

# Children Who Witness: Early Life Exposure to Unilateral Divorce Laws and Intimate Partner Violence in Adulthood

## **Abstract**

This study investigates the impact of early childhood exposure to unilateral divorce laws (UDL) as a framework for understanding childhood shocks and their influence on intimate partner violence (IPV) in adulthood. Using data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) from 2000–2015, combined with state divorce regulations, we find that individuals aged 0–10 at the time of the reforms are 0.18 percentage points more likely to experience IPV in adulthood than older cohorts and those in states without UDL. Additionally, we examine how childhood exposure to UDL influences IPV victimization through its effects on education and employment outcomes.

*Keywords:* Unilateral divorce laws, Early childhood exposure to negative shock, Intimate partner violence.

*JEL Codes:* J12, J13, K36.

# 1 Introduction

There is substantial evidence that early childhood shocks have enduring effects into adulthood. The literature in economics and early childhood development explores the impacts of a wide range of shocks and childhood circumstances on different health and labor market outcomes; including the loss of biological parents in early childhood ([Tato and Admassie \(2024\)](#)), Parental divorce ([Kiernan and Hobcraft \(1997\)](#); [Short \(2002\)](#)), exposure to violence, conflict, and war ([Bundervoet and Fransen \(2018\)](#); [Akbulut-Yuksel \(2014\)](#)), cash transfers ([Duque et al. \(2018\)](#); [Aizer et al. \(2016\)](#)), and infectious diseases or pandemics ([Venkataramani \(2012\)](#); [Schwandt \(2018\)](#)). Specifically, negative shocks during preschool years have been found to adversely affect health and earnings later in life ([Nicoletti et al. \(2023\)](#); [Berhane et al. \(2019\)](#); [Currie and Almond \(2011\)](#)).

In the literature, the long-term effects of early negative shocks, such as family disruptions, on the likelihood of becoming a victim or perpetrator of intimate partner violence remain underexplored. We address this gap by examining whether the implementation of unilateral divorce laws (UDL) during the 1970s and 1980s influenced children who were 0–10 years old at the time. Specifically, we investigate how exposure to these legal changes in early childhood affected their likelihood of experiencing or committing intimate partner violence (IPV) later in life. IPV, characterized by abuse within intimate partner relationships in which one partner exerts dominance and control over the other, remains a prevalent issue despite a decline in rates over recent decades. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), in its 2010–2012 report<sup>1</sup>, revealed that approximately 1 in 4 women (23.2%) and 1 in 7 men (13.9%) have experienced severe physical violence from an intimate partner in their lifetimes. These findings underscore the ongoing need for effective strategies to address IPV.

Between the late 1960s and early 1980s, many U.S. states experienced significant changes in divorce legislation. A key aspect of these reforms was the adoption of unilateral divorce, allowing one spouse to initiate a divorce without the consent of the other. The timing of this reform varied considerably across states, providing a natural setting for empirical research on its effects. Building on this body of work, we examine the impact of the UDL on another crucial aspect of family welfare: intimate partner violence.

Our study offers three key contributions to the literature. First, while most research on UDL has focused on its immediate impact on divorce rates, ([Friedberg \(1998\)](#), [Wolfers \(2006\)](#), [Kim and Oka \(2014\)](#)), family dynamics ([Stevenson \(2007\)](#), [Wickelgren \(2009\)](#)), divorced women ([Genadek et al. \(2007\)](#), [Fernández and Wong \(2014\)](#)), and children ([Gruber](#)

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<sup>1</sup>Smith, S.G., Chen, J., Basile, K.C., Gilbert, L.K., Merrick, M.T., Patel, N., Walling, M., Jain, A. (2017). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010-2012 State Report.

(2004), Cáceres-Delpiano and Giolito (2008)), our paper shifts the focus to the long-term effects on children exposed to these laws during their formative years, as they transition into adulthood. UDL, which allows one spouse to file for divorce without mutual consent, significantly altered family structures, gender roles, and economic stability. While previous studies have largely concentrated on the immediate outcomes of the UDL, the enduring impacts on children’s lives remain underexplored, and our study addresses this gap.

Second, in the literature on IPV, much of the focus has been on the immediate triggers of violence, such as characteristics of partners (Jewkes (2002), Walton-Moss et al. (2005), Capaldi et al. (2012), Weitzman (2018)) or economic factors (Jewkes (2002), Aizer (2010), Anderberg et al. (2016)). Our study, however, takes a broader view by investigating how early childhood shocks—such as parental divorce or family instability—can shape an individual’s risk of experiencing IPV in adulthood. By examining the long-term effects of these childhood experiences, we provide new insights into how early life adversities contribute to future vulnerability to IPV. Third, our study fills a crucial gap in the literature by examining the long-term effects of state-level policies, such as the UDL, on younger generations as they transition into adulthood. While much of the existing research has focused on the impact of economic conditions or policy changes on current IPV rates—particularly studies on the immediate effects of the UDL on family violence—our analysis shifts to how policies enacted in the 1970s and 1980s, which influenced family stability and marital dynamics, continue to shape individuals’ vulnerability to IPV in adulthood. This underscores the importance of considering the enduring influence of past policies when developing contemporary strategies to reduce IPV.

Our main analysis relies on data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which we use to examine how the UDL reforms affected different birth cohorts. We define married couples directly exposed to the UDL reforms as the “first generation.” Most previous research has focused on this group, analyzing how the reforms influenced various social outcomes for those directly affected, including experiences of domestic violence. For example, Dee (2003) examines the effects of UDL on spousal violence and finds that while these laws had little impact on violence against wives, they led to a notable increase in spousal homicides of husbands. Similarly, Stevenson and Wolfers (2006) find that UDL were associated with declines in female suicide, domestic violence, and spousal homicide. Beyond the U.S. context, Corradini (2023) shows that the introduction of UDL reduced domestic violence in Egypt. Fernández (2017) conducts a welfare analysis of divorce regimes and finds that women tend to fare better under mutual consent divorce laws, while men prefer unilateral systems.

In contrast to these studies, our focus is on the “second generation”—children who were 0–10 years old at the time of UDL implementation. Our goal is to investigate how early

exposure to UDL affects these children later in life, particularly in terms of their likelihood of experiencing IPV in adulthood. Analyzing the policy’s impact on the second generation is challenging due to the significant time gap between the first generation’s exposure to the reform and the second generation’s observed outcomes. Our identification assumption requires that children aged 0–10 who were exposed to the UDL did not experience any other state-level policy shock that could also influence their long-term well-being. As with all such research designs, we cannot be 100 percent sure that we have eliminated all possible confounders; nevertheless, we offer a transparent way to assess the impact of the UDL for the young children who were at the early stage of their mental development.

Our estimation approach relies on the parallel trends assumption, which posits that, in the absence of the UDL reform, outcomes for children in both adopting and non-adopting states would have followed similar trajectories. This assumption ensures that any observed differences in mental development can be attributed to the policy change rather than to pre-existing differences between the states. Additionally, we assume that families did not differentially migrate between states with and without the UDL in response to the law. Such migration could introduce bias by altering children’s exposure to the reform, thereby confounding our estimates of the UDL’s effect on IPV experiences in adulthood.

We found no evidence that the UDL affected the likelihood of experiencing IPV for children who were older than 10 years at the time of implementation. The finding is also consistent with the existing literature which suggest that relatively older children have better awareness to accept parent’s divorce or separation than younger children. We provide several additional robustness checks to support our main estimation results. Specifically, we utilized an alternative version of the NCVS data covering the years 1979-2000. This enabled us to confirm the impact of childhood exposure (ages 0-10) to the UDL on the likelihood of IPV victimization in adulthood. Although this older dataset includes fewer variables compared to the primary NCVS data (2000-2015), it serves as a crucial robustness check for our findings.

Our findings suggest that state-level laws targeting parents may have long-term impacts on children. By exploring this effect in the context of IPV, a significant social issue, we aim to contribute to the existing literature. This research offers insight into the potential intergenerational consequences of policy decisions, indicating how laws aimed at adult behaviors might influence the development and well-being of children. Additionally, our study addresses a gap in the literature, as previous research has not specifically examined the relationship between state-level legal changes and their long-term effects on children in the context of IPV. These findings underscore the importance of further research into the direct and indirect effects of social policies and their potential to shape family dynamics and child outcomes over time.

This article proceeds as follows: In Section 2, after providing a brief review of the evolution of divorce reforms, we present background information on the UDL and its effects on divorce rates and children’s well-being. In Sections 3 and 4, we describe our data and the econometric specifications used. Section 5 presents the results on the effects of the UDL on IPV victimization across different age groups, followed by a more detailed examination of these effects on the 0–10 age group. At the end of Section 5, we explore two important mechanisms through which early exposure (ages 0–10) to the UDL can affect IPV victimization in adulthood. Section 6 conducts a specification check to address potential biases in our model, and Section 7 concludes.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 The Evolution of Divorce

Divorce laws in the United States evolved significantly over the 20th and 21st centuries. Early laws were fault-based, requiring proof of wrongdoing, and divorce rates remained low. The shift toward no-fault divorce began in some states before 1950, allowing couples to divorce without proving fault but still requiring mutual consent. By the late 1960s, unilateral divorce emerged, enabling one spouse to initiate divorce without the other’s approval. This reform became widespread by the mid-1970s, with states varying in their restrictions, including required separation periods of 1 to 5 years. It’s important to note that our research specifically looks at the UDL without requiring a separation period, rather than focusing on the more general no-fault divorce laws.

The availability of unilateral divorce in every state from 1910 to the current date, based on [Gruber \(2004\)](#), are detailed in Table A1. Figure A1 illustrates the frequency of states that introduced the UDL in the United States, grouped into 5-year intervals starting from 1930. Most states introduced the UDL between 1970 and 1975, with a notable peak during this period where 22 states enacted the law. After this, the frequency sharply declined, with only a few states adopting the law after 1980. Additionally, 15 states (highlighted in the “No Law” category) never introduced the UDL during the examined period, remaining without such legislation.

This study aligns with prior economic research by emphasizing the significance of the UDL as the primary focus, rather than solely examining the presence of no-fault divorce itself. The rationale behind this approach lies in the fact that unilateral divorce brings about a significant alteration in property rights, potentially elevating divorce rates and significantly

reshaping bargaining dynamics within families. While no-fault divorces might streamline the process and reduce transaction costs, they do not inherently alter the fundamental structure of family bargaining dynamics to the extent that would significantly impact divorce rates or outcomes. According to [Gruber \(2004\)](#), while no-fault regulations have a slight effect on the likelihood of divorce, this effect is notably smaller than that of unilateral regulations. The study finds that the odds of divorce increase by approximately 0.004 percentage points for women and 0.002 percentage points for men due to no-fault regulations—about one-quarter of the effects observed with unilateral regulations. However, neither of these estimates is statistically significant.

The dramatic increase in divorce rates simultaneous with the shifts in the legal landscape of divorce in the 1970s sparked debates about the possible connection between these two phenomena. Examining the same group of women surveyed in 1979, [Peters \(1986\)](#) found no relationship between the transition to unilateral divorce and the upsurge in divorce rates, while [Allen \(1992\)](#) found a significant impact. [Friedberg \(1998\)](#), using a panel of state-level divorce rates, proposed that the shift toward unilateral divorce contributed to 17 percent of the rise in divorce rates from 1968 to 1988. This assertion gained broad acceptance, endorsed by subsequent studies by [Johnson and Mazingo \(2000\)](#), [Binner and Dnes \(2001\)](#), and [Gruber \(2004\)](#). Applying the weighted least squares (WLS) model, [Wolfers \(2006\)](#) claims that the implementation of unilateral laws has temporal effects on divorce rates, in contrast to the enduring effects posited by [Friedberg \(1998\)](#). The study reveals a rapid increase in divorce rates following the adoption of the UDL, with this surge being reversed within approximately a decade. According to [Stevenson \(2007\)](#), the diminishing impact of these laws on divorce rates over time can be attributed, in part, to shifts in marriage rates and the selection of individuals entering marriage.

## 2.2 The Effects of Unilateral Divorce on Children’s Well-Being

Following a prolonged discourse regarding the impact of the UDL on divorce rates, there is a burgeoning consensus within the literature concerning a short-term surge in divorce rates following the implementation of such reforms. However, beyond the immediate effects on divorce rates, scholarly attention has increasingly shifted towards understanding the broader implications of unilateral divorce legislation, particularly on the well-being of divorced women and their children. The literature on the long-term effects of the UDL on children is relatively limited, though existing studies offer valuable insights into its enduring repercussions. [Gruber \(2004\)](#) conducted a notable study revealing that adults who experienced the UDL during their childhood exhibited various socioeconomic disadvantages in adulthood. Specifically, they were found to have lower educational attainment, decreased family incomes, earlier marriage but

higher rates of separation, and elevated risks of adult suicide.

Cáceres-Delpiano and Giolito (2008) delved deeper into the impact of the UDL on both children and their mothers. The research highlighted the adverse effects on mothers, showing increased divorce rates, decreased family income, and heightened vulnerability to poverty. For children, particularly those in preschool age during the reform, there was a higher likelihood of grade repetition. Furthermore, a decade later, it was observed that men who experienced the reform during early childhood were significantly more prone to institutionalization, particularly among Black populations. Additionally, women who were between 5 and 15 years old at the time of the reform faced increased risks of poverty, with Black women being disproportionately affected.

UDL potentially impacts children’s well-being through several channels, primarily through parental divorce itself. With an increase in divorce rates following changes in the UDL, which we discussed in previous section, more children are exposed to nontraditional family structures, which could have detrimental effects. The potential negative effects of parental divorce on children are widely accepted in the literature. As noted by Kearney (2023) in her book “The two parent privilege”, marriage functions as a long-term contract between two individuals who collectively pool resources and share household responsibilities, including child-rearing. Kearney (2023) emphasizes this point succinctly, stating, “Two is better than one.” Amato and Keith (1991) meta-analysis, drawing from 37 studies and 15 outcome variables, consistently demonstrates a significant and negative association between parental divorce and adult well-being. This suggests that individuals who experienced parental divorce tend to exhibit lower levels of well-being compared to those from continuously married households.

A second pathway through which UDL can affect children’s outcomes, concerns the relative bargaining power of spouses under such regulations and its implications for resource allocation within households. Gray (1998) states that the impact of the UDL on married women’s bargaining power depends on state-specific characteristics; for instance, women in states with generous welfare systems may experience a smaller shift in bargaining power compared to those in states with more limited welfare support. Studies by Strauss and Thomas (1995) and Lundberg et al. (1997) highlight the negative impacts of shifts in resource allocation away from mothers on children’s well-being. Furthermore, the UDL may incentivize women to prioritize career advancement over household responsibilities, leading to reduced time and investment in child-rearing. This assumption has been explored in studies focusing on the effects of the UDL on female labor force participation, such as those by Gray (1998), Chiappori et al. (2002), Genadek et al. (2007), and Stevenson (2007).

### 3 Data

We utilized public-use files of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data covering the years 2000-2015 for the 52 largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). The NCVS, administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), serves as a primary national source of information on criminal victimization. It employs a nationally representative sample interviewed annually to gather data on the frequency, characteristics, and consequences of criminal victimization in the United States.

IPV data often face challenges of underreporting, as victims may be reluctant to disclose incidents due to fear, shame, or concerns about retaliation. However, the NCVS addresses this challenge by collecting information on both reported and unreported nonfatal personal crimes, including rape or sexual assault, robbery, aggravated and simple assault, and personal larceny. Survey respondents provide personal information (e.g., age, sex, race and Hispanic origin, marital status, education level, and income) and details about victimization incidents. For each incident, the NCVS captures data on the offender (e.g., age, race and Hispanic origin, sex, and victim-offender relationship) and crime characteristics (e.g., time and place of occurrence, use of weapons, nature of the injury, and economic consequences).

To identify IPV, we aligned with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) definition: “any preventable physical, sexual, or psychological harm done by a current or former partner or spouse.” Given the multifaceted nature of IPV, we classify incidents as personal crimes where the relationship between the victim and the offender indicated the spouse at the time of the incident, ex-spouse at the time of the incident, or boyfriend/girlfriend, ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend. Figure A2 illustrates a decline in the number of IPV victims per 1000 individuals over the course of the study.

Table 1 presents a summary of the characteristics of both IPV victims and non-victims, highlighting key demographic and socioeconomic differences between them. Panel A shows the results for females, and Panel B reports the results for males. In each panel, we report the mean and standard deviations (in parentheses) and compare the mean differences for each variable between the two groups: victims and non-victims. As shown, both female and male IPV victims tend to be younger (33.985 vs. 39.875 years for females, and 36.292 vs. 39.206 years for males) and are more often from racial minority groups, particularly Black individuals (26.3% vs. 15.9% for females and 32.6% vs. 13.3% for males). Furthermore, victims are more likely to have dropped out of high school (41.9% vs. 39.2% for females and 49.2% vs. 39.8% for males), suggesting that education is negatively correlated with IPV.

We also find that the likelihood of IPV victimization increases for females with children under 12 years old. However, we do not observe any such effect for males. Additionally, female



college graduates have a higher likelihood of experiencing IPV compared to non-college female graduates. In contrast, male college graduates are less likely to be IPV victims. This result is counterintuitive, as we also find that both female and male high school dropouts have a higher likelihood of being IPV victims. Furthermore, households with higher incomes have a lower proportion of IPV victims compared to those with lower incomes. These results suggest a complex interplay of economic, social, and cultural factors influencing the likelihood of IPV victimization for both females and males.

In Appendix, Table A2, we present the summary statistics of offender characteristics by gender. Our analysis reveals that female offenders are, on average, approximately 5.6 years older than non-offenders, while male offenders are about 4.6 years older than non-offenders. Additionally, female offenders are more likely to have children under 12 years old, a relationship not observed among male offenders. Although the African-American population constitutes roughly 12% of our sample, the proportion among both male and female offenders is 33%, indicating a disproportionately high representation of Black offenders compared to other races. Conversely, the share of Hispanic offenders is disproportionately low.

Figure A3 displays the number of IPV victims per 1,000 individuals across different age groups during exposure to the UDL and for those not exposed to the UDL (“No UDL”). The results indicate that individuals exposed to the UDL during their early childhood (ages 0–10) exhibit the highest rate of IPV victimization at 2.11 per 1,000 individuals. This rate decreases progressively in older age groups, with 1.66 for ages 11–20, 1.51 for ages 21–30, and a significantly lower rate of 0.35 for ages 31 and above. Interestingly, individuals not exposed to the UDL (“No UDL”) show an IPV victimization rate of 1.16, which is higher than those exposed to the UDL at ages 31 and above but lower than the younger age groups. These findings highlight a clear age gradient in the impact of the UDL exposure on IPV risk, particularly emphasizing the heightened vulnerability of children exposed to the UDL during their formative years.

## 4 Estimation Framework

To estimate the effect of childhood exposure to the UDL on IPV victimization, we use the following specification:

$$IPV_{ist_1} = \alpha_0 + \beta_0 \left( UDL_{st_0} \times \text{Exposure Age}_{ist_0} \right) + \gamma_1 X_{ist_1} + \delta_s + \tau_t + \varepsilon_{ist_1} \quad (1)$$

where  $t_0$  is the timing of the UDL for a state  $s$ . Thus, the variable  $UDL_{st_0}$  is a binary indicator

set to 1 if the  $s$  state introduced the UDL for a given year  $t_0$ , and 0 otherwise.

$$UDL_{st_0} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if a state } s \text{ introduced the UDL at period } t_0 \\ 0 & \text{Otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

Since states introduced the UDL at different years during the period 1953 to 1992,  $t_0 \in \{1953 - 1992\}$ . The other time variable  $t_1$  denotes the survey year between 2000 and 2015 when the same individual  $i$  became an adult. The outcome variable  $IPV_{ist_1}$ , is a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 when the individual  $i$ , living in state  $s$  experience IPV at year  $t_1 \in \{2000 - 2015\}$ , and 0 otherwise.

Our variable of interest, Exposure Age $_{ist_0}$  is also a binary variable that takes the value of 1 when individual  $i$ 's age at  $t_0$  falls in a certain range  $(a, b)$ , where  $(a, b) = \{(0 - 10, 11 - 20, 21 - 30, 31 - 40)\}$ . Specifically,

$$\text{Exposure Age}_{ist_0} = \begin{cases} 1 & a \leq \text{individual } i\text{'s age at } t_0 \leq b \\ 0 & \text{Otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

We are particularly interested when an individual  $i$  was exposed to the UDL as a young child such that  $(a, b) = \{0 - 10\}$  because an extensive literature including [Persson and Rossin-Slater \(2018\)](#), [Almond and Currie \(2011\)](#) and [Malaspina et al. \(2008\)](#) suggest that early childhood shock even persist in adult life. Therefore, the coefficient of interest,  $\beta_0$ , represents the effect of early childhood exposure to the UDL on the probability of being a victim of IPV.  $\delta_s$  and  $\tau_t$ , represent state and year fixed effects, respectively and we cluster the standard error by state.

Finally,  $X_{ist}$  is a range of individual-level demographic factors that prior research has identified as potentially influencing both the risk of experiencing IPV and the likelihood of having been affected by parental divorce. Following [Weitzman \(2018\)](#) and [Henke and Hsu \(2018\)](#), we include a dummy variable for college and above education as a control, since higher educational attainment is associated with greater awareness of resources for IPV victims and potentially lower IPV rates. We also include a dummy variable for family income over \$50K, anticipating that higher family income is negatively correlated with IPV due to lesser financial stress. Following [Capaldi et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Cho \(2012\)](#), we also include dummy variables indicating sex, race, ethnicity since we expect that IPV victimization rates can vary significantly across these demographic groups.

Employment status at the time of the survey is controlled for due to the financial independence it may confer, affecting one's ability to leave abusive relationships ([Aizer \(2010\)](#)). Family income above \$50K is included as a proxy for socioeconomic status, which has been

associated with stress and IPV level (Jewkes (2002)). Finally, we control for the presence of at least one child under the age of 12 in the household, acknowledging previous research that suggests the presence of children in the household as a contributing factor to IPV victimization (Mercy et al. (2002)). By controlling for these variables, the study aims to isolate the specific impact of exposure to the UDL on IPV victimization, providing a clearer understanding of its effects independent of these other influential factors.

The identification of this model relies on the assumption that the timing of the UDL in state  $s$  is exogenous to individual  $i$ . Therefore, it is also exogenous to our variable of interest, “Exposure Age”. A large number of studies use this assumption to estimate the impact of the UDL on various outcomes for adults exposed to the law. In contrast, we use this assumption to investigate whether the law also affected young children’s risk of IPV victimization when they became adults. The primary challenge to this assumption’s validity is if parents of young children relocated to different states solely because of the introduction of the UDL. However, this scenario is highly unlikely, as studies (Johnson and Mazingo (2000); Gruber (2004)) indicate that the UDL did not affect state-level migration.

One major limitation of this study is that we do not have data on an individual’s location at the time of the UDL implementation. We only know their location during the sample period from 2000 to 2015. Therefore, we assume that individuals did not move out of state. Considering the national average out-of-state annual migration rate is approximately 3%, this assumption is unlikely to significantly affect our results. Since the outcome of our variable is binary, we use both logit and linear probability models and discuss the findings in next section.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 The Effects of the UDL on IPV Victimization by Exposure Age

We report the logit model estimates from equation (1) for four different exposure age groups: 0-10, 11-20, 21-30 and more than 30 in Table A3. Our results indicate that the exposure to the UDL affected only young children who were 0-10 years old. Taken at face value, the point estimate for the exposure age group 0–10 implies that, when they reach adulthood, the probability of being an IPV victim increases by approximately 0.026 due to exposure to the UDL during early childhood. The finding is inline with Cáceres-Delpiano and Giolito (2008), who find that families with an eldest child aged five or older at the time of the reform experienced adverse socioeconomic outcomes, including a heightened risk of poverty, reduced

family income, and decreased likelihood of children attending private schools.

In contrast to the younger age group, we do not find any statistically significant effect for other three age groups. This is because individuals aged 11-20 or even older possess a heightened awareness of familial dynamics and potentially view divorce or separation differently from younger children (Bane (1976)). A substantial body of literature indicates that preschool children, due to their developing social and cognitive abilities and their greater dependency on their parents, may respond differently to parental divorce compared to older children (Hetherington et al. (1989), Anderson (1989); Wallerstein et al. (2002); Leon (2003); Kelly and Emery (2003)). Additionally, Wallerstein (1983) suggests that preschool-age children may be more prone to feeling responsible for their parents' divorce and experiencing fears of abandonment and separation, unlike older children.

## 5.2 The Effects of Exposure to the UDL as a Zero-Ten Year Old Child on IPV Victimization

Having establish that the exposure to the UDL mainly affected young children to become a victim of IPV in their adult life, in this section we examine the robustness of this result shown in Table 2. The coefficients are multiply by 100 to ease of interpretability. In the first column, we estimate the model without any control variables, where the coefficient lacks significance. In columns 2 and 3, we add gender and race dummy variables and in column 4 we add offender's race information and find that the coefficient is statistically significant at 10%. However, as we add the demographic and labor market controls in columns 5 and 6, we find that being a child between 0–10 years old at the time of law implementation increases the likelihood of experiencing IPV as an adult by 0.186% and the coefficient is statistically significant at 5%.<sup>2</sup>

Our results indicate that women are significantly more likely to be victims of IPV than men, with an increase of 1.234 percentage points, a result that remains highly significant across all models. Racial and ethnic disparities are also evident. For instance, White individuals are less likely to experience IPV compared to other racial groups, with a significant negative effect of -0.082. Similarly, American-Indian and Asian individuals have substantially lower probabilities of IPV victimization, with significant reductions of -0.157 and -0.155, respectively. Socioeconomic factors also play a crucial role. Higher income appears to have a protective effect, reducing the likelihood of IPV by approximately 0.506 percentage points. Conversely, the presence of young children in the household significantly increases IPV risk, with a positive

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<sup>2</sup>To obtain the impact in terms of percentage point, we use the following calculation:  
percentage point change = (Coefficient/Mean IPV Rate)×100

effect of 0.581 percentage points. Employment is also associated with a higher risk of IPV, showing a significant increase of 0.207 percentage points. However, attaining a college or higher education does not have a statistically significant impact on the likelihood of IPV victimization.

Exposure to UDL can affect children through two opposing channels. First, UDL helps reduce family violence and spousal homicide. [Stevenson and Wolfers \(2006\)](#) found that states enacting the UDL experienced a 30% decline in IPV for both men and women and a 10% decline in intimate partner homicide involving women. As a result, young children benefit from growing up in less abusive parental relationships. Additionally, if parents divorce due to an abusive relationship, children benefit from being raised in a safer environment. Growing up in such an environment helps young children become financially stable and mentally strong in adulthood ([Morrison and Coiro \(1999\)](#)). Consequently, this reduces their likelihood of becoming victims of IPV later in life.

In contrast, a large existing literature shows that children from divorced families faced several negative consequences. Notably, [Zill et al. \(1993\)](#) show that children from divorced families have difficulties in adjusting both socially and psychologically and as a consequence they are more likely to exhibit behavior that is antisocial, impulsive or acting out. [Guidubaldi et al. \(1984\)](#) find that they perform worse academically and more likely to suffer lower on I.Q., reading, spelling, and math tests. Furthermore, adolescents with divorced parents are two to three times more likely to drop out of school, become pregnant, or engage in antisocial and delinquent behavior ([Achenbach and Edelbrock \(1983\)](#), [Isaacs \(1988\)](#), [Hetherington et al. \(1989\)](#)). Similarly, [Flewelling and Bauman \(1990\)](#) find they begin to date and have sex at a younger age.

A large existing literature including [Keith and Finlay \(1988\)](#), [McLeod \(1991\)](#), [Aquilino \(1994\)](#), [McLanahan and Sandefur \(1994\)](#) show that adults children of divorced parents are less likely to attend or complete college and they are more likely to be unemployed and on welfare. Furthermore, children of divorced parents are more likely to marry and cohabit at an earlier age, and they face a higher likelihood of marital dissolution through separation or divorce ([McLanahan and Bumpass \(1988\)](#); [Amato and Keith \(1991\)](#); [Kiernan and Hobcraft \(1997\)](#); [Feng et al. \(1999\)](#); [Kiernan and Cherlin \(1999\)](#)). [Dornbusch et al. \(1985\)](#), [Baumrind \(1989\)](#), [Doherty and Needle \(1991\)](#) show that teenagers with divorced parents are more aggressive, non-complaint, sexually active, and likely to use and abuse drugs and alcohol. Furthermore, teenagers whose parents have divorced are more likely to have a low academic performance and to drop out of school ([Guidubaldi et al. \(1984\)](#), [Kreim and Beller \(1988\)](#)).

The negative implications of divorce for children can be driven by several factors such as

single parents have less time to invest on children and also the negative psychological impacts due to separation of parents (Bougheas and Georgellis (1999)). Therefore, in theory, the impact of divorce on children’s well-being is ambiguous due to the presence of two conflicting forces. In addition to these opposing factors, another key element is the shift in bargaining power brought about by UDL. Even if a family’s marital status remains unchanged after the introduction of UDL, the increased accessibility of divorce can still reshape the bargaining dynamics between spouses.

A large number of studies including Strauss and Thomas (1995) and Lundberg et al. (1997) show that resources controlled by women are more beneficial to children than those controlled by men. Therefore, if the UDL weakens the bargaining position of the wife within the household, it can have negative implications for children who might have benefited from their mother’s relatively stronger position under the multilateral divorce regime. Conversely, this effect may work in the opposite direction if the UDL strengthens the wife’s bargaining power. However, there is limited evidence on how easier divorce regulations affect bargaining power at the margin. Therefore, we assess the overall impact of early exposure to the UDL on the likelihood of experiencing IPV in adulthood. However, we are unable to isolate the three distinct channels discussed above.

### 5.3 Heterogeneous Impacts

In Table 3, we examine whether the effects of UDL exposure on IPV victimization vary across racial and ethnic groups among females. We include a set of double interaction terms between UDL exposure at ages 0–10 and race, controlling for all other variables. The coefficient of the double interaction term captures whether female children aged 0–10 from a specific racial group experienced a differential impact compared to the rest of the population. Columns 1 to 3 report results for White, Black, and Hispanic females.

Comparing the coefficients, we find that the probability of being a victim of IPV significantly decreases for Black females by 0.123 percentage points compared to the rest of the population. In contrast, the probability for White females increases by approximately 0.038 percentage points, though this effect is not statistically significant. Given the adverse effects of the UDL on children, particularly through its impact on women’s labor force participation and the consequent reduction in time and investment in child-rearing, these findings align with existing literature. Research by Parkman (1992) demonstrates that the effects of the UDL on labor force participation were more pronounced for young, White married women. In column 3, the interaction term between UDL age exposure at ages 0–10 and Hispanic is positive and statistically significant, indicating that among female children aged 0–10 at the

time of the UDL implementation, being Hispanic is associated with a higher probability of being a victim of IPV.

## 5.4 Mechanisms

In this section, we explore two crucial pathways through which exposure to the UDL during childhood, specifically within the 0–10 age group, can increase the likelihood of experiencing IPV in adulthood. The first pathway is through the effects of the UDL on family stability and parental bargaining power, which can influence IPV experiences in adulthood by impacting children’s education. The second pathway through which childhood exposure to the UDL can significantly affect IPV risk is employment. This legal shift often alters parental relationships, which can lead to disruptions in children’s outcomes.

To explore the first mechanism, we estimate the effects of early exposure to the UDL on higher education by gender and race. The dependent variable is a dummy variable that equals one if the individual has attained a college-level education or above, and zero otherwise. Again, we use the logit model and report the results in Table 4. As shown in columns 1 and 2, the probability of receiving college and higher education decreases by approximately 0.02 for both male and female children who were exposed to the law when they were 0–10 years old, a finding consistent with research highlighting the correlation between lower levels of education and an increased susceptibility to IPV in adulthood. Furthermore, examining different racial groups in columns 3 to 6, we find that while this effect is negative across all races, it is statistically significant only for Whites, Asians, and Hispanic people.

The second mechanism we explore is how childhood exposure to divorce laws affects employment, which in turn relates to IPV in adulthood. UDL can disrupt family dynamics and economic stability, potentially impacting children’s future employment opportunities. These laws can alter parental relationships and household dynamics, which in turn influence children’s perceptions of work and their ability to navigate the labor market successfully. Therefore, in Table 5 we estimate the impact of early exposure to the UDL on employment in adulthood. In columns 1 and 2 we observe that being a child aged 0–10 during the time of reforms correlates with a decrease in the likelihood of employment in adulthood by -0.004 for men and -0.003 for women. Moreover, this effect varies among different racial groups, ranging from -0.003 for Whites to -0.027 for American-Indians.

Next, in Table 6, we explore the extent to which the adverse effects of the UDL on education and employment influence the likelihood of being a victim of IPV. Therefore, in column 1, we interact UDL exposure at ages 0–10 with an employment dummy, and in column 3, we interact it with college and above education. The coefficient of the interaction term measures the extent



to which the probability of experiencing IPV is affected by higher education or employment for children who were exposed to the UDL at ages 0–10. In addition to this channel, we also look at two additional channels: household income more than 50K and having children less than 12 years old.

As shown in column 1, the interaction between UDL exposure at ages 0–10 and employment dummy shows a statistically significant negative effect on IPV ( $\beta = -0.102$ ). This suggests that being employed in adulthood is associated with a lower likelihood of experiencing IPV for individuals who were between 0-10 years old at the time of the UDL reforms. Combining our previous findings in Table 2, we conclude that the UDL exposure in early childhood affects IPV in adulthood through its negative impact on employment. The results are consistent with the previous literature, which also shows that being employed helps women reduce their risk of IPV by increasing their financial independence (Rothman et al. (2007)), improving females’ relative bargaining power (Aizer (2010)), and reducing the time partners spend together (Dugan et al. (1999)).

Similar to the employment channel, we also find that the coefficient for the interaction term between UDL exposure at ages 0-10 and college education is negative ( $\beta = -0.036$ ). This suggests that having a college education lowers the probability of being an IPV victim, even if one was exposed to the UDL in early childhood. However, the coefficient is not precisely measured. As we find in Table 2, exposure to the law in early childhood is associated with a lower probability of attaining a college education. This, in turn, is associated to a higher likelihood of IPV victimization for those exposed to the law during early childhood. Therefore, the impact of the UDL exposure on early childhood has long-lasting negative effects on educational attainment and subsequent risk of IPV victimization.

Lastly, we examine whether higher household income can mitigate the risk of IPV victimization. To define higher household income we create a dummy variable based on household annual income above \$50K. As shown in column 4, the coefficient of the interaction term between UDL exposure at ages 0-10 and higher household income is -0.036. This indicates that for individuals who were between 0-10 years old at the time of the reforms, having a higher income in adulthood is associated with a lower likelihood of experiencing IPV. The finding is intuitive because higher income can provide greater economic independence, reducing financial dependence on an abusive partner and making it easier for individuals to leave abusive relationships (Ahmadabadi et al. (2020); Wilson (2019); Fox and Benson (2006); Pearlman et al. (2003) ). Furthermore, higher income can also mean a stronger and more supportive social network, which can provide emotional and practical support in times of need, making it easier to seek help and leave abusive situations (Ogbe et al. (2020); Wright (2015); Baumgartner (1993)).



To explain the heterogeneous impacts by race, we further investigate how employment of different race can attributes the risk of IPV victimization. Therefore, we multiply UDL exposure at ages 0-10 dummy with the race and employment status. The coefficient of the triple interaction term measures to what extend the probability of experiencing IPV affected due to employment in adulthood for the children from a specific race who exposed to the UDL when they were 0-10 years old. We report the results for White, Black and Hispanic females in Panels A to C in Table A4.

We find that the coefficient for the triple interaction term for Black females is 0.168, suggesting that Black females who were between ages 0–10 at the time of the reforms and employed in adulthood are more likely to experience IPV compared to other racial groups. This finding is inline with [Stöckl et al. \(2021\)](#) which suggests that when a African woman earns more than her husband, she has higher odds of reporting violence. Furthermore, [Abramsky et al. \(2019\)](#) suggests that while higher income is associated with a lower risk of physical IPV both at baseline and over time, as well as a lower risk of sexual IPV at baseline, women who contributed more financially to the household than their partners faced higher risks of both physical and sexual IPV.

In contrast to Black females, we do not find any such effects for White and Hispanic females. For both White and Hispanic, the coefficient of the triple interaction term is negative. These suggest that being employed is associated with a lower likelihood of experiencing IPV when the individuals was exposed to the law at an age between 0-10 years old. Overall, these findings highlight the nuanced relationship between gender, race, employment, and IPV among adults exposed to the UDL during their first decade of life. While employment appears to play a protective role against experiencing IPV for White and Hispanic females, it has the opposite effect for Black females.

## 5.5 Exposure to the UDL in Early Childhood and Gendered Patterns of IPV Victimization and Offending

Given that existing literature suggests the UDL affects the mental well-being of male and female children differently, this section examines whether early exposure to the UDL also influences the likelihood of becoming a victim or perpetrator of IPV by gender. The upper panel of Table 7 presents the results for IPV victimization, while the lower panel focuses on IPV perpetration for males and females separately. We find that exposure to the UDL during early childhood (ages 0-10) increases the probability of IPV victimization for females by 0.035, and the effect appears insignificant for males. In contrast, the results in Panel B suggest that early childhood exposure to the UDL raises the likelihood of males becoming perpetrators of

IPV by 0.119, with the coefficient being significant at the 1% level.

The contrasting outcomes, where young female children are more likely to become IPV victims and male children more likely to become IPV perpetrators, can be explained by Heise (1998)’s model, which addresses the differential impacts of childhood trauma by gender. Specifically, these differential impacts can arise from three distinct scenarios: experiencing abuse during childhood, witnessing marital violence within the family of origin, and having an absent or rejecting father. Men often attributed their perpetration of IPV to the lasting effects of childhood trauma exposure. The absence of fathers emerged as a significant factor in men’s childhood experiences (Voith et al. (2019)). This absence may have disrupted crucial developmental processes essential for establishing a sense of safety, trust, and self-worth (Mclanahan et al. (2013)). Therefore, one pathway through which exposure to the UDL during early childhood can influence the probability of IPV perpetration in adulthood is through the presence of absent fathers, a phenomenon that tends to occur more frequently when divorce procedures are simplified.

## 6 Robustness Tests

In this section we perform several robustness tests to check the validity of our results.

### 6.1 Linear Probability Model

For the robustness check, we re-estimated our main models using OLS and found that the results remain consistent, providing additional confidence in our findings. Table A5 presents the results for Equation 1, estimated using the OLS model. The variable UDL exposure age 0-10, representing female children aged 0–10 exposed to the UDL, remains positive and statistically significant across all specifications, with coefficients ranging from 0.036 to 0.071. These results suggest that early childhood exposure to the UDL increases the likelihood of IPV victimization in adulthood. The strongest effect is observed in columns (1) and (2), with coefficients of 0.070 and 0.071, respectively, indicating a consistent and significant relationship.

Racial and ethnic disparities are also apparent in the results. White females show a significantly reduced likelihood of IPV victimization in specifications (2) and (4), with coefficients of -0.335 and -0.305, respectively. For Black females, the results are not consistently significant; however, the coefficient in column (4) is -0.243 and marginally significant. Asian females consistently show a significant reduction in IPV likelihood, with coefficients of -0.444 and -0.448 in columns (2) and (4). For Hispanic females, the results differ across models. In column (3), the interaction coefficient is 0.047 and statistically significant, whereas in column (4), the

coefficient is -0.093 and remains significant. These findings highlight complex and varying impacts of the UDL exposure across racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, socioeconomic factors such as an income above 50K and the presence of children under 12 are significant predictors of IPV risk. Higher income is associated with a lower likelihood of IPV (-0.257), whereas having young children increases the risk (0.219). These findings further underscore the nuanced interplay between demographic, economic, and social factors in shaping IPV outcomes.

## 6.2 National Crime Victimization Survey Data: 1979-2000

To ensure the robustness of our primary findings, we also utilized an alternative version of NCVS data from the years 1979-2000. This allowed us to confirm the impact of exposure to the UDL during childhood (ages 0-10) on the likelihood of IPV victimization in adulthood. Table 8 presents the results of a logit model examining the likelihood of being a victim of IPV in adulthood, focusing on individuals who were 0-10 years old at the time of the implementation of the UDL. Three models are reported, each controlling for various demographic variables and including state and year fixed effects. The key variable of interest, UDL exposure at ages 0-10 consistently shows a positive and significant coefficient across all three models (0.192, 0.189, and 0.185, respectively), indicating that individuals who were between 0-10 years old at the time of the UDL implementation are significantly more likely to experience IPV in adulthood. This effect is robust across all specifications, highlighting a persistent association between early childhood exposure to the law and later IPV victimization.

The demographic controls reveal notable disparities in IPV risk. Being White or Black is associated with a higher likelihood of IPV victimization compared to other racial categories, with coefficients of 0.444 and 0.592 in Model 2, and 0.440 and 0.553 in Model 3, respectively, both significant at the 1% level. American-Indian individuals also show a significantly higher risk (coefficients of 0.751 and 0.726). Conversely, higher income is strongly associated with a reduced likelihood of IPV, with a significant negative coefficient of -0.285. College and above education and Hispanic ethnicity yield mixed results. Education has no significant effect, while Hispanic ethnicity is negatively associated with IPV in Model 3 (-0.097). Overall, the findings underscore the enduring impact of early childhood legal environments on later life outcomes, particularly regarding IPV risk, and highlight the role of race and socioeconomic factors in shaping these risks.

Table A6 presents the heterogeneity impact analysis for females using the NCVS data for the years 1979-2000. The interaction terms provide additional insights into heterogeneity by subgroup. For instance, the interaction between UDL exposure at ages 0-10 and White

is positive and statistically significant (0.088), indicating that White females exposed to the UDL at ages 0–10 are more likely to experience IPV than their counterparts from other racial groups. In contrast, interaction between UDL exposure at ages 0–10 and Black is negative and statistically significant (-0.088), suggesting a reduced likelihood of IPV victimization for Black females in the same age group. Similarly, double interaction between UDL exposure at ages 0–10 and college and above education is negative and statistically significant (-0.110), indicating that higher education reduces the likelihood of IPV for those exposed to the UDL during early childhood. Finally, socioeconomic factors, such as income more than 50K, show a protective effect, with higher income consistently reducing IPV likelihood by approximately 0.28 percentage points across all specifications. These findings highlight significant heterogeneity in the effects of childhood exposure to the UDL based on race, education, and income.

## 7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the widespread adoption of UDL across the US during the late 1960s and early 1980s continues to inspire scholarly inquiry into its complex effects on family dynamics and well-being. While initial studies focused on divorce rates and their immediate effects on family, our research extends the scope to investigate the long-term consequences, particularly the risk of IPV victimization among children in adulthood. Our findings underscore the nuanced relationship between exposure to the UDL during childhood and the heightened risk of experiencing IPV later in life, with individuals aged 0–10 at the time of the reforms exhibiting a notably higher likelihood of IPV victimization, increasing by 0.18 percentage points. Moreover, we illuminate the pathways through which these laws influence IPV, highlighting the role of disrupted family stability and altered bargaining power in shaping individuals' education and employment outcomes, which in turn impact their vulnerability to IPV.

By examining the long-term effects of the UDL on IPV using comprehensive National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data, our study contributes to the literature on the enduring impact of divorce laws. Unlike previous research, which often focused on immediate impacts or relied on limited IPV data, our analysis provides a robust examination of the enduring consequences of legislative reforms on family violence. Additionally, our findings emphasize the importance of developmental timing in understanding the differential effects of policy changes, underscoring how exposure during early childhood has far-reaching implications for adult outcomes. This research underscores the need for targeted interventions and policy reforms to address the long-term effects of childhood shocks, such as UDL, while prioritizing vulnerable populations to break the intergenerational cycle of harm and promote family well-being.

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Table 1: Differences in the Characteristics of IPV Victims and Non-Victims by Gender

	A: Female			B: Male		
	IPV Victim	Not Victim	Diff (t-stat)	IPV Victim	Not Victim	Diff (t-stat)
Age	33.985 (9.167)	39.875 (13.843)	-5.890 [-10.692]	36.292 (10.971)	39.206 (13.850)	-2.914 [-2.417]
Having Children Under 12 Years Old	0.595 (0.491)	0.359 (0.480)	0.236 [12.330]	0.318 (0.468)	0.319 (0.466)	-0.001 [-0.014]
Race						
White	0.690 (0.463)	0.762 (0.426)	-0.073 [-4.279]	0.614 (0.489)	0.788 (0.409)	-0.174 [-4.884]
Black	0.263 (0.440)	0.159 (0.366)	0.103 [7.086]	0.326 (0.470)	0.133 (0.339)	0.193 [6.533]
Hispanic	0.161 (0.368)	0.136 (0.343)	0.025 [1.825]	0.076 (0.266)	0.142 (0.349)	-0.066 [-2.182]
Asian	0.013 (0.112)	0.060 (0.237)	-0.047 [-4.985]	0.000 (0.000)	0.062 (0.240)	-0.062 [-2.944]
American-Indian	0.005 (0.069)	0.003 (0.056)	0.002 [0.717]	0.000 (0.000)	0.003 (0.057)	-0.003 [-0.657]
Education						
College and Above	0.717 (0.492)	0.436 (0.496)	-0.281 [-1.304]	0.303 (0.461)	0.426 (0.495)	-0.123 [-2.862]
HS Graduate	0.175 (0.377)	0.173 (0.378)	-0.002 [-0.130]	0.205 (0.405)	0.175 (0.380)	0.029 [0.883]
HS Dropout	0.419 (0.494)	0.392 (0.488)	0.028 [1.425]	0.492 (0.502)	0.398 (0.490)	0.094 [2.205]
Employment and Income						
Employed	0.578 (0.494)	0.550 (0.498)	0.028 [1.403]	0.742 (0.439)	0.672 (0.470)	0.071 [1.731]
Income $\geq$ 50K	0.239 (0.427)	0.550 (0.498)	-0.311 [-15.683]	0.379 (0.487)	0.601 (0.490)	-0.222 [-5.213]
No of observations	632	283,705		132	254,414	

\* The summary statistics table reports mean and standard deviations (in parentheses). The numbers in the parentheses of the third and sixth columns denote t-statistics.

Table 2: Logit Model Estimates: The Impact of Childhood Exposure to Unilateral Divorce Laws (UDL) on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Victimization

VARIABLES	IPV					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
UDL Exposure Age 0-10	0.002 (0.019) [0.015]	0.003 (0.019) [0.020]	0.003 (0.019) [0.023]	0.025* (0.014) [0.176]	0.026** (0.013) [0.186]	0.026** (0.013) [0.186]
Female		0.207*** (0.018) [1.460]	0.203*** (0.018) [1.432]	0.193*** (0.013) [1.361]	0.173*** (0.013) [1.227]	0.174*** (0.013) [1.234]
White			-0.128*** (0.035) [-0.903]	-0.080** (0.038) [-0.561]	-0.076** (0.038) [0.537]	-0.082** (0.037) [-0.580]
Black			-0.017 (0.039) [-0.118]	0.008 (0.039) [0.060]	-0.014 (0.038) [-0.098]	-0.018 (0.037) [-0.126]
American-Indian			-0.114 (0.083) [-0.804]	-0.159* (0.084) [-1.121]	-0.155* (0.087) [-0.085]	-0.157* (0.089) [-1.107]
Asian			-0.351*** (0.099) [-2.476]	-0.151 (0.095) [-1.065]	-0.147 (0.093) [-1.029]	-0.155* (0.090) [-1.093]
Hispanic			0.016 (0.014) [0.109]	0.055*** (0.010) [0.391]	0.026** (0.010) [0.182]	0.028*** (0.010) [0.196]
Offender: White				0.836*** (0.015) [5.897]	0.809*** (0.015) [5.663]	0.807*** (0.014) [5.692]
Offender: Black				0.741*** (0.014) [5.227]	0.714*** (0.013) [5.297]	0.713*** (0.013) [5.029]

*Continued on next page*

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<i>Continued from previous page</i>						
VARIABLES	IPV					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Income $\geq$ 50K					-0.074*** (0.012) [0.456]	-0.082*** (0.014) [0.506]
Having Children Under 12 Years Old					0.070*** (0.015)	0.072*** (0.015) [0.581]
College and Above Education						0.021 (0.013) [0.149]
Employed						0.029** (0.013) [0.207]
Year FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
State FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	538,883	538,883	538,883	538,883	538,883	538,883

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The numbers in the first parenthesis of each column represent the state of residence level clustered robust standard errors. The percentage impacts are shown in square brackets. All coefficients are multiplied by 100.

Table 3: Logit Model Estimates: Heterogeneous Impacts for Females by Race

Variable	IPV Victimization		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
UDL Exposure Age 0-10	0.006 (0.052)	0.057*** (0.020)	0.021 (0.015)
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 $\times$ White	0.038 (0.062)		
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 $\times$ Black		-0.123* (0.063)	
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 $\times$ Hispanic			0.084* (0.044)
White	-0.099 (0.064)	-0.097 (0.064)	-0.096 (0.064)
Black	-0.025 (0.068)	-0.015 (0.065)	-0.027 (0.068)
American-Indian	-0.125 (0.136)	-0.126 (0.141)	-0.126 (0.137)
Asian	-0.152 (0.136)	-0.154 (0.136)	-0.153 (0.135)
Hispanic	0.072*** (0.018)	0.073*** (0.018)	0.059*** (0.018)
Offender: White	1.210*** (0.018)	1.210*** (0.018)	1.210*** (0.019)
Offender: Black	1.080*** (0.021)	1.080*** (0.021)	1.080*** (0.022)
College and Above Education	0.055** (0.023)	0.056** (0.023)	0.054** (0.023)
Employed	0.036 (0.025)	0.035 (0.025)	0.036 (0.025)
Income $\geq$ 50K	-0.133*** (0.022)	-0.133*** (0.022)	-0.132*** (0.022)
Having Children Under 12 Years Old	0.131*** (0.023)	0.132*** (0.023)	0.132*** (0.023)
Observations	284,337	284,337	284,337

\* The numbers in the first parenthesis of each column represent the state of residence level clustered robust standard errors. All coefficients are multiplied by 100.

Table 4: The Effects of Early Exposure to the UDL on Education, by Gender and Race

VARIABLES	Gender		Race				
	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	American-Indian	Hispanic
UDL Exposure Age 0-10	-0.015*** (0.006)	-0.018** (0.009)	-0.013* (0.007)	-0.013 (0.017)	-0.051*** (0.011)	-0.083 (0.059)	-0.032* (0.0165)
Female			0.052*** (0.006)	0.088*** (0.008)	0.009 (0.008)	0.110** (0.048)	0.083*** (0.007)
White	0.058* (0.031)	0.030 (0.026)					-0.074** (0.032)
Black	-0.028 (0.026)	-0.022 (0.024)					-0.036 (0.042)
American-Indian	-0.080** (0.040)	-0.052 (0.046)					-0.138*** (0.049)
Asian	0.136*** (0.030)	0.071*** (0.026)					-0.035 (0.036)
Hispanic	-0.248*** (0.014)	-0.214*** (0.022)	-0.240*** (0.014)	-0.121*** (0.029)	-0.239*** (0.032)	-0.216*** (0.062)	
Employed	0.204*** (0.012)	0.203*** (0.011)	0.201*** (0.011)	0.215*** (0.009)	0.169*** (0.025)	0.186*** (0.037)	0.153*** (0.014)
Income $\geq$ 50K	0.205*** (0.010)	0.202*** (0.009)	0.196*** (0.009)	0.238*** (0.008)	0.206*** (0.019)	0.206*** (0.046)	0.257*** (0.012)
Having Children Under 12 Years Old	-0.039*** (0.005)	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.015*** (0.004)	-0.019** (0.008)	-0.023*** (0.006)	-0.002 (0.051)	-0.068*** (0.015)
Observations	192,198	212,602	313,147	60,222	26,013	1,289	59,319

\* The numbers in the first parenthesis of each column represent the state of residence level clustered robust standard errors.



Table 5: The Effects of Early Exposure to the UDL on Employment, by Gender and Race

VARIABLES	Gender		Race				
	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	American-Indian	Hispanic
UDL Exposure Age 0-10	-0.004*** (0.002)	-0.003** -0.00129	-0.003* (0.002)	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.008*** (0.002)	-0.027 (0.039)	-0.011*** (0.003)
Female			-0.006*** (0.001)	-0.004** (0.002)	-0.012*** (0.002)	0.008 (0.020)	-0.013*** (0.002)
White	-0.014*** (0.003)	-0.012*** (0.002)					-0.018*** (0.003)
Black	-0.005* (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)					-0.008 (0.005)
American-Indian	0.003 (0.005)	0.009 (0.008)					0.006 (0.009)
Asian	-0.027*** (0.004)	-0.036*** (0.002)					-0.014* (0.008)
Hispanic	0.005** (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	0.017*** (0.004)	-0.003 (0.023)	
College and Above Education	0.014*** (0.003)	0.022*** (0.003)	0.018*** (0.003)	0.022*** (0.003)	0.010** (0.005)	0.005 (0.031)	0.026*** (0.004)
Income $\geq$ 50K	-0.006*** (0.002)	-0.010*** (0.002)	-0.009*** (0.002)	-0.005* (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	0.014 (0.018)	-0.003 (0.003)
Having children under 12 Years old	-0.000 (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)	0.002* (0.001)	0.008*** (0.003)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.025 (0.016)	0.006*** (0.002)
Observations	254,546	284,337	417,188	79,158	32,568	1,559	74,972

\* The numbers in the first parenthesis of each column represent the state of residence level clustered robust standard errors.

Table 6: Logit Model Estimates: Heterogeneous Impacts for Females- Socio-Economic Variables

	IPV			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × Employed	-0.102*** (0.027) [-0.719]			
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × Having Children Under 12 Years Old		-0.074** (0.035) [-0.522]		
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × College and Above Education			-0.036 (0.027) [-0.253]	
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × Income ≥ 50K				-0.036 (0.032) [-0.255]
UDL Exposure Age 0-10	0.091*** (0.022) [0.640]	0.067** (0.027) [0.471]	0.037** (0.016) [0.262]	0.036** (0.016) [0.257]
Employed	0.045*** (0.012) [0.317]	0.029** (0.013) [0.205]	0.029** (0.013) [0.207]	0.030** (0.013) [0.209]
Having Children Under 12 Years Old	0.071*** (0.015) [0.504]	0.083*** (0.016) [0.587]	0.072*** (0.015) [0.506]	0.072*** (0.015) [0.509]
College and Above Education	0.020 (0.013) [0.138]	0.022* (0.013) [0.154]	0.025** (0.012) [0.178]	0.021 (0.013) [0.145]
Income ≥ 50K	-0.081*** (0.014) [-0.573]	-0.081*** (0.015) [-0.573]	-0.082*** (0.014) [-0.580]	-0.077*** (0.016) [-0.541]
All Other Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No of Observations	538,883	538,883	538,883	538,883

\* The numbers in the first parenthesis of each column represent the state of residence level clustered robust standard errors. All coefficients are multiplied by 100.

Table 7: Logit Model Estimates: The Effect of Exposure to the UDL as a 0-10 years Old Child on IPV Victimization and Perpetration by Gender

IPV Victimization				
VARIABLES	Female		Male	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
UDL Exposure Age 0-10	-0.015 (0.028)	0.035** (0.016)	0.024 (0.018)	0.025 (0.018)
White		-0.095 (0.064)		-0.057* (0.029)
Black		-0.026 (0.068)		0.004 (0.027)
American-Indian		-0.126 (0.139)		-
Asian		-0.153 (0.136)		-
Hispanic		0.072*** (0.018)		-0.032 (0.020)
White Offender		0.0121*** (0.018)		0.361*** (0.018)
Black Offender		1.080*** (0.021)		0.311*** (0.018)
College and Above Education		0.055** (0.023)		-0.016 (0.011)
Employed		0.036 (0.025)		0.034*** (0.010)
Income $\geq$ 50K		-0.133*** (0.022)		-0.024* (0.013)
Having children under 12 Years old		0.131*** (0.023)		0.010 (0.012)
Observations	284,337	284,337	249,916	249,916
IPV perpetration				
VARIABLES	Female		Male	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
UDL Exposure Age 0-10	0.043 (0.044)	0.039 (0.045)	0.126*** (0.020)	0.119*** (0.020)
white		0.041 (0.029)		0.073*** (0.011)
Black		0.008 (0.028)		0.040*** (0.013)
Hispanic		0.018 (0.082)		-0.037 (0.037)
Observations	1,330	1,330	5,596	5,596

Table 8: The Effect of Exposure to the UDL as a 0-10 Years Old Female Child on IPV Victimization: 1979-2000

VARIABLES	IPV		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
UDL Exposure Age 0-10	0.192*** (0.018)	0.189*** (0.018)	0.185*** (0.018)
White		0.444*** (0.035)	0.440*** (0.035)
Black		0.592*** (0.033)	0.553*** (0.034)
American Indian		0.751*** (0.095)	0.726*** (0.096)
Hispanic		-0.0495 (0.034)	-0.097** (0.039)
College and Above Education			-0.018 (0.019)
Income $\geq$ 50K			-0.285*** (0.035)
State FE	YES	YES	YES
Year FE	YES	YES	YES
Observations	837,068	837,068	837,068

\* The numbers in the first parenthesis of each column represent the state of residence level clustered robust standard errors. All coefficients are multiplied by 100.

# A Appendix

Table A1: Unilateral Divorce Law across the US States

State Name	Unilateral Divorce Law	Unilateral Separation Requirements	State Name	Unilateral Divorce Law	Unilateral Separation Requirements
Alabama	1971	Yes	Montana	1973	Yes
Alaska	1935	Yes	Nebraska	1972	Yes
Arizona	1973	Yes	Nevada	1967	Yes
Arkansas	No	No	New Hampshire	1971	Yes
California	1970	Yes	New Jersey	No	Yes
Colorado	1972	Yes	New Mexico	1933	Yes
Connecticut	1973	No	New York	No	No
Delaware	1968	No	North Carolina	No	No
District of Columbia	No	Yes	North Dakota	1971	Yes
Florida	1971	Yes	Ohio	1992	Yes
Georgia	1973	Yes	Oklahoma	1953	Yes
Hawaii	1972	Yes	Oregon	1971	Yes
Idaho	1971	Yes	Pennsylvania	No	Yes
Illinois	No	Yes	Rhode Island	1975	Yes
Indiana	1973	Yes	South Carolina	No	Yes
Iowa	1970	Yes	South Dakota	1985	Yes
Kansas	1969	Yes	Tennessee	No	No
Kentucky	1972	Yes	Texas	1970	Yes
Louisiana	No	Yes	Utah	1987	No
Maine	1973	Yes	Vermont	No	No
Maryland	No	No	Virginia	No	No
Massachusetts	1975	Yes	Washington	1973	Yes
Michigan	1972	Yes	West Virginia	1984	No
Minnesota	1974	Yes	Wisconsin	1978	No
Mississippi	No	No	Wyoming	1977	Yes
Missouri	No	Yes			

<sup>1</sup> Source: ?.

Figure A1: Frequency of States Introducing Unilateral Divorce Laws: 1930-1990

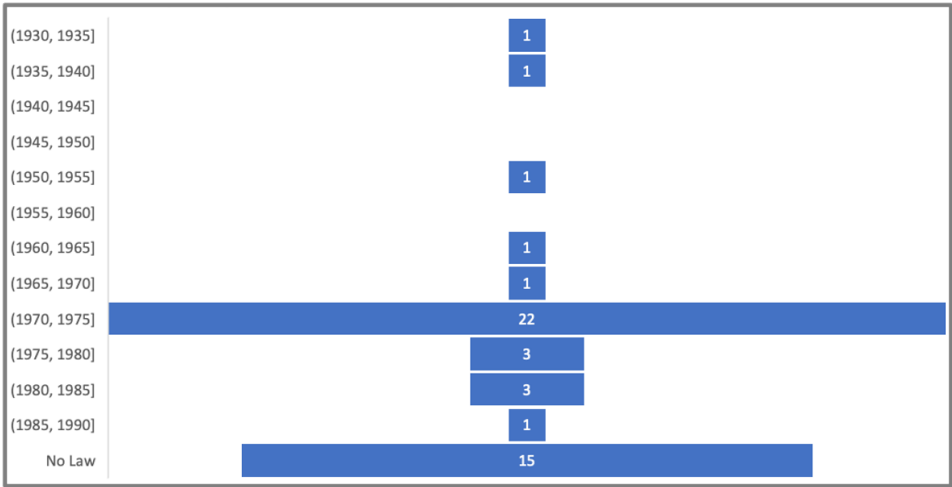
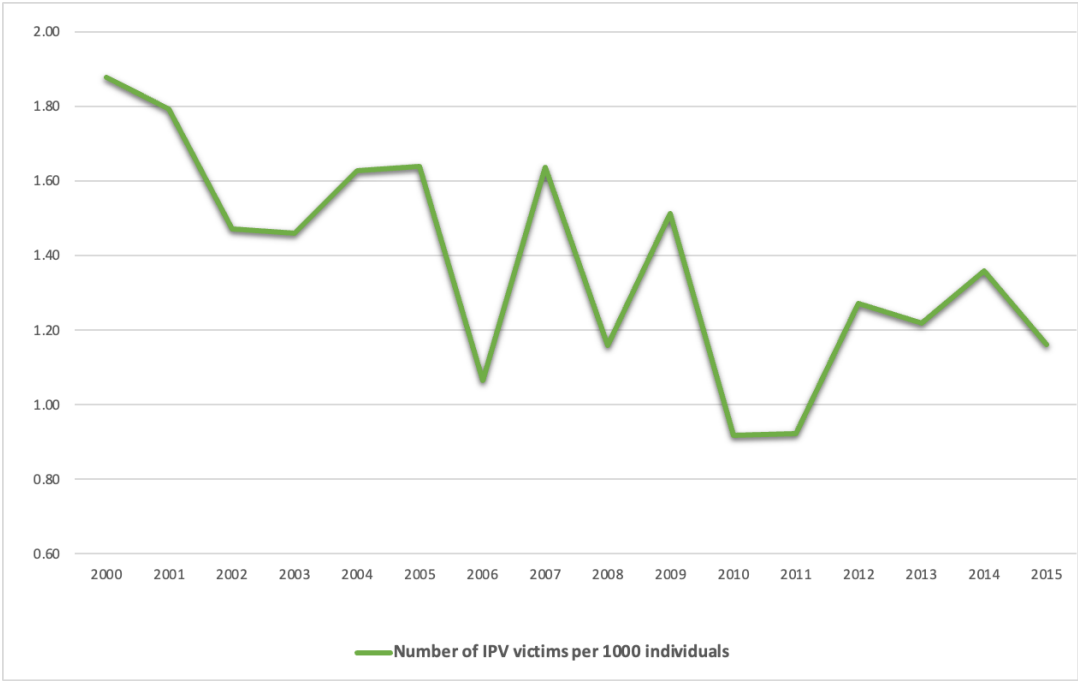


Figure A2: Number of IPV victims per 1000 individuals over time: 2000-2015



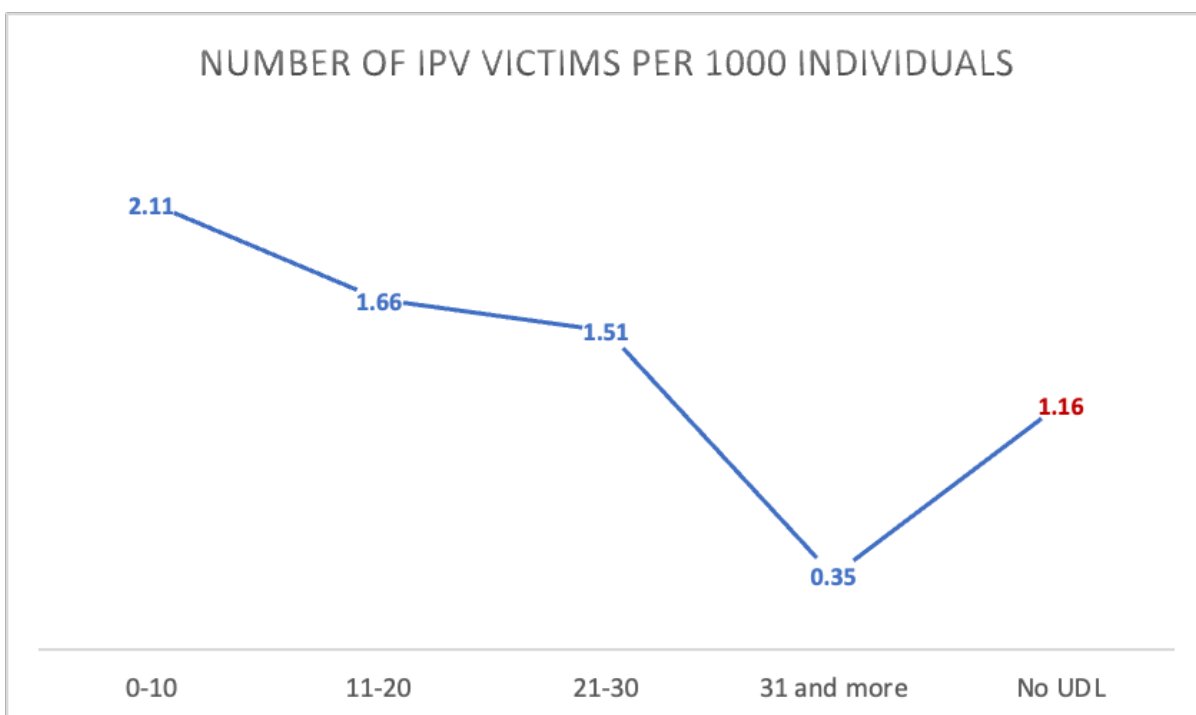
\* Source: The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data covering the years 2000-2015.  
\*\* We define IPV as the number of personal crimes where the relationship between the victim and the offender indicated the spouse at the time of the incident, ex-spouse at the time of the incident, or boyfriend/girlfriend, ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend.

Table A2: Differences in The Characteristics of IPV Offenders and Non-Offenders by Gender

	Female			Male		
	IPV Offender	Not Offender	Difference	IPV Offender	Not Offender	Difference
Age	31.492 (5.339)	25.894 (8.878)	5.598 [14.965]	30.333 (6.007)	25.670 (8.268)	4.663 [6.256]
Having Children under 12 Years old	0.595 (0.491)	0.359 (0.480)	0.236 [12.330]	0.318 (0.468)	0.319 (0.466)	-0.001 [-0.014]
White	0.555 (0.497)	0.005 (0.069)	0.551 [190.521]	0.568 (0.497)	0.006 (0.076)	0.562 [83.619]
Black	0.335 (0.473)	0.005 (0.067)	0.331 [117.081]	0.333 (0.473)	0.005 (0.070)	0.328 [53.489]
Hispanic	0.021 (0.142)	0.000 (0.015)	0.020 [30.495]	0.023 (0.150)	0.000 (0.020)	0.022 [12.956]
No of observations	132	254,414		632	283,705	

\* T-statistics are reported in brackets in the second row of “Difference” columns.

Figure A3: Number of IPV victims per 1000 individuals by the age group at which the individual is introduced to the UDL



\* Source: The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data covering the years 2000-2015.

\*\* No UDL shows the Number of IPV victims per 1000 individuals in states with no UDL.



Table A3: The Effect of Exposure to The UDL on IPV Victimization by Age of Exposure

	IPV			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
UDL Exposure Age 0-10	0.026** (0.013)			
UDL Exposure Age 11-20		0.011 (0.035)		
UDL Exposure Age 21-30			0.050 (0.046)	
UDL Exposure Age $\geq 31$				-0.022 (0.015)
Female	0.174*** (0.013)	0.174*** (0.013)	0.174*** (0.013)	0.174*** (0.013)
White	-0.082** (0.037)	-0.082** (0.037)	-0.082** (0.037)	-0.082** (0.037)
Black	-0.018 (0.037)	-0.018 (0.037)	-0.018 (0.037)	-0.018 (0.037)
American-Indian	-0.157* (0.089)	-0.157* (0.088)	-0.158* (0.088)	-0.158* (0.088)
Asian	-0.155* (0.090)	-0.155* (0.091)	-0.155* (0.091)	-0.156* (0.091)
Hispanic	0.028*** (0.010)	0.027*** (0.010)	0.027*** (0.010)	0.027*** (0.010)
Offender: White	0.807*** (0.014)	0.807*** (0.014)	0.807*** (0.014)	0.807*** (0.014)
Offender: Black	0.713*** (0.013)	0.712*** (0.013)	0.712*** (0.013)	0.712*** (0.013)
College and Above Education	0.021 (0.013)	0.021 (0.013)	0.021 (0.013)	0.021 (0.013)
Employed	0.029** (0.013)	0.029** (0.013)	0.029** (0.013)	0.029** (0.013)
Income $\geq 50K$	-0.082*** (0.014)	-0.082*** (0.014)	-0.082*** (0.014)	-0.082*** (0.014)
Having Children Under 12 Years Old	0.072*** (0.015)	0.072*** (0.015)	0.072*** (0.015)	0.072*** (0.015)
Year FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
State FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	538,883	538,883	538,883	538,883

Table A4: Logit Model Estimates: Heterogeneous Impacts for Females by Race and Employment Status

IPV					
Panel A: White Female		Panel B: Black Female		Panel C: Hispanic Female	
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × White × Employed	-0.010 (0.076) [-0.073]	UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × Black × Employed	0.168** (0.081) [1.185]	UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × Hispanic × Employed	-0.179** (0.083) [-1.263]
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × Employed	-0.096* (0.057) [-0.676]	UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × Employed	-0.141*** (0.035) [-0.995]	UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × Employed	-0.075** (0.035) [-0.528]
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × White	-0.014 (0.046) [-0.098]	UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × Black	-0.120*** (0.045) [-0.846]	UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × Hispanic	0.115* (0.066) [0.811]
Employed × White	0.031 (0.027) [0.221]	Employed × Black	-0.052* (0.028) [-0.363]	Employed × Hispanic	0.030 (0.044) [0.213]
UDL Exposure Age 0-10	0.102** (0.041) [0.719]	UDL Exposure Age 0-10	0.119*** (0.025) [0.839]	UDL Exposure Age 0-10	0.071** (0.030) [0.497]
Employed	0.024 (0.021) [0.171]	Employed	0.061*** (0.015) [0.431]	Employed	0.041*** (0.015) [0.289]
White	-0.094** (0.039) [-0.664]	Black	0.013 (0.038) [0.095]	Hispanic	0.003 (0.033) [0.019]
All Other Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No of Observations	538,883	538,883	538,883	538,883	538,883

\* The numbers in the first parenthesis of each column represent the state of residence level clustered robust standard errors. All coefficients are multiplied by 100.

Table A5: The Effect of Exposure to the UDL as a 0-10 Years Old Female Child on IPV -OLS

VARIABLES	IPV			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
UDL Exposure Age 0-10	0.070*** (0.022)	0.071*** (0.023)	0.050*** (0.018)	0.036* (0.021)
White		-0.335*** (0.117)	-0.167 (0.107)	-0.305** (0.115)
Black		-0.181 (0.121)	-0.083 (0.112)	-0.243* (0.122)
American-Indian		-0.110 (0.222)	-0.062 (0.202)	-0.130 (0.227)
Asian		-0.444*** (0.125)	-0.158 (0.109)	-0.448*** (0.123)
Hispanic		0.013 (0.020)	0.047*** (0.014)	-0.093*** (0.022)
White Offender			0.186*** (0.946)	
Black Offender			0.130*** (0.010)	
College and Above Education				0.063** (0.025)
Employed				0.074*** (0.018)
Income $\geq$ 50K				-0.257*** (0.035)
Having children under 12 Years Old				0.219*** (0.019)
Constant	0.358*** (0.021)	0.645*** (0.107)	0.222** (0.098)	0.629*** (0.106)
Observations	596,386	596,386	596,386	596,386
R-squared	0.000	0.001	0.147	0.002

\* All coefficients are multiplied by 100.

Table A6: Heterogeneity Impact Analysis for Females: 1979-2000

VARIABLES	IPV			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
UDL Exposure Age 0-10	0.113*** (0.028)	0.199*** (0.022)	0.223*** (0.025)	0.188*** (0.019)
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × White	0.088** (0.036)			
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × Black		-0.088** (0.039)		
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × College and Above Education			-0.110*** (0.038)	
UDL Exposure Age 0-10 × Income ≥ 50K				-0.038 (0.048)
White	0.415*** (0.039)	0.441*** (0.035)	0.437*** (0.036)	0.440*** (0.035)
Black	0.547*** (0.033)	0.572*** (0.034)	0.550*** (0.034)	0.553*** (0.034)
American-Indian	0.727*** (0.095)	0.725*** (0.096)	0.722*** (0.097)	0.725*** (0.096)
College and Above Education	-0.018 (0.019)	-0.018 (0.019)	0.007 (0.017)	-0.018 (0.019)
Income ≥ 50K	-0.284*** (0.035)	-0.284*** (0.035)	-0.285*** (0.035)	-0.276*** (0.040)
Observations	837,068	837,068	837,068	837,068

\* The numbers in the first parenthesis of each column represent the state of residence level clustered robust standard errors. All coefficients are multiplied by 100.