

# Families under Confinement: COVID-19, Domestic Violence, and Alcohol Consumption

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## Abstract

Evidence suggests that during the COVID-19 lockdown, alcohol consumption has increased and income has gone down among several households in Mexico City. The existing literature relates alcohol consumption and negative income shocks to a greater number of occurrences of intimate partner violence. This paper estimates the effect of the COVID-19 lockdown on call-center services for domestic violence in Mexico City, and documents the impact of alcohol consumption on these types of calls by exploiting exogenous variation in municipalities that prohibited alcohol sales during the lockdown. Using an event-study design, our results show that during the lockdown: (1) calls of intimate partner violence asking for psychological services increased, (2) calls of intimate partner violence requesting legal aid decreased, and (3) alcohol prohibition did not impact the number of calls reporting domestic violence.

**Keywords:** domestic violence; COVID-19; alcohol; Latin America; Mexico

**JEL:** J12, J16, J18.

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# 1 Introduction

On May 6, 2020, during a press conference, president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador assured that intimate partner violence (IPV) did not increase during the COVID-19 lockdown. This is because, according to the president, Mexican families are “exceptional”. [Arteta \(2020\)](#), using data on calls reporting gender violence, finds that reports went down from 812 reports in March to 746 reports in April, in 2020. Yet, the number of calls in April 2020 is more than three times the 211 calls reported in April 2019.

Did IPV-calls increase or decrease during the COVID-19 lockdown? Figure 1 presents the weekly evolution of IPV-calls before and after the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown in Mexico City. The following patterns occur: (1) The number of calls drops one week after the quarantine begins, although this pattern was also observed in 2019. (2) During the second and third week there is an increase in IPV-calls. (3) From the third week to the sixth week, the number of calls begins to fall. Interestingly, this time period coincides with the start of the ban on alcohol sales in several municipalities in Mexico City. (4) Finally, calls rebound during week seven.

In this paper, we estimate the effect of the COVID-19 lockdown on IPV-calls

in Mexico City. In addition, we analyze the impact of the prohibition imposed on alcohol sales on IPV-calls. Using an event study design, the results indicate no statistically significant effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on the number of IPV-calls. Yet, we do find clear evidence of heterogeneous effects. In particular, we conclude that the COVID-19 lockdown has led to a 100-percent rise in IPV-calls requesting psychological services and to a 100-percent drop in IPV-calls requesting legal services. Finally, results suggest a null impact of prohibition imposed on alcohol sales on IPV-calls.

This paper relates to recent literature analyzing the effects of the COVID-19 and alcohol consumption on domestic violence. [Leslie and Wilson \(2020\)](#), using data from fifteen large cities in the USA, conclude that the COVID-19 pandemic generated a 10-percent increase in domestic violence police calls.<sup>1</sup> Regarding alcohol consumption, [Markowitz \(2000\)](#) assures that an increase in the price of alcohol reduces violence against women. On the other hand, [Zeoli and Webster \(2010\)](#) fail to find evidence of a reduction of IPV after imposing taxes on beer.

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<sup>1</sup>Although not necessarily on domestic violence, other papers have analyzed the effects of COVID-19 on mental well-being ([Brodeur, Clark, Fleche, and Powdthavee \(2020\)](#); [Fetzer, Hensel, Hermle, and Roth \(2020\)](#)), lockdowns ([Briscese, Lacetera, Macis, and Tonin \(2020\)](#); [Fang, Wang, and Yang \(2020\)](#)), and macroeconomic consequences ([Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey, and Tertilt \(2020\)](#); [Berger, Herkenhoff, and Mongey \(2020\)](#); [Coibion, Gorodnichenko, and Weber \(2020\)](#); [Jones, Philippon, and Venkateswaran \(2020\)](#); [Jorda, Singh, and Taylor \(2020\)](#); [Ramelli and Wagner \(2020\)](#); [Stephany, Stoehr, Darius, Neuhauser, Teutloff, and Braesemann \(2020\)](#); [Stock \(2020\)](#))

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section II reviews the existing literature on the relationship of domestic violence, alcohol consumption and negative income shocks. Section III describes the data and empirical methods employed for this paper. Section IV presents results, and Section V concludes.

## **2 Domestic violence, COVID-19, and alcohol consumption**

In Mexico, one out of four women experiences some type of IPV during the year, while four out of 10 married or united women suffer from some type of IPV throughout their relationship ([ENDIREH, 2016](#)). There are two main factors related to IPV: alcohol consumption and negative income shocks. Economic data indicates that the COVID-19 lockdown had an impact on the aforementioned variables, and, thus, probably had consequences for domestic violence.

Regarding alcohol consumption, evidence suggests that alcohol plays a role in aggressive behaviors; still, the causal effect of alcohol on domestic violence is complex. For example, there is weak or no evidence that an increase in alcohol prices affects violence against women. [Markowitz \(2000\)](#), using data from the USA,

finds that a one-percent increase in the price of alcohol causes a three-percent reduction in IPV. [Durrance et al. \(2011\)](#), using data from the USA, shows a null effect of alcohol taxes on female homicide rates. Moreover, there is some evidence that alcohol sales restrictions can reduce violence against women. [Duailibi et al. \(2007\)](#), using data from the Brazilian city of Diadema, assures that restrictions on drinking hours decrease women homicide rates, but not assaults against women. [Livingston \(2011\)](#), using data from the Australian city of Melbourne, estimates that the density of liquor licenses is positively associated with IPV. Yet, [Cunradi et al. \(2011\)](#), using data from California, finds an association of off-premises outlets (liquor stores) with domestic violence, but not with on-premises outlet density (bars and restaurants).

Income-wise, existing literature shows that negative income shocks and unemployment relate to IPV. [Cunradi et al. \(2011\)](#), using data from the USA, analyzes the influence of various socioeconomic factors on IPV. Their estimations conclude that, among the factors analyzed, annual household income has the greatest relative influence on the probability of IPV. [Pan et al. \(1994\)](#) finds that having lower income increases the odds of either mild or severe physical IPV. [Rodriguez et al. \(2001\)](#) demonstrate that employed individuals, participating in social programs, are four times more likely to report domestic violence. [Caetano et al. \(2008\)](#), using

data from the USA, finds a causal relation between unemployment and IPV. Overall, these studies suggest that negative income shocks and alcohol consumption are risk factors related to domestic violence.

## 3 Data and Empirical Strategy

### 3.1 Data

To estimate the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on IPV-calls, we use administrative data from *Línea Mujeres* in Mexico City. *Línea Mujeres* is a call-center service that provides legal, psychological and medical advice to women for a variety of issues such as government procedures, labor inquiries, and domestic violence. This service operates 24 hours a day, all year long. *Línea Mujeres* catalogues calls by services (e.g. legal, psychological, or medical). Afterwards, the call-center assigns these calls to a topic category (e.g. school, work, violence, gender, among many others).

For the present study, we only use data on calls related to IPV, by limiting the call topics to the following categories: “gender”, “family”, “injuries”, “violence”, “domestic violence”, and “gender violence”. Namely, for calls inquiring

about psychological services, we use calls with the following sequence: “violence”, “gender”, “family”, and “intimate partner”. For calls requesting legal services, we use calls with the following sequence: “family” and then “domestic violence”.<sup>2</sup> Finally, calls for medical services do not yield any IPV-related topic. We restrict our search to women who are currently married or cohabiting.

We consider the number of calls per week for domestic violence per 100,000 inhabitants. Population data comes from the National Population Council (CONAPO). For our analysis, we exclusively use data from the 16 municipalities of Mexico City, for the months of February, March, April, and the first two weeks of May, for 2019 and 2020.<sup>3</sup> This time selection provides a total of 14 weeks for each year.

The government officially decided that the quarantine began on March 23 (week eight in our analysis). However, [Merodio-Gómez and Ramírez-Santiago \(2020\)](#) present evidence that mobility in Mexico City started to decrease one week before the official quarantine (week seven in our analysis). Thus, in this study, we use week seven as a cut-off reference to analyze the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics regarding the rate of IPV-calls per 100,000

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<sup>2</sup>The system does not display more information on associated topics.

<sup>3</sup>Data is available up to that period for 2020

inhabitants during 2019 and 2020. “Control” refers to the six weeks prior to the lockdown, while “treatment” refers to the eight weeks during the lockdown. In 2019, there is no difference between “treatment” (0.32) and “control” (0.33). Interestingly, IPV-calls increase from 0.32 in 2019 to 0.70 in 2020 for the “treatment” period. Yet, there is no statistically significant difference between “treatment” (0.70) and “control” (0.73) for 2020. This result suggests that IPV-calls did not increase during the confinement.

Table 1 also provides descriptive statistics for the rate of IPV-calls per 100,000 inhabitants during 2019 and 2020 for psychological and legal services. In the case of psychological services, there is no statistically significant difference between the “treatment” (0.10) and “control” (0.11) groups in 2019. A similar pattern occurs for legal services in 2019, when both “treatment” and “control” observations register a rate of 0.22 calls for 100,000 inhabitants. However, in 2020, there is a statistically significant difference between “treatment” (0.51) and “control” (0.29) of around 0.22 for psychological services. This suggests that calls for psychological services increased after the confinement. In the case of calls for legal services, there is also a statistically significant difference between “treatment” (0.20) and “control” (0.43) of around 0.23. This suggests that calls for legal services decreased during this period.



Another important aspect to take into account are the policies restricting alcohol sales. According to Figure 1, starting from the third week of confinement, a decrease in the number of calls for domestic violence occurs. Interestingly, a number of states implemented measures restricting alcohol sales (See Table 2). Table 3 provides descriptive statistics for the rate of IPV-calls for 100,000 inhabitants before and after the implementation of the prohibition imposed on alcohol sales in several of Mexico City's municipalities. "Treatment" refers to the six municipalities that prohibited alcohol sales, while "control" to the 10 municipalities that did not prohibit alcohol sales. "Before ban" refers to the nine weeks before the prohibition imposed on alcohol sales and "After ban" to the five weeks after the prohibition imposed on alcohol sales. Prior to the prohibition, there is no statistically significance difference between the "treatment" (0.64) and "control" (0.71). In addition, there is no statistically significant difference between the "treatment" (0.74) and "control" (0.77) after the ban. A similar pattern occurs for psychological and legal services. These results suggest that the prohibition imposed on alcohol sales was not a factor that impacted IPV-calls in Mexico City.

## 3.2 Econometric Methodology

To estimate the effect of the COVID-19 lockdown on IPV-calls, we use a weekly event study model:

$$Y_{mty} = \sum_{t=-6}^6 \beta_t Covid_{mty} + \theta X_{mty} + a_m + \gamma_t + \nu_y + e_{mty}$$

where  $Y_{mty}$  refers to IPV-calls at municipality  $m$  at week  $t$  in year  $y$ .  $Covid_{mty}$  is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 at municipality  $m$  before or after  $t$  weeks the lockdown starts in year  $y$ . The week from March 9 to March 15 is the reference week (one week before the quarantine starts), and is, thus, omitted;  $X_{mty}$  is a vector of controls (working, cohabiting, and having high school or more);  $a_m$  are municipality-fixed effects which control for time-invariant difference across municipalities;  $\gamma_t$  are weekly fixed-effects and controls for potential seasonal trends; and  $\nu_y$  are year fixed effects and controls for secular trends in the prevalence of domestic violence. To correct for autocorrelation of the outcome — measured across weeks within municipalities —, we apply clustered standard errors at the municipality level. The coefficients of interest are  $\beta_t$ .

In addition, we estimate the effect of the prohibition imposed on alcohol sales on IPV-calls, using the following weekly event study model:

$$Y_{mt} = \sum_{t=-3}^3 \beta_t Alcohol_{mt} + \theta X_{mt} + a_m + \gamma_t + e_{mt}$$

where  $Y_{mt}$  refers to the domestic violence calls at municipality  $m$  at week  $t$ . The  $Alcohol_{mt}$  is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 at municipality  $m$  before or after  $t$  weeks from the prohibition of alcohol sales in a treated municipality. We omit the week prior to the beginning of the prohibition.  $X_{mt}$  is a vector of controls (working, cohabiting, and having high school or more);  $a_m$  are municipality-fixed effects; and  $\gamma_t$  are weekly fixed-effects. To correct for autocorrelation of the outcome, we apply clustered standard errors at the municipality level. The coefficients of interest are  $\beta_t$ .

## 4 Results

Column 1, in Table 4, presents the results for the event study that analyzes the effects of COVID-19 lockdown on all IPV-calls. Estimated effects for weeks two to six before the lockdown do not exhibit statistically significant differences from zero at the 95 percent level of confidence. This supports the parallel trend assumption. When we analyze the weeks after the lockdown, we find that none of the coefficients are statistically significant. This result suggests that the lockdown did not have any effect, on average, on IPV-calls.

Column 1, in Table 4, and Figure 2 present the results for the event study

analyzing the effects of COVID-19 lockdown on IPV-calls related to psychological services. The results show that during five weeks prior to the lockdown, the coefficients of interest are not statistically significant. Then we observe that for the first three weeks of lockdown, the coefficients of interest are negative, but do not show statistically significant differences from zero. However, after the third week of confinement, it is observed that the coefficients are positive, suggesting an increase in IPV-calls for psychological services. These remain statistically significant for weeks four and six after the lockdown. This result suggests that the IPV-violence calls requesting psychological services did not increase immediately, but rather after some weeks of confinement. There is some evidence that domestic violence is correlated with the husband's being unemployed or going through economic problems. It is necessary to remember that in the case of Mexico, the government did not provide any support to families in order to smooth their consumption or unemployment support. Thus, it is possible that families used to have some resources when the lockdown started, but, as the lockdown continued, some of them lost their income. As a consequence, this negative economic shock increased the probability of suffering domestic abuse.

Column 3, in Table 4, and Figure 3 present findings for the effects of COVID-19 lockdown on IPV-calls related to legal services. The results show that in general,

we satisfy the parallel trends. The only exception is the third week prior to the lockdown, which is statistically significant. We did not observe a pattern in the calls during the first four weeks of confinement. Yet, from weeks four to six, the coefficients associated turn to be negative. Interestingly, the coefficient associated with the sixth week is negative and exhibits a statistically significant difference from zero. This result makes sense because, as the confinement progressed, many courts also closed. And, this pattern possibly reflects the drop in the demand for this kind of services.

Another important aspect to analyze is the effect of the prohibition imposed on alcohol sales in six municipalities of Mexico City. Column 1, in Table 5 presents the results for the effects of the prohibition on IPV-violence calls. The results show that the coefficients associated with the weeks before the lockdown are not statistically significant, implying that we satisfy the assumption of parallel trends. Then, we observe that the coefficients post-lockdown are also not statistically significant. This suggests that the prohibition of alcohol sales did not have any impact on reducing IPV-calls. Furthermore, we explore whether this result comes as a consequence of potential heterogeneous effects. Column 2, in Table 5, and Figure 4 analyze the effects of the prohibition of alcohol sales on psychological services. Notably, there is no evidence of any effect after the lockdown. Column 3, in Ta-

ble 5, and Figure 5 presents the results for legal services. Here again, coefficients post-lockdown are not statistically significant. In all, these results suggest that the prohibition imposed on alcohol sales did not have an effect on IPV-calls, in general or by type of service, in Mexico City.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper analyzes the effects of COVID-19 lockdown on call services related to domestic violence in Mexico City. In addition, we analyze the impact imposed on the prohibition of alcohol sales in six municipalities of Mexico City on domestic violence calls. Using an event study design, the results indicate a null effect of the COVID-19 lockdown on IPV-calls. Nevertheless, we find suggestive evidence of heterogeneous effects. In particular, we conclude that the COVID pandemic led to an increase in IPV-calls for psychological services and a decrease in case of legal services. Finally, we fail to find any evidence that the prohibition imposed on alcohol sales impacted the calls for domestic violence.

Policy makers should exercise more caution regarding the information on domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdown. Although President Lopez Obrador was right affirming that there was no increase in calls for violence, this did not

clearly reflect what was happening. In general, the women were experiencing violence from their partners and demanding psychological support. While at the same time they stopped asking for support regarding legal services.

Another aspect to take into account is that the policies that prohibited alcohol sales are not enough to reduce calls denouncing domestic violence. In this sense, the increase in calls reporting psychological violence is possibly related to a negative shock in the household's income. It is necessary for governments to analyze the possibility of channeling monetary transfers to the families in order to smooth their consumption and possibly reducing domestic violence when facing a risky situation like COVID-19.

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## 6 Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Social Distancing and Domestic Violence Calls



Figure 2: Event Study: Psychological Services Domestic Violence Calls

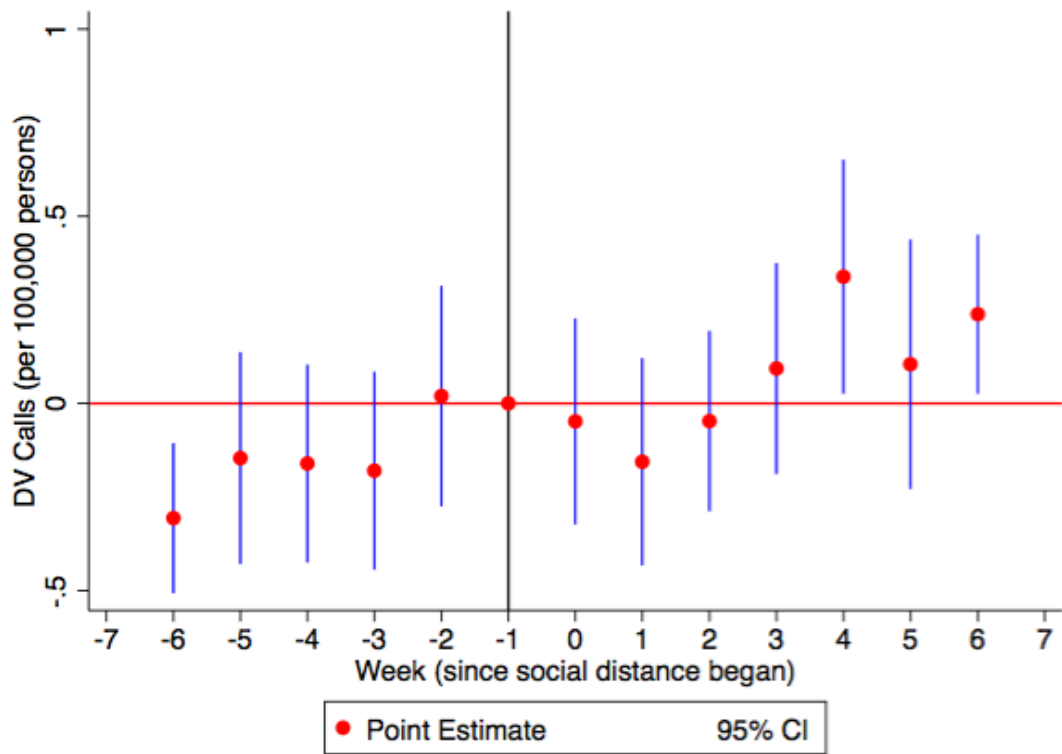


Figure 3: Event Study: Legal Services Domestic Violence Calls

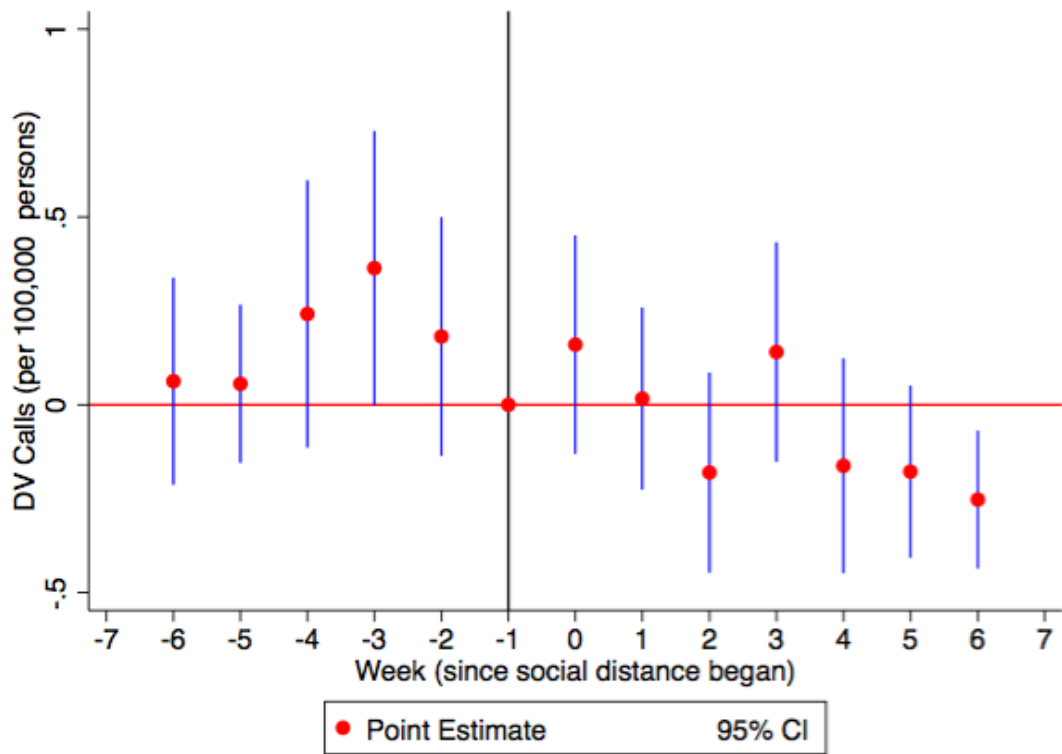


Figure 4: Event Study: Psychological Services Domestic Violence Calls (Alcohol Prohibition)

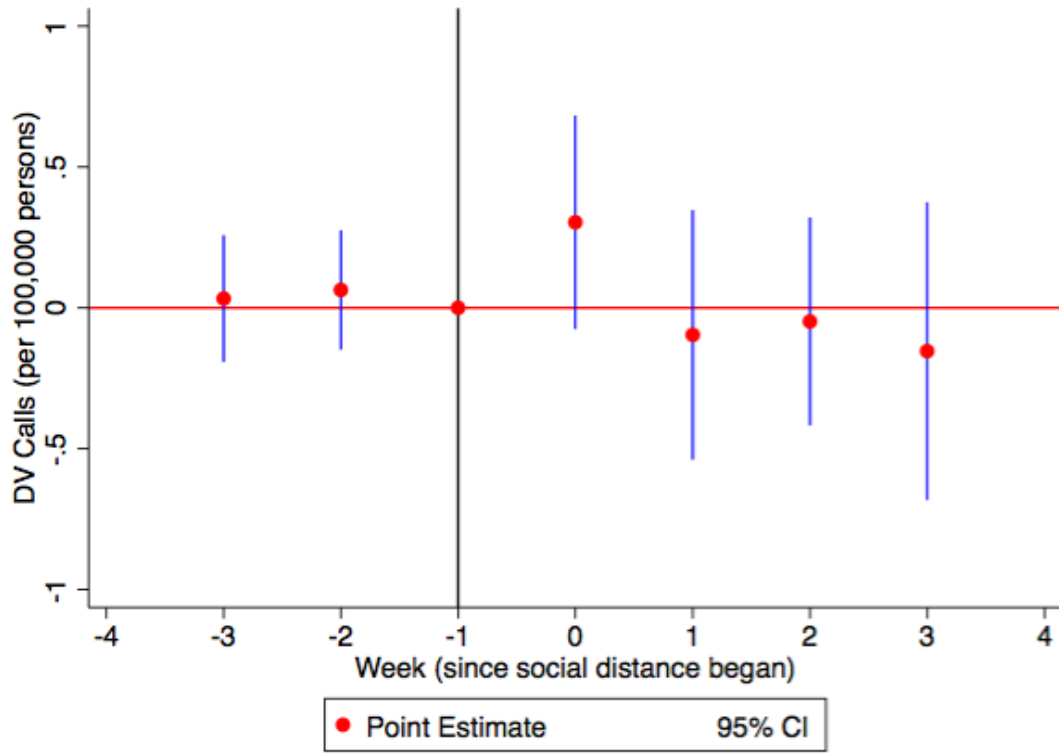


Figure 5: Event Study: Legal Services Domestic Violence Calls (Alcohol Prohibition)

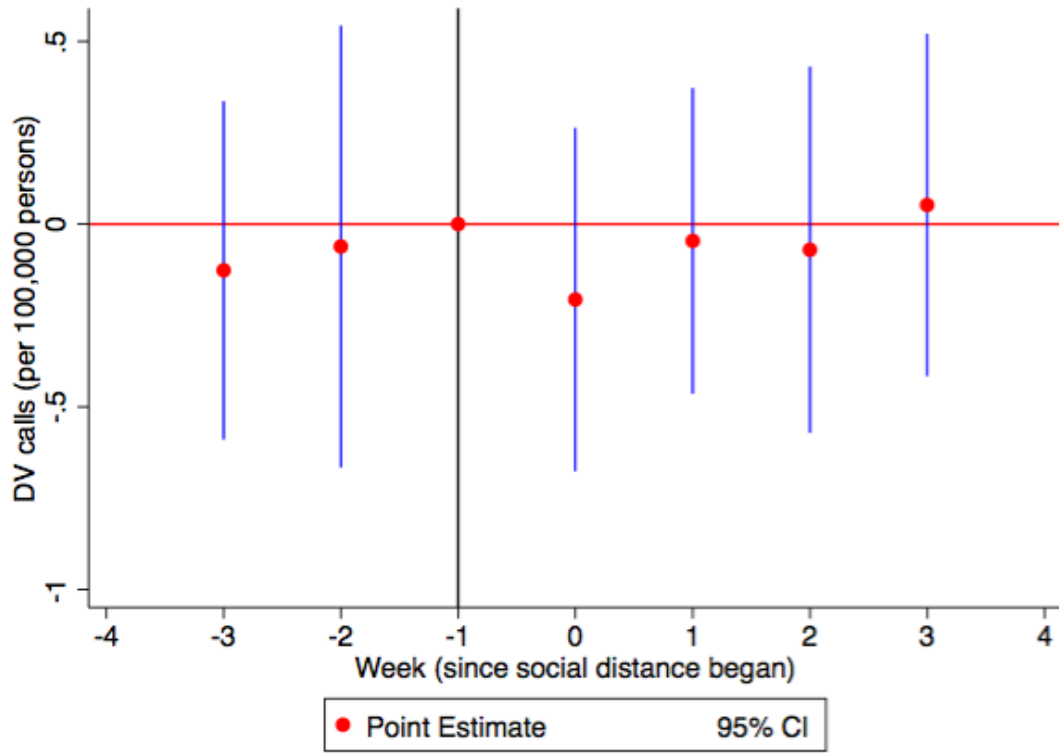




Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (Domestic Violence)

	2019			2020		
	Treatment	Control	Difference	Treatment	Control	Difference
DV Calls (per 100,000 persons)	0.32	0.33	-0.01	0.70	0.73	-0.03
Psychological DV Calls (per 100,000 persons)	0.10	0.11	-0.01	0.51	0.29	0.22***
Legal DV Calls (per 100,000 persons)	0.22	0.22	0.00	0.20	0.43	-0.23***
Cohabiting	0.31	0.21	0.10**	0.32	0.32	0.00
Working	0.29	0.26	0.03	0.33	0.34	-0.01
High School or more	0.43	0.51	-0.08	0.49	0.49	0.00
Observations	128	96	224	128	96	224

Source: Línea Mujeres.

Note: Each column shows average values for the 16 municipalities in our sample. “Treatment” refers to the 6 weeks before the week when social distance began, and “Control” to the 8 weeks after the social distance began. \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 2: Implementation of Alcohol Sale Prohibition

Municipality	Ban starts	Ban ends	Days of application
Milpa Alta	April 7		Weekends
Cuajimalpa	April 13	May 31	Friday, Saturday, and Sunday
Álvaro Obregón	April 17		Monday to Sunday from 20:00 pm to 11:59 am
Gustavo A. Madero	April 23	May 31	Friday, Saturday, and Sunday
Coyoacán	April 23	May 31	Friday, Saturday, and Sunday
Xochimilco	April 24	July 15	Friday, Saturday, and Sunday

Source: Official Gazette of Mexico City.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics (Domestic Violence and Alcohol)

	Before ban			After ban		
	Treatment	Control	Difference	Treatment	Control	Difference
DV Calls (per 100,000 persons)	0.64	0.71	-0.07	0.74	0.77	-0.03
Psychological DV Calls (per 100,000 persons)	0.32	0.31	0.01	0.61	0.60	0.01
Legal DV Calls (per 100,000 persons)	0.32	0.40	-0.08	0.14	0.17	-0.03
Cohabiting	0.27	0.33	-0.05	0.27	0.37	-0.10
Working	0.33	0.36	-0.03	0.34	0.31	0.03
High School or more	0.43	0.50	-0.07	0.50	0.53	-0.03
Observations	54	90	144	30	50	80

Source: Línea Mujeres.

Note: Each column shows average values for the 16 municipalities in our sample. “Treatment” refers to the 6 municipalities that prohibited the sale of alcohol, and “Control” to the 10 municipalities that did not prohibited the sale of alcohol. “Before ban” refers to the 9 weeks before the ban and “After ban” to the 5 weeks after the ban. \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 4: Event Study: Domestic Violence Calls

	(1) DV Calls Total	(2) DV Calls Psychological	(3) DV Calls Legal
Week -6	-0.244* (0.129)	-0.307*** (0.093)	0.063 (0.129)
Week -5	-0.090 (0.149)	-0.146 (0.132)	0.056 (0.098)
Week -4	0.081 (0.174)	-0.161 (0.123)	0.242 (0.166)
Week -3	0.184 (0.207)	-0.180 (0.123)	0.364** (0.171)
Week -2	0.201 (0.214)	0.020 (0.138)	0.182 (0.148)
Week 0	0.112 (0.171)	-0.048 (0.129)	0.160 (0.136)
Week 1	-0.140 (0.145)	-0.156 (0.129)	0.016 (0.113)
Week 2	-0.228 (0.155)	-0.047 (0.112)	-0.180 (0.124)
Week 3	0.234 (0.201)	0.093 (0.132)	0.140 (0.136)
Week 4	0.176 (0.170)	0.338** (0.146)	-0.162 (0.134)
Week 5	-0.073 (0.143)	0.105 (0.156)	-0.178 (0.107)
Week 6	-0.014 (0.104)	0.238** (0.099)	-0.252*** (0.085)
Municipality FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Week FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.44	0.49	0.33
Observations	448	448	448

Note: Standard errors clustered at the municipality level in parentheses. Controls include cohabiting, working, and having high school or more. \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 5: Event Study: Domestic Violence Calls and Alcohol Prohibition

	(1) DV Calls Total	(2) DV Calls Psychological	(3) DV Calls Legal
Week -3	-0.093 (0.278)	0.033 (0.105)	-0.126 (0.216)
Week -2	0.002 (0.348)	0.064 (0.098)	-0.061 (0.283)
Week 0	0.097 (0.171)	0.304 (0.177)	-0.206 (0.220)
Week 1	-0.142 (0.366)	-0.096 (0.207)	-0.046 (0.196)
Week 2	-0.118 (0.373)	-0.048 (0.172)	-0.070 (0.234)
Week 3	-0.101 (0.454)	-0.154 (0.247)	0.052 (0.219)
Municipality FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Week FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.33	0.40	0.37
Observations	224	224	224

Note: Standard errors clustered at the municipality level in parentheses. Controls include cohabiting, working, and having high school or more. \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$