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Nudge-based interventions in the decision-making of women victims of violence: an integrative review of the literature

Intervenções baseadas em Nudge na tomada de decisão de mulheres vítimas de violência: uma revisão integrativa da literatura

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts an integrative review to explore the issue of violence against women and the effectiveness of nudge-based behavioral interventions developed in recent years. The research was conducted using Google Scholar, Scopus, Scielo, and PubMed, utilizing keywords such as "Nudge," "violence," and "women." The search was limited to English, Spanish, and Portuguese articles between 2013 and 2023. After applying predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, only three articles were deemed suitable for the final analysis. This highlights a significant gap in research within this domain, particularly in Brazil, where femicide rates rank among the highest globally. The study identified two primary analytical categories: (1) Gender Violence as a Structural

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Phenomenon and (2) Nudges as Behavioral Tools: Exploring Potential and Limitations. The paucity of findings underscores the urgent need for further research in this area. Advancing our understanding is imperative to develop effective intervention strategies to mitigate violence against women.

Keywords: Violence; Woman; Interventions; Insigths; Nudges.

RESUMO

Este estudo realiza uma revisão integrativa para explorar a questão da violência contra as mulheres e a eficácia das intervenções comportamentais baseadas em nudges desenvolvidas nos últimos anos. A pesquisa foi realizada utilizando Google Scholar, Scopus, Scielo e PubMed, utilizando palavras-chave como "Nudge", "violência" e "mulheres". A busca limitou-se a artigos publicados em inglês, espanhol e português entre 2013 e 2023. Após aplicação de critérios de inclusão e exclusão prédeterminados, apenas três artigos foram considerados adequados para a análise final. Isto destaca uma lacuna significativa na pesquisa neste domínio, particularmente no Brasil, onde as taxas de feminicídio estão entre as mais altas do mundo. O estudo identificou duas categorias analíticas primárias: (1) Violência de gênero como fenômeno estrutural e (2) Nudges como ferramentas comportamentais: explorando potencial e limitações. A escassez de resultados sublinha a necessidade urgente de mais pesquisas nesta área. Avançar na nossa compreensão é fundamental para desenvolver estratégias de intervenção eficazes para mitigar a violência contra as mulheres.

Palavras-chave: Violência; Mulher; Intervenções; Insigths; Nudges.

Gender-based violence is a pervasive global issue, affecting women across various demographics and resulting in a staggering number of victims annually. The World Health Organization (2021) reports that globally, approximately one in three women will experience physical and/or sexual abuse in their lifetime, often at the hands of an intimate partner. This issue is often rooted in long-established cultural traditions that undermine the rights and agency of women (Diehl & Porto, 2018).

This form of violence encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuses, predominantly occurring within the family sphere. Historically in Brazilian society, domestic violence was perceived as a private matter, beyond the scope of external intervention (Conselho Nacional de Justiça - CNJ, 2019, p. 7). The societal recognition of this issue as a criminal act emerged with the enactment of the Maria da Penha Law (Law 11.340/2006) and the Law on Feminicide



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(Law 13.104/2015), marking a recent shift in awareness (Diehl & Porto, 2018). However, despite having such progressive legislation, Brazil continues to witness escalating femicide rates (Borges da Mota Júnior, 2022, p. 6).

Indeed, while legal measures aimed at mitigating domestic violence against women have been forth, there remains a significant discrepancy between the assurance of rights and the prevention of violence. immediate Addressina this requires and effective countermeasures. Insights from Psychology and Behavioral Economics, particularly interventions using "nudges," show promise in this regard (Bellatin, Silva & Bustin, 2021). Thaler and Sunstein (2008) describe this approach as the use of subtle prompts that alter behavior in decisionmaking contexts, fostering more deliberate choices and guiding individuals towards optimal outcomes. These cost-effective strategies have been effective in diverse fields, including health, finance, and environmental sectors.

Digital nudges represent a modern extension of this concept. Weinman et al. (2016, p. 433) define them as the use of user interface design elements to influence behavior in digital decision-making environments. These tactics have been incorporated in campaigns against gender-based violence, such as the symbolic "X" on victims' palms, signaling a distress call and prompting immediate police intervention, as shown in Figure 1 (Portal Pizón, 2021).



Figure 1. Source: Portal Pizón, 2021.



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The present study aims to explore the application of Nudge Theory in decision-making processes among female victims of violence and stimulate further research in Brazil, a country with notably high feminicide rates (Martinho, 2020). Additionally, it seeks to contribute to the nascent academic discourse on nudges, which remains relatively unexplored nationally and globally. This integrative review addresses the question: Is there scientific evidence supporting the use of nudges as a strategy to mitigate violence against women?

METHOD

This study was developed through an integrative literature review, a methodology synthesizing diverse research findings for practical application. This approach uniquely accommodates both theoretical and empirical studies, thus offering a comprehensive perspective on the examined phenomenon (Souza, Silva, & Carvalho, 2010). A systematic search across Google Scholar, Scopus, Scielo, and PubMed yielded an initial pool of 171 studies. These studies, published between 2013 and 2023, spanned English, Spanish, and Portuguese languages and pertained to the thematic focus of the research. Keywords guiding this search included "Nudge," "violence," and "women."

In order to refine this pool to the most relevant articles, specific inclusion criteria were applied, requiring that the papers be open-access, fully available, directly relevant to the research topic, published within the defined timeframe (2013–2023), and written in English, Spanish, or Portuguese. Additionally, the published works needed to incorporate the pre-defined keywords. The exclusion criteria eliminated duplicates, articles not directly addressing the research question, and non-peer-reviewed sources such as dissertations, theses, books, book chapters, and research projects. The selection process from August to December 2023 ultimately identified only three articles for the final sample.



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In-depth analysis of titles, abstracts, and keywords led to the selecting of the three most pertinent articles, which were systematically organized in an Excel table for clarity and ease of reference. Subsequently, two analytical categories were established to enhance understanding of the subject matter: 1) Gender Violence as a Structural Phenomenon, and 2) Nudges as Behavioral Tools: Exploring Possibilities and Boundaries. The objective is to distill critical insights for a more profound comprehension of domestic violence and to explore potential nudge-based intervention strategies.

RESULTS

The final sample consisted of 03 original articles, 02 in English and 01 in Spanish. They were analyzed according to the criteria required for an integrative review: identification of the theme; inclusion and exclusion criteria; collection of categorized information; critical analysis; interpretation of results; and finally, the synthesis of knowledge (Souza, Silva, & Carvalho, 2010). Regarding the nature of the articles, 02 were bibliographic studies and 01 was classified as a qualitative-quantitative mixed experimental research. Table 1 presents the main characteristics of the selected papers, which are described in ascending order of the year of publication.

In order to synthesize the relevant articles, two categories of analysis were listed that seek to answer the question of this research: 1 – Gender violence as a structural phenomenon; 2 – Nudges as behavioral tools: between possibilities and limits. It is noteworthy that the studies evidenced the use of nudges as an effective strategy to reduce cases of violence against women.



Table 1. Description of selected articles in ascending order of year of publication.

Full Reference	Year of Publication	Languag e	Method	Goal	Main Results
Waylen, G. (2018). Nudges for gender equality? What can behaviour change offer gender and politics?. European Journal of Politics and Gender, 1(1-2), 167-183. Retrieved Dec 7, 2023.	2018	English	Bibliograph ic research	The study explores what behavior change, with its associated methods, approaches and policy prescriptions, can offer to gender and politics.	Key findings from the study include the finding that behavior change, with its methods and approaches, can offer important <i>insights</i> into the subfield of gender politics
Bellatin, P., Silva, M. W., & Bustin, C. (2021). Behavioral Insights and Gender-Based Violence Prevention: Evidence From a Facebook Trial in Honduras. The Behavioral Economics Guide, 3, 15-26.	2021	English	Quali- Quanti Research	She used nudges to encourage women to denounce and seek help, whether for themselves or others. The goal was to test messages based on behavioral science to see which one would have the most impact	Among the messages that caused the most significant impacts were those that were part of "sunk costs" and "uncertainty aversion bias."
Hortal, A. (2023). Combatiendo la violencia de género a través de políticas públicas conductuales: alcance y limitaciones. Revista de Ciencias de Administración y Economía (RETOS), 13(25), Universidad de Carolina del Norte.	2023	Spanish	Bibliograph ic research	The study aims to comprehensively analyze the current literature on public policies, explore the possible applications of behavioral economics in the context of genderbased violence, and use behavioral interventions such as <i>nudges</i> .	The main results of the study include the identification of the lack of attention and research in the application of behavioral economics in public policies related to gender-based violence. In addition, the study highlights the importance of including behavioral knowledgebased interventions, such as nudges.





GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AS A STRUCTURAL PHENOMENON

Brazil is one of the countries with the highest rates of feminicide and violence against women in the world, something that has been historically associated with a culture with strict male and female roles (Borges da Mota Júnior, 2022). Cultural experiences shape subjectivities, for culture is a collective construction of a dynamic and continuous nature, which influences individuals' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses (Valsiner, 2012; Simão, 2015). It offers possibilities for action but stipulates conditions for that action. In this tension between the "self and the other," that culture is transformed, created, and recreated amidst the personal edges of self and other - where interactions, possibilities, and limits meet (Boesch, 1984; Simão, 2015). Thus, to understand this phenomenon, it is also necessary to observe the cultural and social structures involved in the process.

The main causes that lead women to situations of violence include sociocultural, economic, and individual factors. According to B.O. Ahinkorah et al. (2018) some of the main causes involve: gender inequality and cultural norms (reflecting on the role of women in society and at home); limited empowerment of women (less decision-making capacity and control over their lives); economic factors (financial dependence on partners); education and awareness (lower level of knowledge about their rights and available resources); social pressures and stigma (lack of family or community support). These are just some of the factors that can contribute to violence against women, and it is important to address these issues holistically to prevent and address gender-based violence.

Most cases of violence occur within the family environment itself. According to the National Council of Justice monitoring, and such figures continue to grow despite the legal changes that have occurred in recent years, with the advent of anti-violence laws and other protection devices





(Conselho Nacional de Justiça [CNJ], 2019). Based on the definition provided by the Maria da Penha Law, domestic or family violence against women has been established as an act or fact that results in physical, psychological, moral, or property damage committed by an intimate partner (Brasil, 2006).

The research by Waylen (2018) and Hortal (2023) offers a solid theoretical basis to reflect on the benefits that behavioral tools could bring to the context of public policies related to gender issues, making room for an integrated and comprehensive vision, recognizing that the elimination of gender-based violence requires a multifaceted approach. Actions to confront domestic violence must address different perspectives, and it is necessary not only to act in repression but also in the sense of benefiting the choices and decisions of the affected women by promoting prevention through the provision of information, as well as acting in the guarantee of rights (Diehl & Porto, 2018). Since people are not always capable of making rational decisions and constantly fall into "mistakes" during the decision-making process, receiving influences from past experiences, the environment in which they are inserted, and their cognitive limitations (Simon, 1979).

NUDGES AS BEHAVIORAL TOOLS: BETWEEN POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS

Decision-making is a complex cognitive process involving selecting a course of action from multiple alternatives (R. Sternberg & K. Sternberg, 2016). Research in Psychology and Behavioral Economics has revealed that individual judgment and decision-making are often constrained by "limited rationality" (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Simon, 1979; Kahneman, 2003). This concept is further elucidated by the Dual Model of Information Processing (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), which posits that decision-making involves two distinct systems: an intuitive and





automatic system (System 1), responsible for rapid and effortless operations, and a reflective and rational system (System 2), which engages in slower, more deliberate processing. Notably, individuals frequently rely on the quick but error-prone decisions of System 1, requiring minimal cognitive effort (Kahneman, 2011).

These cognitive limitations are also influenced by heuristics, fallacies, and biases (Da Cunha & Aguiar, 2020), which shape decision-making through distorted perceptions and the impact of prior experiences, values, beliefs, and knowledge (Gontijo & Maia, 2004). However, Thaler and Sunstein (2008) argue that more effective decision-making can be achieved through well-designed "Choice Architecture" and subtle prompts or "nudges," enabling better decision recognition with minimal cost and without impinging on freedom of choice. Thus, these interventions can guide individuals towards more advantageous and informed decisions, influencing behavior in beneficial ways.

In a study conducted in Honduras with women affected by violence (Bellatin, Silva & Bustin, 2021), researchers identified several cognitive barriers hindering prevention and early intervention, including the recognition of violent situations. Key barriers included: (1) Availability bias, where the frequency of events is estimated based on the ease of recalling occurrences (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974); (2) The sunk cost fallacy, where decisions are influenced by past investments (Arkes & Blumer, 1985); (3) Aversion to uncertainty, a preference for known risks over unknown ones (Ellsberg, 1961); (4) The absence of safety plans, which can inhibit seeking change and escaping cycles of aggression (Bellatin, Silva & Bustin, 2021). The study demonstrated that targeting these barriers with nudge strategies, such as visual aids, yielded positive outcomes in experimental groups.

However, the target audience for interventions against genderbased violence is diverse, extending beyond women who are victims or





potential victims. Almeida and colleagues (2016) also identify potential recipients of such interventions, including: prospective and actual perpetrators (key behaviors to address here include refraining from committing violence against women and avoiding recidivism); the social environment, which includes relatives, friends of the victim and bystanders (target behaviors in this group include supporting the victim in reporting the violence and taking other appropriate actions, as well as intervening directly in critical situations); professionals, including police officers (to support victims in reporting and refer them to appropriate services), medical professionals (to encourage reporting and help perpetrators prevent recidivism), social workers (to detect signs of violence and provide safe environments for women), but also journalists and bloggers (to change attitudes towards violence and avoid portraying it as a 'crime of passion'), and judges (to ensure fair trials); the general public, covering all age groups, is also a target, with the aim to raise awareness about violence against women, participate in prevention initiatives, and report domestic violence to external authorities.

The document also provides guidelines on behavioral levers in designing initiatives. These levers include social norms and social referents, knowledge raising, commitment devices, framing, and salience.

What is notable is that the showcased initiatives, which fall under what we would now call "nudging interventions," are not so recent, indeed, some date back more than thirty years (see, for example, Donovan and Vlais' review, 2005). This again suggests that the issue of violence against women may have been somewhat overlooked in behavioral science research.

It is important to note, however, that interventions based solely on nudges are insufficient to address the complex issue of gender violence comprehensively. These behavioral insights offer potential solutions but



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also have limitations, as they do not address underlying legal, financial, and social challenges. A multifaceted approach, encompassing educational, cultural, and legislative strategies, as well ascollaborations between the public and private sectors, organized civil society, and the academic community, is essential for addressing this severe, pervasive, and intricate societal issue.

In other words, while individual-level solutions like nudges can be effective in specific scenarios, their impact is often limited, especially for systemic issues. This applies not only to gender-based violence but also to challenges like climate change, obesity, retirement savings, and plastic waste. Chater and Loewenstein (2023) argue that individual-level interventions (i-frame solutions) should be complemented by systemic changes (s-frame solutions) to alter the broader environment in which individuals operate. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are most effective when used in synergy.

DISCUSSION

The prevailing research on gender-based violence often overlooks the potential contributions of Behavioral Economics in fostering behavioral change among female victims of violence. Addressing this issue necessitates tackling a multifaceted array of challenges, including but not limited to the assurance of basic human rights, the recognition and protection of work, and the safeguarding of physical and emotional well-being. This complex interplay of factors, encompassing perceptions, emotions, cognitive limitations, and decision-making processes, is crucial for understanding and mitigating this deeply rooted social and political issue.

Education emerges as a critical tool in combating social inequalities and harmful cultural norms. It enables the challenging of detrimental gender stereotypes, the fostering of critical awareness, and the cultivation of values centered on respect and equality. In this context,





prior research (Abreu & Roazzi, 2023) suggests that the application of nudges can significantly enhance knowledge across various settings. Similarly, the legislative field must be bolstered to enforce laws that protect women's rights, ensuring effective support for victims of violence and appropriate penalties for the perpetrators. Additional studies (Horta, 2019) have also highlighted the benefits of employing behavioral tools in judicial decision-making processes.

The integrative review found two papers that primarily focused on theoretical aspects of Behavioral Economics and the application of Nudges within public policy frameworks (Waylen, 2018; Hortal, 2023). These studies explored gender-related issues and potential improvements in decision-making processes. While Waylen (2018) did not specifically address violence against women, his work suggests strategies in this area using Nudges and other public policy methods. Hortal (2023), on the other hand, explicitly discusses the potential of this behavioral tool in combating gender violence.

A notable qualitative-quantitative, randomized study conducted in Honduras by Bellatin, Silva and Bustin (2021) surveyed 829,445 women via Facebook. This research identified decision-making biases and barriers among women experiencing violence and demonstrated positive outcomes from the deployment of Nudge-infused images. All experimental groups showed marked improvements over the control group, particularly in messages addressing "sunk costs" and "uncertainty aversion bias." These findings underscore the necessity of comprehending the decision-making complexities faced by female victims of violence and how interventions grounded in Behavioral Economics can beneficially influence these decisions.

FINAL THOUGHTS



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The pervasive issue of violence against women, deeply rooted in cultural norms, demands a thorough comprehension of the cultural dynamics that contribute to and perpetuate such violence. This necessitates a reevaluation of the symbolic boundaries that shape individual and collective behaviors, as well as an examination of transformative cultural shifts that can empower women and eliminate gender-based violence.

Key to this effort is the recognition of cultural nuances and the specific circumstances of the women affected. It is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of the cultural norms, values, and meanings associated with violence against women. In addition to cultural factors, behavioral aspects are equally critical, as they significantly influence the decision-making processes of these women. The goal is to positively impact their decision-making, enabling them to transform their lives through changed self-perceptions during their experiences and promoting their recognition as agents capable of disrupting the cycle of violence.

Current research highlights a significant gap in studies in this area, particularly in the context of rising incidents of violence against women. Notably, Brazilian research in this field, especially studies that utilize digital nudge strategies for victims of gender violence, is scarce, despite the increasing reliance on digital decision-making in the Digital Age. Therefore, developing strategies to mitigate these impacts is urgent and crucial. These strategies should offer insights into interventions targeting gender violence, encouraging behavioral change, and guiding women toward more effective decisions in terms of prevention and early intervention.

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