

Fighting gender violence with behavioral public policy: scope and limitations

Combatiendo la violencia de género a través de políticas públicas conductuales: alcances y limitaciones

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Abstract: since the concept of “nudge” was introduced in 2008 by Thaler and Sunstein, proposing that small interventions based on changes in choice architectures can alter people’s behavior and make it easier for them to achieve their desired goals, the application in public policy of behavioral economics has gained significant attention. This has led to the emergence of different types of policies based on behavioral insights, which have been used in a variety of areas, including health or finance, with the goal of promoting well-being and addressing social and economic issues. After providing a basic theoretical background as a frame of reference to understand gender violence, this study explores the use of tools from the field of behavioral economics as it is applied in public policy. Regulatory (paternalistic) and non-regulatory (libertarian) interventions based on behavioral insights will be considered: nudges, boosts, shoves, nudges, or sludge audits, are examined as potential interventions to use in matters related to this type of violence. After evaluating these behavioral policy instruments and their potential effectiveness, the limitations of the behavioral perspective are recognized, and the need for a multifaceted approach to combating gender violence is acknowledged. The article concludes by arguing that public policies addressing gender violence should not only utilize behavioral tools but should also incorporate strategies related to education, legislation, and social norms.

Keywords: gender violence, nudge, public policy, libertarian paternalism, behavioral economics, nudges, shoves, education.

Resumen: desde que en 2008 se introdujera el concepto de nudge en el libro *Nudge*, que argumentaba que las pequeñas intervenciones basadas en cambios en la arquitectura de elección pueden alterar el comportamiento de las personas y facilitarles el logro de sus objetivos deseados, el uso de la economía del comportamiento en políticas públicas ha crecido significativamente, lo que ha llevado a la aparición de diferentes intervenciones basadas en conocimientos conductuales. Estas intervenciones se han aplicado en distintas áreas de políticas públicas y administrativas, incluyendo salud, finanzas, o medio ambiente, con el objetivo de promover el bienestar y abordar problemas sociales y económicos. El uso de estas aplicaciones en cuestiones relacionadas con la violencia de género ha sido con frecuencia ignorado. De este modo, el objetivo de este estudio es analizar el uso de herramientas de la economía del comportamiento en políticas públicas, como nudges, boosts o auditoría de sludges y su aplicación a asuntos relacionados con este tipo de violencia. Al mismo tiempo que se señalan los posibles beneficios de su uso, también se reconocen las limitaciones del enfoque conductual, apuntando a la necesidad de una aproximación multifacética para combatir dicha violencia. Así, las políticas públicas que tratan con violencia de género deben incluir el uso de herramientas conductuales junto con otras estrategias relacionadas con la educación, la legislación y las normas sociales.

Palabras clave: violencia de género, pequeños empujones, políticas públicas, paternalismo libertario, economía conductual, estímulos, empujones, educación.

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Introduction

The field of behavioral economics has gained significant attention in recent years as a tool for improving public policy. The publication of *Nudge* (Thaler and Sunstein, 2009) served as a catalyst for the incorporation of behavioral approaches in policymaking, with the aim of influencing individuals' decision-making processes and addressing their bounded rationality in order to enhance their well-being and promote societal progress. Despite the proliferation of research and interventions in this area, there has been a notable lack of focus on the issue of gender violence. This study aims to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the current literature on behavioral public policy and highlighting the various approaches employed across different domains. Furthermore, this study will explore potential applications of behavioral economics in the realm of gender violence, with the ultimate goal of reducing and ultimately eliminating instances of this pervasive problem.

The prevalence of gender violence is a significant public health and human rights concern, affecting individuals, families, and communities worldwide. Despite the efforts of governments, organizations, and advocates to address this issue, rates of gender violence remain alarmingly high. Some authors have argued that "interventions should support men to take responsibility for their own behavior" (Devaney, 2014, p. 480), while others are asking to review the warrantless domestic violence arrest laws (Chin and Cunningham, 2019) or approach the problem from other perspectives. Behavioral economics, with its focus on understanding and influencing decision-making processes, has the potential to offer new and innovative solutions to this complex problem. However, as previously stated, the current research and interventions in the field of behavioral economics have largely neglected the issue of gender violence. Therefore, this study, while reviewing current literature, it also addresses the application of behavioral economics to reduce and eliminate gender violence, filling this gap in the research and contributing to the ongoing efforts to address this critical issue.

Herbert Simon published *Administrative Behavior* (1947), criticizing the ideal approach of classical and neo-classical economics and administration theory when describing rational processes (Hortal, 2017). Simon's contributions to behavioral economics were largely centered around the idea of bounded rationality (Simon, 1957, 1982): people are not always able to process all the available information and make fully rational decisions. He argued that this is due to cognitive constraints such as limited attention, memory, and processing power, as well as the complexity of the decision-making environment. Simon asserted that people often rely on mental shortcuts or heuristics to make decisions (Simon, 1977), rather than carefully analyzing all the available information. He also suggested that people's preferences and values may be influenced by their context and how information is presented to them.

Likewise, Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman's research (1972, 1974, 1981) identified systematic deviations from classical standards of rationality that are predictable and result from the use of heuristic processes in our cognitive system. These heuristics can sometimes cause biases that distort our perception of reality and lead to irrational behavior. Tversky and Kahneman's work has significantly impacted our understanding of human decision-making and has had significant implications for fields such as economics, psychology, and political science. One of the major contributions of their research was prospect theory: a framework for understanding how people make decisions under uncertainty (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). According to prospect theory, people do not always make decisions based on expected utility, as posited by classical economic theory. Instead, they are often affected by potential losses and gains, and they usually exhibit a preference for avoiding losses over acquiring gains. This theory has been influential in explaining a wide range of phenomena in decision-making, including risk aversion, framing effects, and the endowment effect. It has also had significant practical applications in fields such as marketing, finance, and policy-making.

It is in the field of policy-making where Rich-

ard Thaler (a usual collaborator of Kahneman), together with Cass Sunstein, considering the research mentioned above, developed an approach to interventions based on behavioral insights (taking into account the cognitive biases of our bounded rationality). In 2008 they published the book *Nudge*, examining how small interventions based on changes in choice architecture can alter people's behavior successfully. These nudges can make it easier for people to achieve their desired goals to have a happier and better life as judged by themselves (Gold *et al.*, 2020; Sunstein, 2020). Since people have a hard time (due to their cognitive limitations and bounded rationality) to achieve what they propose, policy-makers can help by organizing the choice environment making certain options more salient than others in a way where the best choice becomes the easiest choice. These nudges can also be used to make society better as a whole (environmental aspects, public health, organ donations, or even during pandemics (Martínez and Fernández, 2020).

After the publication of *Nudge* (Thaler and Sunstein, 2009), nudging became a framework to deploy efficient and evidence-based interventions (Hortal, 2020a) to improve people's well-being by organizing the choice environment. Behavioral sciences have increasingly been applied to public policy in recent years, leading to the emergence of various intervention approaches such as nudges (Oliver, 2013, 2018), boosts (Grüne-Yanoff and Hertwig, 2016; Hertwig and Grüne-Yanoff, 2017; Reijula *et al.*, 2018), nudge plus (Banerjee and John, 2021), meta-nudges (Dimant and Shalvi, 2022), virtue-nudges (Hortal, 2022), or shoves (Sunstein, 2013). While nudges are intended to promote well-being, the term "sludge" has been introduced to refer to intentional or unintentional interventions that utilize similar techniques but with the purpose of decreasing well-being. Thaler introduces the notion of sludge, referring to nudge-type interventions that would decrease people's wellness. In theory, while nudges are interventions designed to make lives better, "the same techniques for nudging can be used for less benevolent purposes" (Thaler, 2018).

This article aims at considering different ways in which the approaches mentioned above can

complement public policy initiatives to eliminate or reduce the cases of gender violence, mitigate its effects, and help in the prosecution of offenders. In this article, besides "gender violence," other concepts had to be considered, such as "intimate partner violence" or "domestic violence."

"Gender violence," "intimate partner violence," and "domestic violence" all refer to forms of violence or abuse that occur within relationships or households. These terms are often used interchangeably, and they can include physical, sexual, emotional, or financial abuse or coercion. "Gender violence" is a comprehensive concept that refers to any form of violence or abuse that is perpetrated against someone on the basis of their gender. This can include violence or abuse against women, men, or non-binary individuals. It is fundamental to highlight that not all violence in a relationship is domestic violence (Kuennen, 2020) and that domestic and gender violence are connected but distinct phenomena. "Intimate partner violence" refers explicitly to violence or abuse that occurs within intimate relationships, such as between spouses, dating partners, or domestic partners. It can include physical, sexual, emotional, or financial abuse or coercion. "Domestic violence" refers to violence or abuse that occurs within the home, typically between family members or household members. It can include physical, sexual, emotional, or financial abuse or coercion. All three terms encompass a range of behaviors and actions used to control, intimidate, or harm another person within a relationship or household setting. They are serious issues that can significantly negatively impact the physical and mental health of those who experience them.

Although these different notions of violence are not the same and do not refer to the same events, they share enough similarities to consider them jointly when referring to how behavioral public policy can be used to reduce the number of cases.

Selection criteria

When conducting this study on behavioral public policy and its possible application to gender vio-

lence, the following criteria were used to select relevant articles:

- **Relevance to the topic:** The articles should pertain to the intersection of behavioral public policy and gender violence, with a focus on reducing and eliminating instances of gender violence. The objective of the exploratory review was to identify relevant studies in the emerging area of behavioral public policy. The criteria for inclusion were based on various factors, such as publication date, number of citations, authorship, and journal. The review specifically sought to uncover studies that utilized behavioral interventions such as nudges or boosts. Given the limited nature of literature in this field, all relevant papers that met the predetermined criteria were included in the review.
- **Use of appropriate keywords:** The articles included keywords (from the field of behavioral public policy and behavioral economics): such as “behavioral public policy”, “nudge”, “libertarian paternalism”, and “behavioral economics”. The study also searched connections between the terms just mentioned and these other concepts: “gender violence”, “domestic violence”, “violence against women,” and “intimate partner violence”.
- **Date of publication:** The articles should be relatively recent, with a publication date within the last five to ten years.
- **Quality of the research:** The articles should be based on rigorous research methods and provide a thorough analysis of the topic.
- **The reputation of the journal:** The articles should be published in reputable journals within the field, such as Behavioral Public Policy, which is considered one of the main journals in the field of behavioral public policy.

By employing these criteria and Boolean operators “and”, “or” and “not” through the Google

Scholar academic search engine, this study was able to select a comprehensive and diverse set of articles that can provide an exploratory comprehension of the execution of behavioral public policy to various problems, while guiding the direction to recognize potential applications in gender violence by recognizing deficiencies in existing research and regions for future inquiry.

The review was exploratory (Stebbins, 2001) providing a broad approach to the area to highlight the lack of research that connects behavioral economics, public policy, and gender violence. The strategy for selection and synthesis of studies in this literature review on gender-based violence and behavioral public policies was carried out in a systematic and objective manner. The objective of the review was clear and precise, and focused on answering the specific research question regarding the need for an increase in behavioral approaches in the implementation of interventions that seek a reduction in gender violence. The studies were selected using clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, such as date of publication, methodology used (favoring studies that used randomized controlled trials but considering other approaches), and journal classification. The results and information obtained from the selected studies were then synthesized.

Debates about the status of the issue

Gender violence

Gender violence is a structural, social, political, and relational phenomenon that occurs systematically around the world (Ramírez Velásquez *et al.*, 2020) and is the result of a power imbalance between men and women (Jaramillo-Bolivar and Canaval-Eraza, 2020). According to Poggi (2019), for public policymakers to effectively address and reduce the prevalence of gender violence, it is important to have a clear and specific definition of the term within legislative and policy frameworks. The General Assembly of the United Nations (resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993) proclaimed that “gender violence is a term that encompasses a range of harmful behaviors and

practices that are perpetuated on the basis of gender. This can include physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, as well as economic or social discrimination and coercion. It is defined as “means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” Gender violence is often rooted in and perpetuated by societal gender norms and power imbalances between men and women. It is a global issue that cuts across all social and economic sectors and can occur in a variety of settings, including the home, community, and workplace (Hatch-Maillette and Scalora, 2002; Hatch-Maillette *et al.*, 2007), affecting women’s health and even self-esteem (Velarde *et al.*, 2022)

Klugman (2017) claims that gender-based violence is a widespread issue that affects one in three women at some point in their lives. Confinement policies related to COVID-19 have increased the number of cases (Lorente-Acosta, 2020; Ruiz-Pérez and Pastor-Moreno, 2021), hence international community has increasingly recognized the need to eradicate this type of violence. Accordingly, the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 5 seeks to reach gender equality and empower all women and girls, not only ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls, but also eliminating violence against women and girls in both public and private spheres, eradicating harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, identifying and appreciating unpaid care and domestic work, and ensuring women’s complete and useful participation in decision-making processes. Additionally, the goal includes providing universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, granting women equal rights to access and control over economic resources such as land and property, and utilizing technology to enhance women’s empowerment. Governments are urged to implement policies and legislation to achieve gender equality and empower all girls and women.

To reduce or eliminate gender violence, public policymakers have used legislative efforts based

on mandates and penalties (paternalistic). Governments and other institutions also rely on effective interventions (Hester and Westmarland, 2005) based on educational tools and information to create awareness, but all these interventions and approaches are not enough. In 2022, according to the UN (2022), “violence against women and girls continues to be amplified in digital spaces, particularly targeting those who are active in political and public life, exercising their freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and association”. The UN claims that, although gender violence is an across-the-board problem, few countries have made this type of violence a separate crime. Additionally, data on this issue is often incomplete and unreliable. The UN advises that to effectively address this matter, countries must invest in collecting comprehensive, reliable gender violence data, including information that is disaggregated by sex, age, and gender. This is a fundamental initial step that countries need to take to comprehend and tackle this concern. Policies that try to tackle gender violence “must be based on emerging evidence in developing economies (process evaluations, qualitative evaluations, and imperfectly designed impact evaluations) and on more rigorous impact evaluations from developed countries” (Morrison *et al.*, 2007, p. 25).

Most research in this regard tends to neglect the latest advances in behavioral sciences, which try to change behavior by taking into account people’s bounded rationality. The following sections will capture the different strategies that have been emerging within the field of behavioral public policy to review the current status of the issue exploring current uses of behavioral insights in gender violence. The paper will then discuss the different contributions to the issue and expand on these approaches as potential solutions to combat gender violence.

Behavioral Public Policy Tools

Nudges

Nudge theory, a concept developed at the intersection of behavioral economics, public policy, and psychology, proposes that slight alterations

to the environment or the presentation of options can influence individuals' decisions and behavior, making some options more salient than others. Some authors have already suggested that nudges should work consistently with other types of interventions and always with educational approaches (Hortal, 2020b). The objective of a nudge is to enhance decision-making and outcomes without limiting freedom or choice. Accordingly, nudges can be considered libertarian, since they do not remove choices, and paternalistic (Epstein, 2018; Hansen, 2016; Karpan and Urbaník, 2021), because they influence people's behavior. Regarding gender violence, these interventions often target victims, survivors, their friends and family, bystanders, or institutions in an effort to facilitate the desired behaviors (denounce, support, holding while waiting for a response on a helpline, attending trials, etc.). Recent changes in public policy have shifted "the focus from victims and perpetrators towards the community as a whole, with all community members sharing this responsibility" (Moreno Martín *et al.*, 2019, p. 876), even institutions like religious parishes (Boddé, 2014). A recent study summarizes the target groups and behaviors as follows:

Five different target groups for the prevention and reduction of violence against women are identified: (1) past and prospective perpetrators of violence, (2) victims of violence, (3) victim's relatives and friends, along with bystanders, (4) practitioners and relevant professionals (i.e., police officers, medical professionals, social workers, journalists, judges) and (5) the general public. (Almeida *et al.*, 2016, p. 7)

According to Kahan, "reformers might do even better with a 'gentle nudges' strategy, which over time would induce those decision-makers and members of the public at large to become less tolerant of domestic violence" (Kahan, 2000, p. 630). The behavioral approach to public policy acknowledges people's biases and bounded rationality and exploits it to increase the chances of successfully accomplishing the proposed goal. Therefore, nudges aim to simplify the attainment of the intended behavior, removing behavioral frictions and making some choices more salient.

For example, a report that sought recommen-

dations based on behavioral sciences to improve the lives of survivors (Garnelo *et al.*, 2019), highlighted possible interventions that would enhance the services survivor agencies provide, attempting to propose "interventions ideas, informed by a review of the behavioral science literature, that can be tailored to existing services and evaluated for impact" (Garnelo *et al.*, 2019, p. 5). Likewise, they summarized their objectives as follows: "i) emphasize confidentiality of support to minimize survivors' uncertainty aversion; ii) streamline processes to reduce decision fatigue among service providers; and iii) ease survivors' cognitive load during the referral process" (p. 6).

To help illustrate how behavioral public policy can address issues related to gender violence, the following points contain (from the previous report) a number of suggestions in the form of nudges. These nudges are recommendations for different types of service providers, including helplines, the criminal justice system, shelters, healthcare providers, and mental health professionals:

- For helplines (Taylor *et al.*, 2019), the report suggests minimizing the fear of retaliation by erasing call records from mobile phones.
- For the criminal justice system, it suggests providing feedback to staff on their social impact to overcome burnout and highlight the positive impact of their work on survivors.
- For shelters, it suggests leveraging social support from relatable individuals, such as former residents or friends and family, and providing supportive text messages to counter feelings of isolation. Others have even argued about using hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mantler *et al.*, 2021)
- For healthcare providers, the report suggests emphasizing confidentiality and giving clear information on reporting requirements, introducing training and conditional screening protocols, and helping survivors realize their progress in addressing mental health conditions.

- Healthcare providers can also target communication patterns, since “the risk of experiencing violence in relationships is reduced if the communication patterns and conflict become the objects of intervention of professional’s healthcare” (Maria *et al.*, 2016, p. 1267)

There are a few ways that the nudging framework could be applied to promote gender equality (Waylen, 2018) and prevent violence with minor changes to the environment or the presentation of choices. For example, a workplace might use gender-neutral language in job descriptions or provide equal opportunities for career advancement for men and women. This could help to reduce the risk of gender-based violence by creating a more equal and respectful environment. Nudging can also encourage bystander intervention, which can be an important way to prevent gender violence. Nudges could be used to encourage bystander intervention, such as by providing information about how to intervene safely or by making it easier for people to report incidents of violence. Some studies have also explored the use of digital responses during the pandemic (Emezue, 2020)

Violent images can also be used as a nudge that re-frames cases and, thanks to “morbid curiosity,” images can be the clearest footprint of what has happened and may contribute to the credibility of the events they narrate, establishing undeniable truths and help to preserve the memory. The horror of violent images sometimes has the possibility of mobilizing the person who looks (Villanueva *et al.*, 2018, p. 18-19) or create awareness. Although images can sometimes trivialize and legitimize violence (Villanueva and Bayarri, 2021), they can also have the capacity to trigger a responsibility effect in the spectator (Belli and Villanueva, 2021, p. 7).

For example, considering that incidents such as sexual assault and harassment are becoming more prevalent in urban areas like Delhi, and women often find themselves unable to protect themselves in these situations for various reasons, some authors (Sehji and Banerjee, 2021) suggest the use of social nudges as a way to design visual

campaigns in public spaces to steer the intentions of those who may perpetrate it: “Graphic concepts were created to tap into the offender’s mind by redirecting the flow of thoughts while in public space” (Sehji and Banerjee, 2021, p. 339).

Other authors have considered the use of text messages to remind survivors, victims, and witnesses about trials, but some initial randomized controlled trials have not seen any improvements with the help of text messages (Cumberbatch and Barnes, 2018). The study found that text messages had a minimal effect on the presence of victims and witnesses in the three magistrates’ courts they studied. Nevertheless, the research did indicate that text messaging is a dependable, efficient, and cost-effective way of communicating with witnesses. A more recent study related to a different context (appearing in court as a defendant) has shown that behavioral nudges in the form of text messages and changes in the wording of the summons form can improve attendance in trials (Fishbane *et al.*, 2020).

Nudges can also backfire (Bolton *et al.*, 2018), showing paths to nudge the population better. For example, Busara, a research and advisory organization that uses behavioral science to design and evaluate interventions aimed at promoting social and economic development, was hired by the Oxford Policy Management group to conduct a survey in Zambia to test possible social nudges related to gender violence and awareness (Busara, 2018). The study found that a social nudge consisting in making explicit that the informational video had been shown to many people in the community has counterintuitive results: participants would be less likely to report a case of GBV against their neighbor, “possibly because of shared responsibility and the bystander effect” (Busara, 2018, p. 3).

Boosts

Since 2008, most behavioral public policy has emphasized nudging as the non-coercive non-monetary approach to altering people’s behavior. Besides nudges, there are other behavioral approaches to accomplish this goal. One of them is boosting (Hertwig and Ryall, 2020; van Roekel

et al., 2021), a libertarian non-monetary perspective that tries to “foster people’s competence to make their own choices—i.e., to exercise their own agency” (Hertwig and Grüne-Yanoff, 2017, p. 973). While nudges target behavior, boosts aim to change people’s competences “through changes in skills, knowledge, decision tools, or external environment” (p. 974). While both nudges and boosts recognize people’s bounded rationality, boosting acknowledges competences and a way to nurture them.

A boosting approach emphasizes the learning capability of individuals (Bradt, 2019; Sims and Müller, 2019) and designs interventions that stick even when the intervention is absent, or the choice architecture has changed. According to Ralph Hertwig, “If individuals lack the cognitive ability or motivation to acquire new skills or competences, then nudging is likely to be the more efficient intervention” (Hertwig, 2017, p. 149). In the same article, Hertwig emphasizes that boosting can be an efficient strategy when policymakers attempt to foster long-lasting behavioral change; in cases where governments do not act in the best interests of individuals or allow private companies to create harmful or manipulative choice environments (pp. 154-156).

Budges and Shoves

Other studies highlight the use of more paternalistic approaches. Budges and shoves (Mojašević and Nikolić, 2022; Oliver, 2018; Sunstein, 2013) use the insights of behavioral sciences to provide regulatory alternatives in public policy. Budges are regulatory interventions deployed by the public sector (Oliver, 2013) that are informed by behavioral economics and aimed at influencing the behavior of private corporations. These interventions are designed to address internalities or situations where the actions of private corporations have negative consequences for individuals or society as a whole. Shoves (Sætra, 2019; Shachar and Greenbaum, 2019), on the other hand, are regulatory measures that are also informed by behavioral economics but differ from nudges in that they involve more heavy-handed intervention and are typically more restrictive.

Shoves are often used to counter errors in individual behavior, such as present bias, and are intended to protect people from themselves. An example of a shove might be a ban on smoking, which is designed to protect individuals from the negative consequences of smoking and reduce the overall prevalence of smoking in society. This approach involves a greater degree of interference in personal lifestyle choices compared to libertarian paternalism, which seeks to influence behavior through nudges while still allowing individuals to make their own choices.

Nudges, Sludges, and Sludge Audits

While nudging encourages behaviors that increase people’s (and sometimes social) wellbeing, sludging discourages such behaviors (Hortal and Segoviano, 2023). Sludge refers to unnecessary or excessive (intentional or unintentional) friction that hinders people from accessing goods, opportunities, and services (Luo *et al.*, 2022; Madsen *et al.*, 2021; Newall, 2022; Shahab and Lades, 2021; Sunstein, 2021). These frictions can take many forms, such as paperwork burdens or other administrative requirements that waste time or financial resources, or maybe frustrating, stigmatizing, or humiliating. Sludge can have particularly harmful effects on vulnerable members of society, such as consumers, employees, or students, and can deprive them of access to important resources or opportunities. To address the issue of sludge, institutions and companies should regularly perform audits to identify sludge and catalog its costs, determining how to reduce it. Sludge audits (Sunstein, 2020) can help identify areas where sludge is causing harm and where it may be more beneficial to reduce or eliminate it. This can be particularly important in the context of gender violence, as sludge can disproportionately affect vulnerable groups and may contribute to barriers that prevent people from accessing support or resources. By conducting sludge audits and taking steps to reduce sludge, private and public institutions can help protect people from the harmful effects of unnecessary or excessive friction.

Contributions to the Status of the Issue

From a public policy standpoint, it is crucial to consider a range of options in addressing the issue of social and gender violence. Traditional policy tools such as mandates, laws, and informational campaigns can effectively raise awareness and promote change. To change entrenched behaviors in culture, it is not enough to modify laws or sanction behaviors that were once accepted. To change, it is necessary for the values that make up attitudes to be transformed (Moreno Martín *et al.*, 2019). Still, besides those mentioned above, there is also value in exploring newer strategies from the field of behavioral public policy. These approaches may offer additional tools that can be used in conjunction with more traditional interventions to reduce gender violence effectively. In the following pages, the article will examine these various approaches and consider their potential usefulness in addressing this pressing issue.

Nudges, as behavioral public policy tools, have many distinctions, and researchers have been classifying them with the goal of identifying their scope. It would be crucial to see how these distinctions might help in the fight against gender violence. Nudge Plus (Banerjee and John, 2021), for example, is a nudging type of intervention that has the capacity to include a deliberative element in the choice architecture. Self-nudges (Reijula and Hertwig, 2020) can make the recipient of the nudge also the choice architect, increasing the autonomy of the subject and the possibility of carrying the nudge to different contexts. Meta Nudges (Dimant and Shalvi, 2022) is an approach that suggests that rather than directly influencing end-users, it may be more effective to use “social influencers” as intermediaries to indirectly influence the behavior of end-users. These approaches are yet to be used in the fight against gender violence. Meta-nudges, for example, involves targeting individuals who have the ability to shape the behavior and norms of others, with the goal of ultimately changing the behavior of the end-users. This strategy may be more successful in achieving the desired outcomes compared to directly attempting to influence end-users. The

meta-nudging approach could potentially be applied to the issue of gender violence by targeting individuals who have the ability to shape the behavior and norms of others, with the goal of reducing instances of gender violence. This could involve working with social influencers such as community leaders, religious figures, or other individuals who have a strong influence within their communities to promote gender equality and non-violent behavior. Self-nudges can be used by practitioners to ensure compliance with current efforts in reducing cases. Nudge-plus can be added to interventions that are already nudging survivors (a nudge that keeps survivors in a helpline may add a deliberative component about the need to stay in the line or about the importance of showing up during judicial processes).

Virtue nudges are a type of intervention that seeks to affect people’s behavior to help them develop virtuous habits. According to Hortal (2022), virtue nudges are designed to help people become virtuous by habituating them to virtuous actions. In other words, virtue nudges are intended to encourage people to engage in behaviors that are considered virtuous or morally good, with the goal of helping them internalize these behaviors as habits. This can involve providing information or education about the benefits of virtuous behavior or making it easier for people to engage in virtuous actions. For example, a virtue nudge might involve setting up a system to facilitate donations to a charity that combats gender violence or volunteer their time in such organizations, in order to encourage them to engage in philanthropic behaviors. Another example might be providing information about the social benefits of reporting violent cases. Overall, virtue nudges seek to influence behavior in a way that helps people become more virtuous by habituating them to virtuous actions.

One issue that has been raised regarding nudge theory is the potential for its effects to dissipate when the choice architecture is no longer present. This concern suggests that the changes in behavior and decision-making that are brought about by nudge interventions may not be sustained over time. There is some evidence to support this concern. For example, a

study found that “for some, but not all behaviors, default nudges may have the potential to yield temporal spillover effects” (Van Rooxhuijzen *et al.*, 2021, p. 1). However, it is vital to highlight that the sustainability of nudge interventions is an area of ongoing debate, and more studies are required to fully comprehend the long-term consequences of these interventions.

Non paternalistic interventions that focus on competences (instead of the choice environment) like boosting can also help in this matter. These types of interventions can target the competences of the general public or even of those working with victims and survivors. They can help people learn how to identify cases and report them. They can also increase the capacity to identify violent language or understand data and statistics about violent cases. For example, “A long-term boost of Bayesian reasoning [...] could foster people’s competence to actively translate any probabilities they encounter into frequencies and thereby simplify the Bayesian computations” (Hertwig and Grüne-Yanoff, 2017, p. 977).

Considering that libertarian approaches have their limitations, paternalistic interventions based on nudges and shoves could also potentially be used as part of a strategy to address gender violence. One way that nudges could be used to fight gender violence is by regulating the behavior of private corporations in a way that promotes gender equality and prevents violence against women. This could involve implementing policies and regulations that require companies to take steps to prevent and address gender-based violence within their workplaces, or to provide resources and help for employees who have suffered this type of violence. Shoves, on the other hand, could be used to address gender violence through more restrictive regulatory measures. For example, governments could implement laws or policies that ban certain behaviors that contribute to gender violence (vocabulary use, micro-aggressions, etc.). Other potential shoves might include mandatory training or education programs for individuals who have been convicted of gender-based violence offenses, or stricter penalties for those who engage in such behavior. Some research explores the use of virtual reality

in this type of education (Dolezal *et al.*, 2022).

Sludge audits, therefore, are a tool that can be used to identify and evaluate bureaucratic elements or procedures that may have negative effects on well-being, particularly for vulnerable populations such as victims and survivors of gender and domestic violence. A sludge audit involves a systematic examination of the choice architecture and decision-making processes within a particular policy or program, with the goal of identifying any potential barriers or disincentives that may hinder individuals from accessing the support or resources they need. For example, a sludge audit of a domestic violence shelter may identify that the shelter’s intake process is too complex or time-consuming, making it difficult for survivors to access the services they need. The audit may also identify that the shelter’s location is not easily accessible by public transportation, which may be a barrier for survivors who do not have access to a car. By identifying these barriers and disincentives, a sludge audit can help to identify ways to remove or mitigate them, facilitating survivors’ access to the support needed. Another example of how a sludge audit may be used to help survivors and victims of gender and domestic violence is by examining the choice architecture of a social welfare program. For example, a sludge audit of a program that provides financial assistance to survivors of domestic violence may identify that the application process is overly complicated, requiring extensive documentation and multiple visits to a local office. This may make it difficult for survivors to access the assistance they need, particularly if they are unable to leave their abuser or are experiencing trauma or other mental health issues. By identifying these barriers and disincentives, a sludge audit can help to identify ways to streamline the application process and make it easier for survivors to access the support they need.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Behavioral economics (Hartmann *et al.*, 2020) and behavioral public policy measures have the potential to effectively address gender-based violence,

according to research by Almeida *et al.* (2016, p. 8). These measures can target various groups, including perpetrators, victims, professionals working in the area of domestic and gender violence, and the general public, to reduce or stop violence from occurring, decrease recidivism, empower women (Alonso, 2018), and improve support for victims and survivors. Behavioral interventions can also help police, medical specialists, social workers, media, the judicial system (DeMichele *et al.*, 2018), and the public at large better support victims and survivors, change attitudes towards violence, encourage reporting cases, and speed up legal processes. Additionally, behavioral public policy measures can work to counteract the portrayal of violence as “passion crimes” and encourage participation in preventive initiatives.

As previously stated, the field of behavioral public policy involves the application of knowledge from behavioral sciences, such as behavioral economics and psychology, to create policies that impact human behavior (Oliver, 2017). We have seen how these interventions can take many forms, such as nudges, boosts, shoves, or other regulatory measures, and can be employed to handle a broad spectrum of problems related to gender violence. While behavioral public policy can be an effective instrument in the fight against gender violence, it is critical to identify the limits of this approach. Gender and domestic violence are complex issues with systemic roots in social and cultural norms, systems of power, and patterns of oppression. Contributing factors include gender inequality, patriarchy, power dynamics, and oppression. Addressing these root causes highlights the limitations of solely focusing on individual behavior. For example, a behavioral intervention may aim to encourage people to save more money by making it easier for them to do so, but it may not address the underlying reasons why people may not be saving, such as low wages or high cost of living. In this case, the intervention may not be sufficient to address the problem in a meaningful way.

Another limitation of behavioral public policy is that it may not be effective in addressing issues related to social, cultural norms, or systems of power. For example, interventions that

aim to address gender violence may be limited in their ability to challenge deeply entrenched gender roles and power dynamics that contribute to the problem. In these cases, more structural approaches, such as education, legislation, and social norms change, may be necessary to address the matter in a comprehensive manner.

When addressing the issue of gender violence, it is important to recognize that behavioral approaches assume that people are not always fully rational in their decision-making. This means that policymakers themselves may also exhibit bounded rationality when designing and implementing behavioral interventions. There is no single solution to this complex problem, and only a combination of various policy tools can effectively address the issue. Behavioral approaches should be considered as a key strategy among other tools, as experts in the field have found them to be effective in influencing behavior change. This is crucial for providing hope to victims, survivors, and the society as a whole.

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