

Bargaining under Threats: The Effect of Joint Custody Laws on Intimate Partner Violence.

Daniel Fernández-Kranz
IE University – IE Business School, Spain

Natalia Nollenberger
IE University – IE Business School, Spain

Jennifer Roff
Queens College, CUNY

May 2024

We exploit a quasi-natural experiment based on a series of reforms in Spain that improved fathers' bargaining power by shifting the custody decision from being unilaterally determined by the mother to a joint decision. Employing a triple difference specification that compares women with and without children in treated and control regions before and after the reforms, we find that the policy led to a large and significant decrease in intimate partner violence (-43.3%), with the largest effects among women over 30 and in regions with low take-up rates. Our results are in line with previous studies that find that women empowerment may lead to an increase of intimate partner violence in societies with strong gender norms as male partners see their status being threatened (Angelucci and Heath, 2020; Heath, 2014, García-Ramos, 2021, Hoehn-Velasco and Silverio-Murillo, 2020).

Keywords: intimate partner violence, joint custody, divorce, household bargaining models

JEL classification: D13, J12, J13, I12, K36