection, the PI also conducted an extensive scope study that involved multiple site visits to churches, parks, and neighborhoods that MNP frequent in Costa Rica’s Central Valley; more than a dozen informal interviews with service providers working with MNP at Costa Rican NGOs and public institutions; and attendance at those institutions’ workshops for MNP. Beyond these activities, the study PI and her research assistant conducted four focus groups with a total of 44 MNP at Fundación Mujer in 2019. These focus groups were designed to uncover unique barriers to data collection among MNP, including issues like literacy levels, establishing trust, and potential scheduling conflicts; and to foreshadow the themes that characterize MNP daily life. Information gleaned from these interviews informed the interview recruitment process and questionnaire. Finally, to maintain careful oversight of the data collection and human subjects process, only the PI and one research assistant conducted the interviews. During those months, we met on a weekly basis to debrief, compare anecdotal observations, and make sure there were no unanticipated ethical considerations that required modifications to our protocol.

### **Cultural and contextual sensitivity.**

Based on our training, background research, and input from Fundación Mujer and other NGOs, we developed a series of culturally and contextually attuned interview protocols. First, upon entering the building, Fundación Mujer offered each participant a meal to eat. This is consistent with Fundación Mujer’s policy of offering meals to each person who passes through its doors, knowing that many of their clientele regularly face hunger. Second, we worked with participants to schedule interviews at times of *their* choosing, including on weekends, to not conflict with their work schedules or other obligations. Third, we conducted all interviews in Spanish, which was the primary language of all participants. Because participants came from various countries, and therefore spoke different colloquial versions of Spanish, when necessary, we asked participants to clarify certain words or phrases. Fourth, to ensure that participants felt heard and understood, during the interviews, we engaged in active listening. This meant we minimally interrupted participants and occasionally repeated back to them what we were hearing to ensure that we were understanding what they were saying in the way they had intended. Fifth, when participants became visibly upset, for example crying or wringing their hands, we offered to pause or end the interview. (All participants, however, expressed a desire to complete their interview after taking a pause). We also offered participants water and tissues as needed. Sixth, we treated participants with dignity and compassion. This meant validating their perspectives; offering them our full attention; thanking them for their participation; and, at the close of the interview, asking them whether they had any questions for us or additional information they wanted to share that we did *not* ask about. Finally, at the close of the interview, we provided participants with a list of legal, social, and health resources for migrants in Costa Rica.

## Protections against coercion or pressure.

We took four steps to minimize participation pressures throughout the study. First, during the recruitment phase, our collaborating NGO, Fundación Mujer, disseminated written and oral information to recent clientele they thought would be eligible to participate and whom they perceived, in their professional opinion, as emotionally prepared to share their stories with others. Potential participants subsequently followed up with the study team to schedule an interview. This recruitment design was intended to give invited individuals time alone to think about whether they wanted to participate. Second, for the informed consent process, we provided participants a written copy of the consent form about fifteen minutes before their interview began, to ensure they had adequate time to read the document. The consent form was in Spanish and used as minimally technical language as possible (Agadjanian, Arnaldo, and Cau 2011). Given that some women were illiterate or had low levels of reading comprehension, we then read the consent form aloud and asked participants whether they had any questions. Third, to minimize the extent to which participants felt financially incentivized to complete an interview (Waters 1999), we remunerated participation modestly and provided participants with their remuneration *before* interviews began. Specifically, participants were remunerated \$20 to defray travel costs and to reduce other financial barriers to participation. Finally, throughout the interview, we reminded participants that they did not have to share with us any details or information they did not feel comfortable sharing. If participants became visibly upset, for example crying or wringing their hands, we offered to take a pause and reminded participants that they could end the interview at any time.

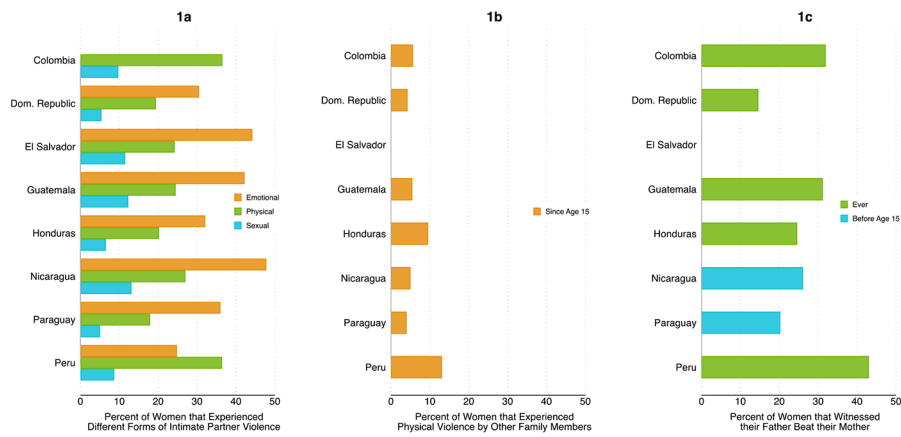
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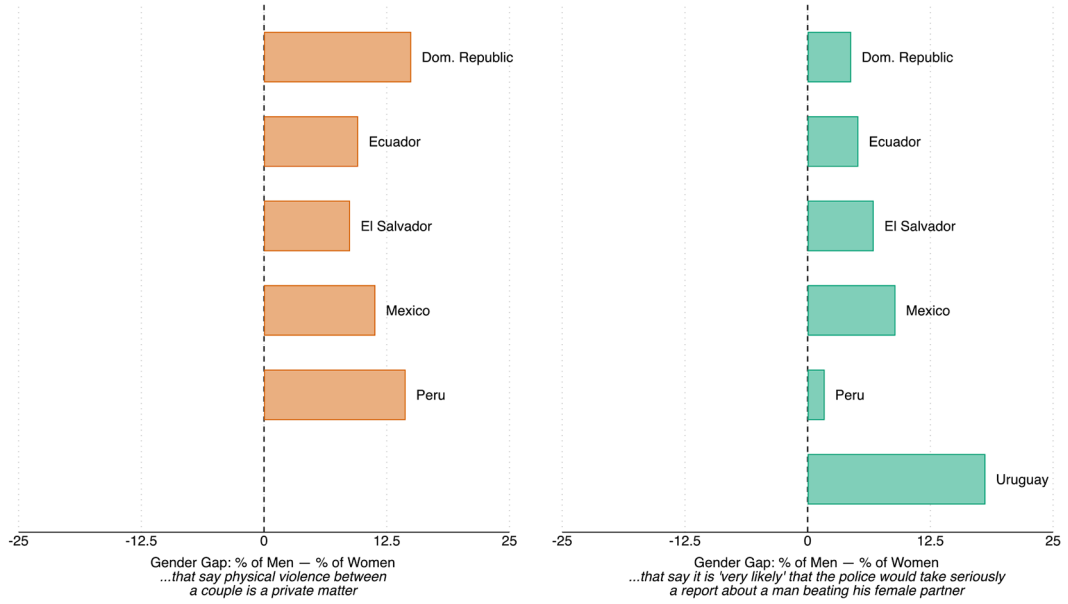
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**Figure 1.** Prevalence of gendered family violence in Latin American Demographic and Health Surveys and Reproductive Health Surveys

*Note:* Data come from the most recent Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Reproductive Health Surveys (RHS) for all Latin American countries surveyed. DHS data are from Colombia (2010); Dominican Republic (2013); Guatemala (2014-15); Honduras (2011-12); and Peru (2011). RHS data are from El Salvador (2008); Nicaragua (2006-07); and Paraguay (2008). DHS were later collected in Colombia (2015); however, the questions about family violence were not standardized with those of other countries. All surveys are nationally-representative of women ages 15-49 except Paraguay, which is representative of women ages 15-44. Survey questions in the DHS and RHS are similar, yet differ slightly. Appendix A offers a more detailed description of question wording. The relevant survey questions for emotional IPV were not included for Colombia (2010). In El Salvador, respondents were asked if family members physically abused them *before age 18* (28% responded affirmatively) rather than *since age 15*. They also were asked if they saw men abusing women in their home before age 18 (24% said “yes”), without specifying their relationship to the abused or abuser.



**Figure 2.** Percentage point differences in men’s and women’s attitudes toward gendered family violence in the Americas Barometers Surveys  
*Note:* Estimates come from our aggregation of individual-level weighted survey data from the most recent Americas Barometer surveys (2021) in Latin America. We draw upon two questions. The first was phrased: “Physical violence between members of a couple is a private matter and should be handled by the couple or close family. Do you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly agree?” This question was not asked in Uruguay. We collapse the former two and latter three categories into a simplified indicator of agreement/disagreement. The second was: “Suppose a woman in your community/ neighborhood was beaten by her partner. If the incident was reported, how likely would it be that the police would take it seriously? Very likely, somewhat likely, a little likely, not at all likely?” Here, we collapse the latter three categories to yield a simplified indicator of very likely/less than very likely. Different ways of dichotomizing possible responses to these questions does not change the substantive conclusion that, across all countries, men express greater support in keeping physical violence between a couple a private matter and greater confidence that the police will take seriously reported incidents of men physically abusing their female partners.

**Table 1.**  
Description of participants and their references to gendered family violence in the pre-migration stage

Pseudonym	National origin	Relationship status	Education level	Referenced					
				Own IPV	Others' IPV	Spousal abandonment	Parental abandonment	Other family violence	Patriarchal norms
Adriana	El Salvador	Ex-Partnered	Secondary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alma	Nicaragua	Ex-Partnered	Incomplete primary			✓			
Andrea	Nicaragua	Partnered	Incomplete secondary						
Antonella	Nicaragua	Ex-Partnered	Secondary		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Astrid	Nicaragua	Ex-Partnered	University						✓
Augustina	Venezuela	Partnered	University						
Beatrice	Nicaragua	Ex-Partnered	Secondary	✓		✓		✓	✓
Belén	Nicaragua	Ex-Partnered	Incomplete secondary			✓			✓
Camila	Cuba	Re-Partnered	Secondary	✓		✓			
Celestina	El Salvador	Ex-Partnered	Incomplete primary			✓			✓
Constanza	Venezuela	Partnered	University						✓
Cristina	Nicaragua	Partnered	Primary						✓
Elena	S. America *	Re-Partnered	Incomplete primary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Emilia	El Salvador	Single	Secondary			✓			✓
Estella	Nicaragua	Partnered	University		✓				
Flor	Nicaragua	Ex-Partnered	University						✓
Gabriela	Nicaragua	Partnered	Primary			✓	✓	✓	
Gracia	Nicaragua	Ex-Partnered	University			✓		✓	
Inez	El Salvador	Ex-Partnered	Secondary	✓		✓	✓		✓
Isabela	Venezuela	Partnered	Secondary			✓	✓	✓	
Josefina	Venezuela	Partnered	University						
Juliana	Nicaragua	Partnered	Secondary		✓			✓	✓
Lola	Venezuela	Partnered	University					✓	✓
Lorena	El Salvador	Widowed	Secondary						✓
Lucia	Nicaragua	Re-Partnered	University						✓
Luna	Nicaragua	Ex-Partnered	None	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Martina	Nicaragua	Ex-Partnered	None			✓			✓
Natalia	Venezuela	Ex-Partnered	Secondary					✓	
Noa	Venezuela	Ex-Partnered	University			✓			
Regina	Venezuela	Partnered	University						✓
Selena	Nicaragua	Partnered	Incomplete secondary						
Sofia	Venezuela	Ex-Partnered	Primary					✓	
Ximena	El Salvador	Partnered	Incomplete secondary						

Pseudonym	National origin	Relationship status	Education level	Referenced					
				Own IPV	Others' IPV	Spousal abandonment	Parental abandonment	Other family violence	Patriarchal norms
Yuli	Nicaragua	Partnered	University						✓

\* Specific country intentionally withheld at participant's request.

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