Decriminalization of Light Intimate Partner Violence and Married Women's Well-Being

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Abstract

Light abuses and threats to receive them at home can deteriorate individuals' well-being, even in the absence of severe physical injury. Leveraging Russia's criminal law reform that decriminalized minor domestic violence, I first confirm that the number of domestic violence incidents classified as criminal offenses against female partners indeed decreased sharply after the reform. Using a difference-in-differences approach, I then show that the reform reduced married women's life satisfaction, increased depression, and increased college-educated married women's alcohol intake. Suggestive evidence indicates that the reform contributed to a decline in new marriages, while the divorce rate remained unchanged. These changes are unlikely to stem from shifts in violence outside the household, as there were no significant changes in gender-based violence or other crimes during the same period. These findings suggest that even minor intimate partner violence decreases married women's well-being and highlights the importance of legal institutions in addressing household violence.

JEL codes: J12, I31, K36, P37

Keywords: Intimate partner violence, Legal reform, Well-being

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1 Introduction

Intimate partner violence against women is widespread globally, affecting both developing and OECD countries (Devries et al. 2013; Garcia-Moreno et al. 2006). This issue has severe, long-lasting consequences, negatively impacting not only women (Delara 2016) but also their children (Aizer 2011; Doyle and Aizer 2018; Monnat and Chandler 2015). Even minor acts of violence or the threat thereof can undermine individuals' well-being. Several legal initiatives aim to combat serious forms of intimate partner violence, such as the criminalization of abusers (Sanin 2024), granting women the right to divorce without their partner's consent (Stevenson and Wolfers 2006), and mandating the arrest of abusers (Iyengar 2009). However, few legal frameworks address minor acts of violence, and decisions regarding the arrest of offenders for such abuses are often left to the discretion of police officers (Amaral, Bhalotra, and Prakash 2021; American Bar Association 2014). Furthermore, while anecdotal evidence suggests that minor acts of violence undermine women's well-being (Human Rights Watch 2018), empirical evidence remains scarce.[1]

This paper studies the effect of decriminalization of light intimate partner violence on married women's well-being leveraging Russia's criminal law reform that decriminalized light domestic violence as part of broader criminal law reform and utilizing panel data from a representative sample of Russian households. I first confirm that the number of domestic violence incidents that are classified as criminal offenses against female partners and other adult female family members, excluding female children, sharply declined following the reform. Using a difference-in-differences approach and flexibly controlling for macroeconomic shocks with unmarried, non-cohabitating women as a control group, I then show that the reform reduced married women's life satisfaction and increased depression. For college-educated married women, the reform also increased alcohol intake.

Additionally, suggestive evidence indicates that the reform contributed to a decline in new marriages, while divorce rates remained unchanged. Importantly, I find no significant changes in other crimes outside the household, including gender-based violence, suggesting that the observed results are not driven by shifts in violence beyond the household. Together, these findings indicate that even light abuses and threats of receiving them can reduce married women's well-being and underscore the importance of legal institutions in addressing household violence.

This paper's contribution is twofold. First, it contributes to the literature on the role of legal institutions in mitigating intimate partner violence by demonstrating that decriminalizing even light partner abuse can harm women's well-being. The closest study to this paper is Sanin (2024), which examines the criminalization of gender-based violence in Rwanda, finding that it increased divorce rates for violent marriages and reduced severe intimate partner violence. In contrast, this paper explores the decriminalization of light intimate partner violence in a middle-income country where women generally have higher levels of education and higher gender equality.[2] Beyond

1. Human Rights Watch (2018) documents narratives from women who report psychological distress and reduced well-being resulting from psychological and light physical abuse by their male partners.

2. Previous studies suggest that in contexts where women have access to income, their improved household bargaining

decriminalization, existing literature shows that unilateral divorce laws (Stevenson and Wolfers 2006), enhanced women's property rights (Amaral 2017), and prohibiting the withdrawal of charges against abusers (Aizer and Dal Bó 2009) can reduce intimate partner violence. Conversely, limiting access to abortion increases intimate partner violence (Muratori 2021). However, Iyengar (2009) finds that mandatory arrest laws reduce the likelihood that women report abuse while increasing the risk of abusers killing their partners.

Second, this paper contributes to the literature on the consequences of intimate partner violence by showing how decriminalizing light abuses affects women's well-being. Previous studies have explored the impact of intimate partner violence on women's mental health (Delara 2016), their children's immediate (Aizer 2011) and long-term physical health outcomes (Monnat and Chandler 2015), and labor market outcomes (Doyle and Aizer 2018). There is also evidence that children exposed to such violence negatively affect their peers' academic outcomes through disruptive classroom behavior (Carrell and Hoekstra 2010). While these studies primarily examine the consequences of severe intimate partner violence, this paper provides novel evidence on the consequences of minor acts of abuse, addressing a gap in the literature.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 provides the institutional context, describing Russia's domestic violence decriminalization reform. Section 3 presents the data and outlines the empirical strategy. Section 4 discusses the main results. Section 5 reports additional descriptive findings that support the main results. Section 6 concludes.

2 Institutional Context

2.1 Russia's Criminal Law Reform around 2016

Light battery was classified as a criminal offense in Russia until July 2015. However, in July 2015, the Russian Supreme Court introduced a bill to decriminalize light battery – redefining it as an administrative offense – as part of broader criminal law reforms (Isajanyan 2017).[3] Initially, the bill did not differentiate between battery against family and non-family members. Before its enactment, however, the national congress excluded light battery against family members from the reform, keeping it classified as a criminal offense.[4] The revised bill was enacted in July 2016.

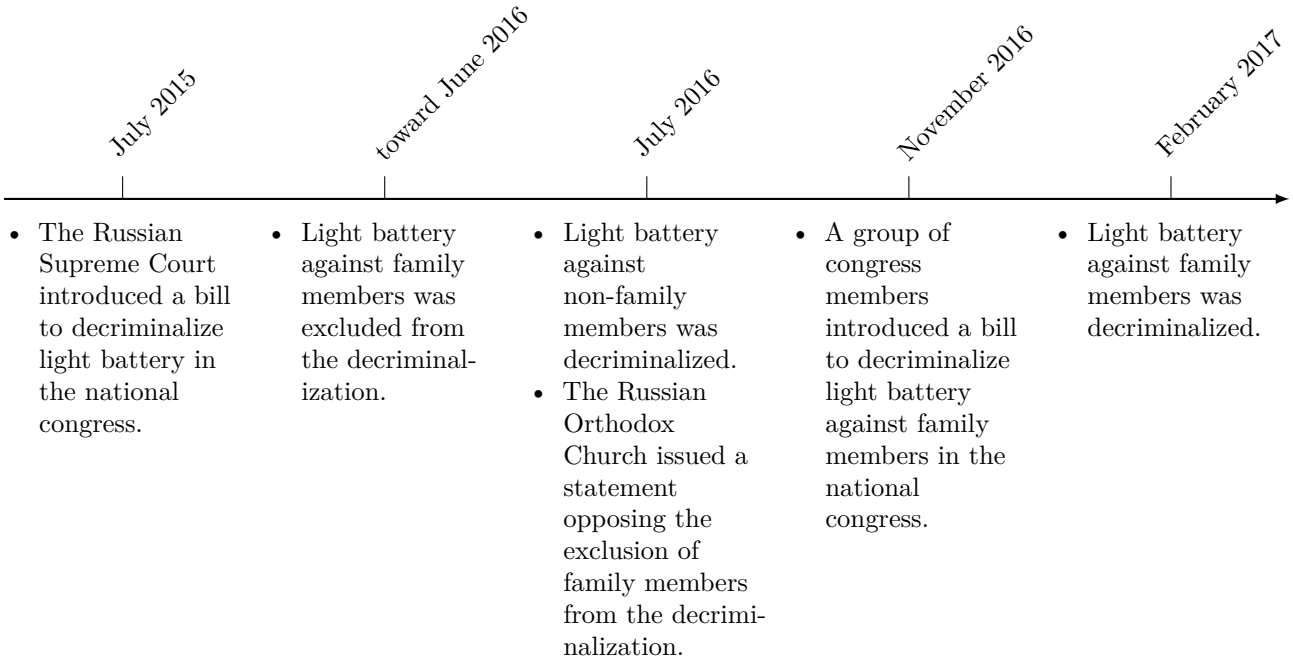
Immediately after the bill's enactment, the Russian Orthodox Church criticized the exclusion of family members from the reform, stating that such an exception had "no moral justification and legal grounds" (Russian Orthodox Church 2016). In November 2016, a group of national congress members introduced a new bill to decriminalize light battery against family members (Layva 2016).

power can reduce physical abuse by male partners (e.g., Anderberg et al. 2016; Kotsadam and Villanger 2022; Sanin 2023).

3. Battery is defined as "Beatings or other violent actions that caused physical pain" (The Russian Federation 1996).

4. Family members are defined as "close relatives (husband, wife, parents, children, adoptive parents, adopted children, siblings, grandfathers, grandmothers, grandchildren), guardians, trustees, as well as persons who are in property with the person who committed the act provided for in this article, or persons who maintain a common household with him" (The Russian Federation 2016).

Figure 1: Timeline of Changes in Penalties for Light Batteries



Notes: This figure shows the timeline of the changes in light battery penalties.
Sources: Isajanyan (2017), Human Rights Watch (2018), Russian Orthodox Church (2016), The Russian Federation (2016, 2017), and (Kholmogorova and Alekhina 2017).

Table 1: Changes in Penalties for Various Types of Battery

	- July 2016	July 2016 - February 2017	February 2017 -
Battery to a family member (1st time in a given year)	Criminal offense	Criminal offense (modified)	Administrative offense
Battery to a non-family member (1st time in a given year)	Criminal offense	Administrative offense	
Battery to anyone (2nd time or more in a given year)	Criminal offense	Criminal offense (modified)	
Battery to anyone that results in injury	Serious criminal offense		

Notes: This table shows changes in penalties for various batteries. Battery is defined as "beatings or other violent actions causing physical pain" (The Russian Federation 1996). A family member is defined as "close relatives (husband, wife, parents, children, adoptive parents, adopted children, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren), guardians, trustees, individuals sharing property with the offender, or those maintaining a common household" (The Russian Federation 2016).
Sources: Isajanyan (2017), Human Rights Watch (2018), and The Russian Federation (2016, 2017).

This bill was subsequently passed and enacted in February 2017.

Figure 1 illustrates the timeline of these reforms, showing the sequence of changes to penalties for light battery, while Table 1 summarizes these changes across various types of battery. Table 2 provides detailed information about the penalties, including fines, imprisonment, labor, and

Table 2: Details of Penalties for Battery Offenses (one of the following applies)

	Administrative offense	Criminal offense	Criminal offense (modified)	Serious criminal offense
Fine (max.)	30000 rubles (≈450 USD)	40000 rubles (≈600 USD)		NA
Imprisonment (max.)	15 days	3 months		2 years
Labor (max.)	NA	6 months		2 years
Community service (max.)	120 hours	360 hours	240 hours	360 hours

Notes: This table details the penalties for the types of battery offenses described in Table 1.
Sources: Isajanyan (2017), Human Rights Watch (2018), and The Russian Federation (2016, 2017). The equivalent USD values for fines are based on the World Bank's 2017 average USD/ruble exchange rate (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/PA.NUS.FCRF), retrieved on August 30, 2022.

community service associated with administrative and criminal offenses.

Although the bill was enacted in February 2017, there was public anticipation of its passage. Following the July 2016 reform, the Russian Orthodox Church's statement calling for the decriminalization of light domestic violence made its enactment appear inevitable, given the Church's strong connection with the autocratic government (see Gorbunova and Ovsyannikova 2016).

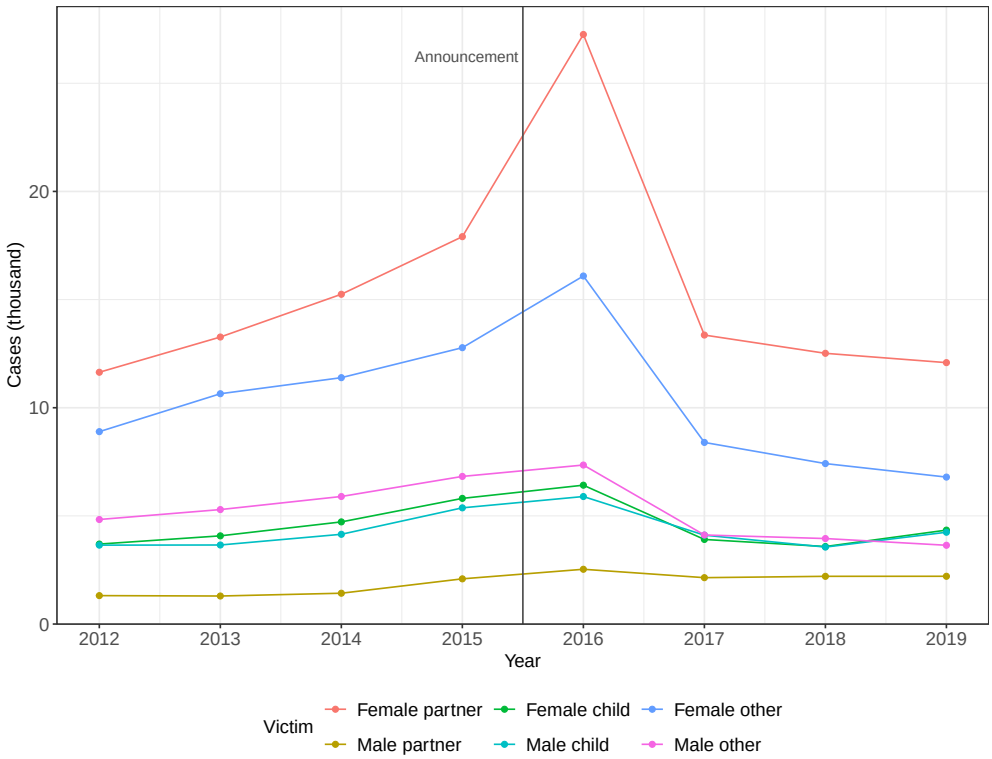
2.2 Changes in the Number of Domestic Violence Incidents Classified as Criminal Offenses Around 2016

Figure 2 shows the number of domestic violence incidents classified as criminal offenses committed against family members in Russia from 2012 to 2019, with vertical lines marking the announcement of the reform. Before the bill's introduction, female partners were the primary victims of domestic violence, followed by other adult female family members (excluding children). The figure also indicates that the number of child victims (both female and male) remained relatively low and balanced, while male partner victims were minimal.

The figure reveals a sharp decline in the number of intimate partner violence incidents against female partners classified as criminal offenses after 2017, following the legal reform. This drop marks a clear departure from the upward trend observed before 2015. Notably, there is a spike in 2016, which may be attributed to two factors. The first is revised enforcement. Until July 2016, the police did not investigate most domestic violence cases, as they were classified under "private prosecution." This changed with the reform, which explicitly made such violence subject to the Criminal Code (Kholmogorova and Alekhina 2017). The second is backlash. The spike may also reflect increased reporting by female partners in response to anticipated legal changes.

The key takeaway from Figure 2 is that the legal reform significantly reduced the number of intimate partner violence cases against female partners classified as criminal offenses by reclassifying certain acts of violence as administrative offenses. The magnitude of this decline cannot be explained

Figure 2: Number of Domestic Violence Incidents Classified as Criminal Offenses by Victim Type



Notes: This figure plots the number of domestic violence incidents classified as criminal offenses committed against family members in Russia from 2012 to 2019. The vertical lines indicate the announcement year of the bill.
Source: The Federal State Statistics Service: Family, motherhood and childhood (https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/13807). Retrieved on August 12, 2022.

by pre-reform trends alone. Importantly, the reduction was much larger for intimate partner violence than for other forms of family violence, including violence against children.

Thus, the legal reform indeed has the "first stage": by decriminalizing certain types of intimate partner violence, it reduced the number of cases classified as criminal offenses that would have otherwise remained criminal under the prior legal framework.

3 Data and Empirical Strategy

3.1 Data

I use the Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS), a household-level nationally representative panel survey conducted annually by researchers at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Kozyreva, Kosolapov, and Popkin 2016). The RLMS samples households and interview members of selected households. For household members aged 13 or younger, questions are answered by an adult from the same household. From 2010 to 2013, the survey covered over 6,000 households and 16,000 individuals annually. To maintain a

balanced sample size, additional households are added each year.

The dataset provides detailed information on individuals' health, well-being, and demographics. This study uses data on women from 2011 to 2019, excluding those added to the survey after 2015, as their marital status prior to the reform cannot be determined. The sample is further restricted to women who meet the following criteria: (i) they were 18 years or older in 2015, (ii) they were not in a cohabitating relationship in 2015, and (iii) they were married and living with their partner in 2015.

The first condition ensures that the sample excludes women who are below the legal minimum marriage age of 18. The second condition excludes women in cohabitating relationships because such relationships could be classified as "family" under Russian law. The third condition excludes married women not living with their partners, as their classification into treated or control groups is ambiguous: physical separation might mean they are less likely to face partner abuse (control group), but they could still experience occasional abuse (treated group).

Table 3: Summary statistics for RLMS data: Treated vs. control women, 2011-2015

	Treated (Married and living with a partner in 2015)		Control (Not married and not in cohabitating relationship in 2015)		Difference (Treated – Control)		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SE	P-value
Panel A: Welfare measures							
Life satisfaction [0-1]	0.60	0.25	0.52	0.28	0.08	0.00	0.00
Depression in the past 12 months (0/1)	0.11	0.31	0.14	0.35	-0.04	0.01	0.00
Alcohol intake per day (gram)	24.93	45.16	19.16	42.19	5.77	0.81	0.00
Panel B: Demographic characteristics							
Age	44.28	14.79	53.06	20.74	-8.78	0.44	0.00
Employed	0.62	0.48	0.40	0.49	0.22	0.01	0.00
Russian Orthodox	0.89	0.32	0.86	0.35	0.03	0.01	0.00
Panel C: Education							
Primary school or below	0.10	0.30	0.25	0.43	-0.14	0.01	0.00
Secondary school	0.56	0.50	0.53	0.50	0.04	0.01	0.00
College or above	0.33	0.47	0.23	0.42	0.11	0.01	0.00
Panel D: Occupation category							
Professionals	0.58	0.49	0.52	0.50	0.06	0.01	0.00
Clerical/Services	0.28	0.45	0.31	0.46	-0.02	0.01	0.08
Blue-collar	0.09	0.29	0.14	0.35	-0.04	0.01	0.00
Agriculture/Craft	0.04	0.19	0.03	0.17	0.01	0.01	0.26
Military	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.00
No. observations	16454		15077				
No. individuals	3856		3521				

Notes: This table describes wellbeing measures that are my dependent variables (Panel A), demographic characteristics (Panel B), an education level (Panel C), and occupation category (Panel D) for treated and control women and their differences before the criminal law reform (2011-2015). The occupation classification follows ISCO-08 (International Labour Office 2012) and defined as follows: Professionals (group 1, 2, and 3), Clerical/Services (group 4 and 5), Blue-collar (group 8 and 9), Agriculture/Craft (group 6 and 7), and Military (group 0). P-values of the difference between treated and control are calculated with standard errors clustered at the individual level.

Table 3 provides summary statistics for treated (married women who live with their partner) and control (unmarried, non-cohabitating women) groups before the reform (2011–2015). Panel A summarizes well-being measures (dependent variables), Panel B summarizes demographic characteristics, Panel C summarizes education levels, and Panel D summarizes occupation categories.[5,6] Alcohol intake is calculated following Yakovlev (2018). Panel B shows that treated women are younger and more likely to be employed.[7] They are also slightly more likely to identify as Russian Orthodox, although the difference is small (3 percentage points). Panel C shows that treated women have higher education levels than control women. Panel D shows that treated women were more likely to work in higher-paying occupations.[8]

These differences highlight that a simple comparison between treated and control women may not yield causal estimates of the reform's effects. To address these differences, I use a difference-in-differences approach, flexibly controlling for macroeconomic shocks at the region-education-occupation level.

3.2 Empirical strategy

I estimate the effects of decriminalizing light intimate partner violence on married women's well-being using the following difference-in-differences specification:

$$Y_{it} = \sum_{l=2011, l\neq 2015}^{2019} \beta_l \mathbb{1}[t = l] \times Treated_i + \mu_i + \delta_{r(it)e(i)o(it)t} + \epsilon_{it} \tag{1}$$

where each variable is defined as follows:

- $Y_{it} \in \mathbb{R}$: well-being measure of individual i in year t, normalized by the base year's standard deviation.
- $Treated_i \in \{0, 1\}$: indicator variable equal to 1 if individual i was married in 2015 and 0 otherwise. Women in cohabitating relationships are excluded.
- μ_i: individual fixed effects to capture unobserved, time-invariant heterogeneity.
- $\delta_{r(it)e(i)o(it)t}$: year-region-education-occupation fixed effects to account for macroeconomic shocks specific to a region, education level, and occupation category.
- ϵ_{it}: random error term.

and $\mathbb{1}$ is an indicator function. Standard errors are clustered at the individual level.

I define 2016 as the event year because it was almost certain by that year that light intimate

5. English translation for the life satisfaction question is "satisfaction with life at present." The answer choices are "fully satisfied" being 1, "rather satisfied" being 2, "both yes and no" being 3, "less than satisfied" being 4, and "not at all satisfied" being 5. For ease of interpretation, I rescaled the answers into [0,1] interval and recoded it so that the higher the value, the more satisfied with the life.

6. English translation for the depression question is "had depression in last 12M?" and the answer choices are 1 being yes and 2 being no. I recoded this variable for ease of interpretation so that 0 being no and 1 being yes.

7. Restricting the sample to women aged 74 or younger does not qualitatively change the results.

8. The classification follows ISCO-08 (International Labour Office 2012) and includes five categories: Professionals (groups 1–3), Clerical/Services (groups 4–5), Blue-collar (groups 8–9), Agriculture/Craft (groups 6–7), and Military (group 0).

partner violence would eventually be decriminalized, as discussed in Section 2. If the true event year is 2017, this will be reflected in the event study plots presented later.

Unmarried, non-cohabitating women serve as the control group because men's well-being trends would differ due to differing industry exposures and macroeconomic conditions. In particular, the 2014 Crimea invasion and the mobilization leading up to it should have affected women's and men's life satisfactions differently. While the control women's well-being could also be negatively affected by the reform (e.g., through a decline in expected utility from marriage), this would bias the results downward, making it harder to detect an effect.

The identification relies on two key assumptions. First is parallel trends: treated and control women would have followed the same time trends in well-being in the absence of the reform, conditional on individual-level fixed effects and macroeconomic shocks at the region-education-occupation level. Second is no Spillovers: the decriminalization of non-domestic violence affects married and unmarried women equally.

Under these assumptions, the coefficients β_ls ($l = 2016, ..., 2019$) capture the year-by-year effects of the reform, while β_ls ($l = 2011, ..., 2014$) serve as a placebo test to verify the parallel trends assumption.

4 Main Results: The Reform Reduced Married Women's Well-Being

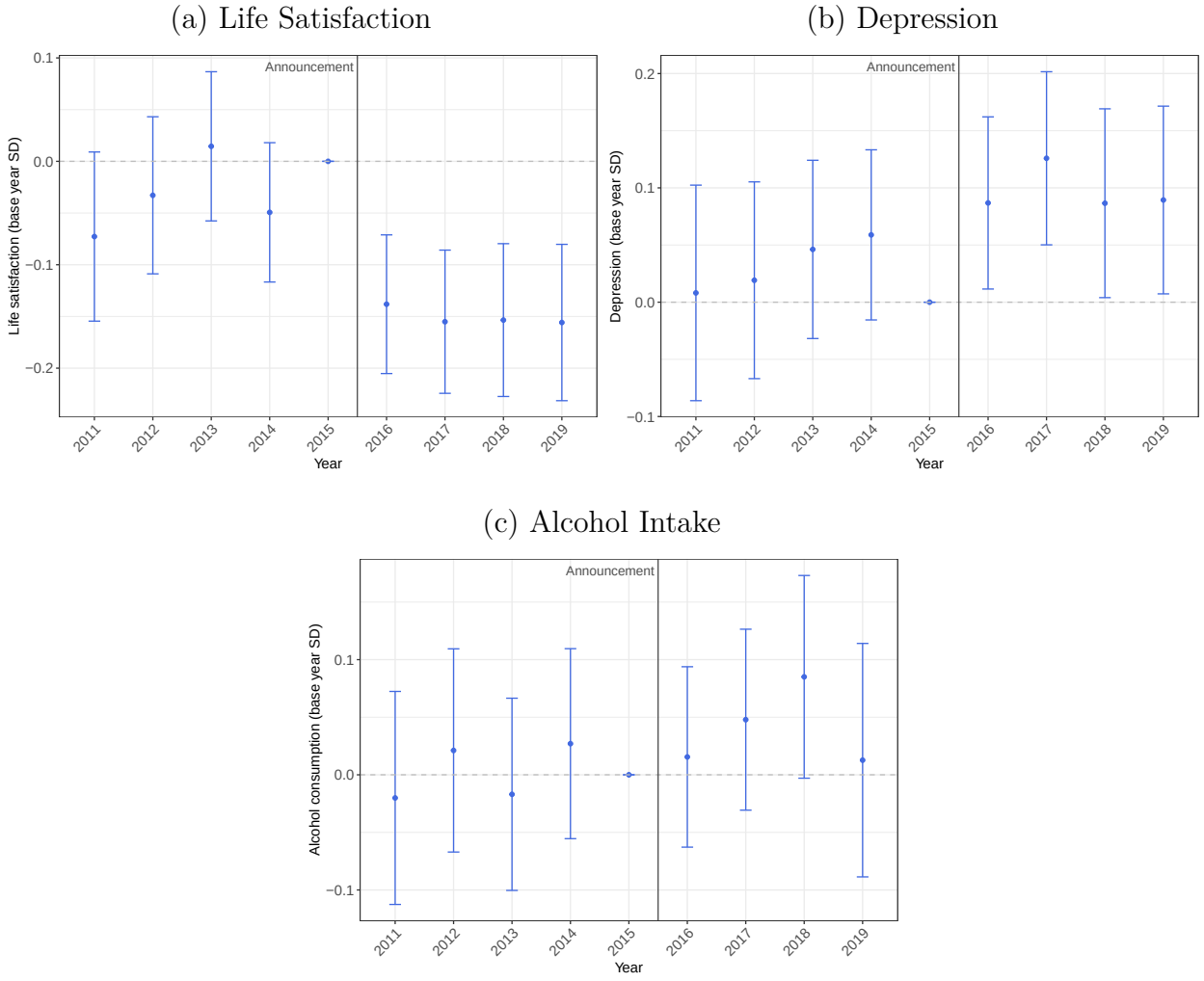
Table 4: Effect of the Reform on Married Women's Well-being (effect heterogeneity)

Dependent variable:	Life satisfaction (relative to base year SD)			Depression in the past 12 months (relative to base year SD)			Alcohol intake per day (relative to base year SD)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Treated x Post	-0.125***	-0.126***	-0.110***	0.071***	0.056**	0.079***	0.036	0.007	0.034
	(0.023)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.024)	(0.028)	(0.030)	(0.027)	(0.031)	(0.034)
Treated x Post x College or above		0.001			0.033			0.065**	
		(0.027)			(0.029)			(0.031)	
Treated x Post x Professionals			-0.025			-0.013			0.004
			(0.028)			(0.030)			(0.033)
Individual FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time-Region-Education-Occupation FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Treated pre-period mean	0.628	0.628	0.628	0.093	0.093	0.093	29.478	29.478	29.478
Treated pre-period SD	0.243	0.243	0.243	0.291	0.291	0.291	48.166	48.166	48.166
Treated base year SD	0.245	0.245	0.245	0.275	0.275	0.275	46.325	46.325	46.325
Adj. R-squared	0.454	0.454	0.454	0.264	0.264	0.264	0.425	0.425	0.425
No. observations	28189	28189	28189	27883	27883	27883	28157	28157	28157
No. individuals	4811	4811	4811	4794	4794	4794	4811	4811	4811

Notes: This table presents standard difference-in-differences estimates from equation 1 and the effect heterogeneity. Standard errors in parenthesis are clustered at the individual level. Significance levels: * 10%, ** 5%, and *** 1%.

Figure 3 presents the OLS estimates of β_ls from Equation 1 for life satisfaction (Panel A), depression (Panel B), and alcohol intake (Panel C), normalized by the base year (2015) standard deviation, along with their 95% confidence intervals. Panel A shows that before the reform, the

Figure 3: Effect of the Reform on Married Women's Well-being (relative to base year SD)



Notes: This figure presents the OLS estimates of β_ls of equation 1 for life satisfaction (Panel A), depression (Panel B), and alcohol intake per day (Panel C) normalized by the base year (2015) standard deviation along with their 95% confidence intervals. All specifications include individual fixed effects and year-region-education-occupation fixed effects. The vertical lines indicate the announcement year of the light intimate partner violence decriminalization (2016). Standard errors are clustered at the individual level.

life satisfaction trends of treated and control women are similar, supporting the parallel trend assumption. After the reform, however, treated women's life satisfaction decreases sharply and remains at a lower level. Panel B shows that while depression levels among treated women exhibit a slight upward trend before the reform, the coefficient estimates are far from statistically significant. After the reform, there is a clear and significant increase in depression among treated women, which persists over time. Panel C shows that while alcohol intake among treated women increases slightly after the reform, the effect is statistically insignificant and quantitatively small.

Table 4 provides the standard difference-in-differences estimates to provide the total effect size of Figure 3 as well as examine effect heterogeneity. Column 1 shows that the reform reduced treated

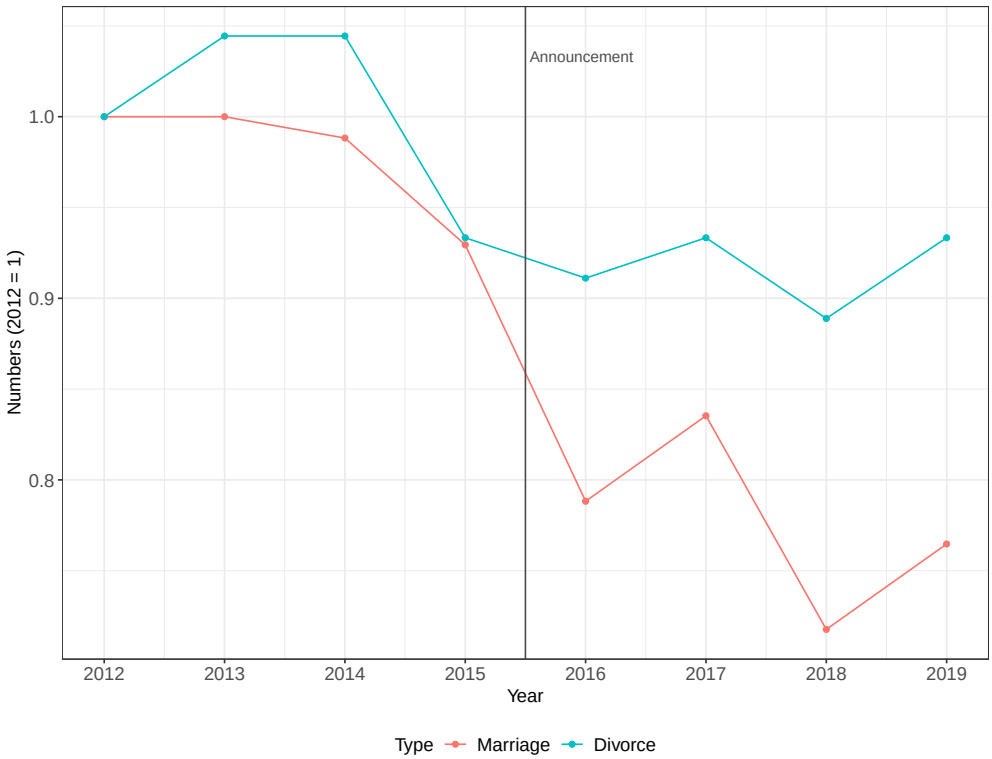
women's life satisfaction by 12.5 percentage points relative to the base year standard deviation. Column 4 indicates that the reform increased treated women's depression by 7.1 percentage points relative to the base year standard deviation. Both effects are statistically significant at the 1% level and are quantitatively substantial. Column 7 shows no statistically significant change in alcohol intake overall, which may be due to societal norms that discourage alcohol consumption among women and may have been reinforced post-reform. Appendix Table A1 demonstrates the stability of these estimates when fixed effects are added gradually.

The heterogeneity analysis suggests that the overall increase in alcohol consumption is concentrated among college-educated women, who experienced a 6.5 percentage point larger increase compared to their non-college-educated counterparts (Column 8). No significant heterogeneity is observed across occupations or broader education levels.

5 Additional Results: Marriage Trends and Crime Patterns

5.1 The Number of Marriages Dropped After the Reform

Figure 4: Number of Marriages and Divorces (2012=1)

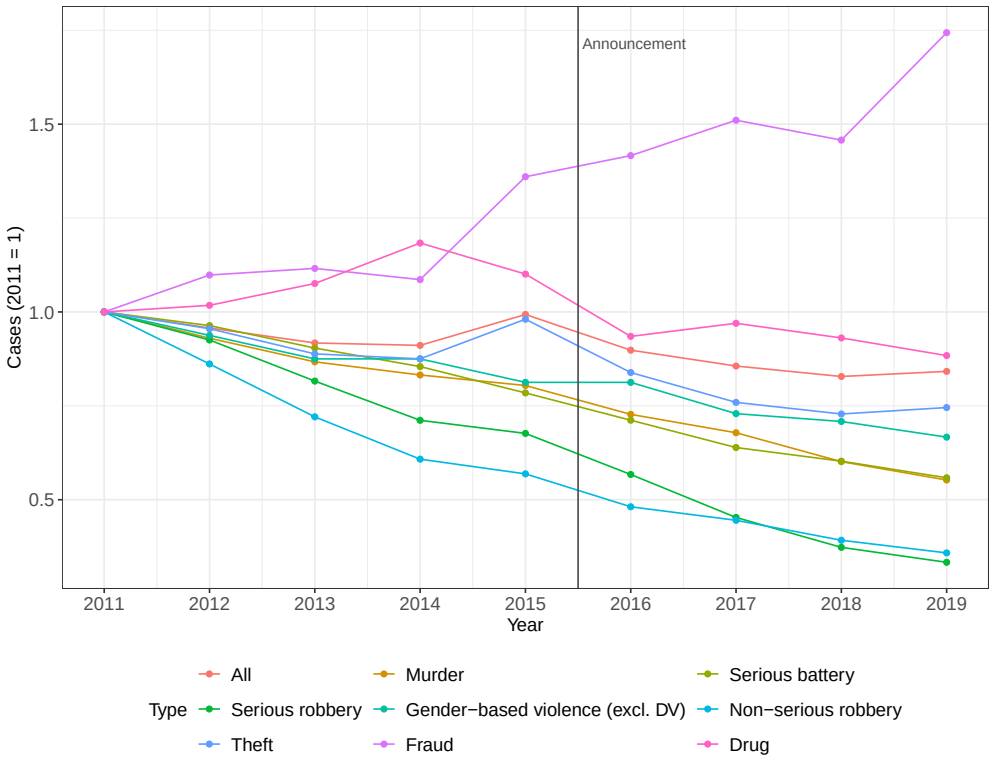


Notes: This figure plots the number of marriages (red) and divorces (green) per 1000 inhabitants from 2012 to 2019, normalized by its 2012 value. The value in 2012 is 9.2 for marriage and 4.7 for divorce per 1000 inhabitants. The vertical line indicates the announcement year of the bill (2016).
Source: The Federal State Statistics Service: Demography (https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/12781). Retrieved on August 15, 2022.

Figure 4 shows the number of marriages (red) and divorces (green) per 1,000 inhabitants from 2012 to 2019, normalized to their 2012 values. The figure shows that the marriage rate was already declining before the reform, but the decline accelerates noticeably afterward. The divorce rate, in contrast, remains relatively stable, with no significant changes around the reform period. While descriptive, these results are consistent with the story that the reform contributed to a decline in new marriages.

5.2 The Number of Gender-Based Violence and Other Crimes Did Not Change Around the Reform

Figure 5: Number of registered crimes in Russia by type (2011=1)



Notes: This figure plots the number of registered crimes by type from 2011 to 2019, normalized by their respective value in 2011. Values in 2011 (in thousands): 2404.8 for all, 14.3 for murder, 38.5 for serious battery, 20.1 for serious robbery, 4.8 for gender-based violence, 127.8 for non-serious robbery, 1038.6 for theft, 147.5 for fraud, and 215.2 for drug. The vertical line indicates the announcement year of the bill (2016). The vertical line indicates the announcement year of the bill (2016).
Sources: The Federal State Statistics Service (2017, 2021).

Because the reform also decriminalized light battery outside the household, one may wonder if the observed decline in women's well-being is driven by increases in other forms of violence outside the household. Additionally, although gender-based violence outside the household was not decriminalized, its prevalence could have increased around the reform period, potentially confounding the results.

Figure 5 plots the number of registered crimes by type from 2011 to 2019, normalized to their respective 2011 values. The figure shows that most crimes, including serious battery, robbery, theft, and gender-based violence (excluding domestic violence), follow declining trends from 2011 onward, with no discernible changes around the reform. The only exception is fraud, which shows an upward trend since 2015. These findings indicate that the decline in married women's well-being is unlikely to be driven by increases in other forms of violence outside the household.

Taken together, these results demonstrate that the reform reduced married women's well-being, as evidenced by decreases in life satisfaction and increases in depression. These effects are not attributable to other forms of violence outside the household. The findings underscore the critical role of legal institutions in addressing intimate partner violence, even when the abuse does not result in serious physical injury.

6 Conclusion

This paper investigates the effects of decriminalizing light intimate partner violence on married women's well-being, leveraging Russia's legal reform as a natural experiment. The findings reveal that the reform reduced married women's life satisfaction, increased depression, and, among college-educated women, led to higher alcohol consumption. Additionally, suggestive evidence indicates that the reform may have contributed to a decline in new marriages, while divorce rates remained unchanged. Importantly, no significant changes were observed in crimes outside the household, suggesting that the effects are not driven by external violence.

These results underscore the critical role of legal institutions in mitigating intimate partner violence and its broader consequences. The evidence highlights that even light abuse – and the threat of it – can undermine married women's well-being. By documenting the consequences of light intimate partner violence, this paper contributes to two strands of the literature: the role of legal institutions in preventing intimate partner violence and the impact of such violence on married women's well-being.

While this study does not include data on individual-level occurrences of intimate partner violence, light abuse often does not appear in hospital or police records. Therefore, although the results rely on reduced-form evidence, they provide a piece of evidence highlighting the importance of legal institutions in addressing even minor abuses by male partners. Future research should focus on identifying optimal interventions to mitigate light intimate partner violence and its consequences.

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Appendix

A Additional Figures and Tables

Table A1: Effect of the reform on married women's welfare (stability of the estimates)

Dependent variable:	Life satisfaction (relative to base year SD)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Treated x Post	-0.070***	-0.081***	-0.081***	-0.081***	-0.082***	-0.126***	-0.125***
	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Treated	0.484***						
	(0.018)						
Post	0.009	0.016					
	(0.012)	(0.011)					
Individual FE		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time FE			✓				
Time-Region FE				✓			
Time-Region-Education FE					✓		
Time-Region-Occupation FE						✓	
Time-Region-Education-Occupation FE							✓
Adj. R-squared	0.050	0.470	0.471	0.471	0.471	0.455	0.454
No. observations	55200	55200	55200	55200	55098	28219	28189
No. individuals	7376	7376	7376	7376	7370	4816	4811
Dependent variable:	Depression in the past 12 months (relative to base year SD)						
	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
Treated x Post	0.030*	0.034**	0.034**	0.035**	0.036**	0.071***	0.071***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Treated	-0.035**						
	(0.017)						
Post	-0.029**	-0.022*					
	(0.012)	(0.012)					
Individual FE		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time FE			✓				
Time-Region FE				✓			
Time-Region-Education FE					✓		
Time-Region-Occupation FE						✓	
Time-Region-Education-Occupation FE							✓
Adj. R-squared	0.000	0.301	0.302	0.301	0.301	0.265	0.264
No. observations	54628	54628	54628	54628	54528	27913	27883
No. individuals	7377	7377	7377	7377	7371	4799	4794
Dependent variable:	Alcohol intake per day (relative to base year SD)						
	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)
Treated x Post	-0.022	-0.011	-0.012	-0.012	-0.004	0.036	0.036
	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.027)	(0.027)
Treated	0.144***						
	(0.019)						
Post	-0.036***	-0.048***					
	(0.012)	(0.011)					
Individual FE		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time FE			✓				
Time-Region FE				✓			
Time-Region-Education FE					✓		
Time-Region-Occupation FE						✓	
Time-Region-Education-Occupation FE							✓
Adj. R-squared	0.005	0.459	0.460	0.460	0.461	0.424	0.425
No. observations	55241	55241	55241	55241	55139	28187	28157
No. individuals	7376	7376	7376	7376	7370	4816	4811

Notes: This table presents standard difference-in-differences estimates from equation 1 but gradually adds fixed effects to show the stability of the estimates. Standard errors in parenthesis are clustered at the individual level. Significance levels: * 10%, ** 5%, and *** 1%.