4/22 Prof. Emily NIX (University of Southern California)
Title: Learning to Harm: The Intergenerational Transmission of Gender-Based Violence

Abstract: Using administrative data from Sweden, this paper provides the first large-scale estimates on the intergenerational transmission of gender-based violence (GBV) and evidence on how this cycle can be broken. We show that sons of fathers suspected of GBV are more than twice as likely to become suspected perpetrators of GBV, and daughters exposed to violent fathers are almost twice as likely to partner with violent men. They also experience worse partnership outcomes and substantially poorer physical and mental health in adulthood, with hospitalization rates that are over 20 percent higher across inpatient, mental health, and injury-related admissions. These patterns persist after controlling for rich demographic, socioeconomic, and neighborhood characteristics. We then examine whether removing fathers who commit GBV from the household weakens this transmission. To address identification concerns, we use a judge instrumental variables approach that exploits quasi-random variation in father removal. For external validity, we also estimate a family fixed effects model, comparing siblings who are less exposed to those who are more exposed to an abusive father. Across all designs, we find that removing violent fathers significantly reduces sons' later perpetration of GBV. The protective effects are particularly pronounced when removal occurs before age 11. We further show that father removal causes improvements in sons' behavioral trajectories, most notably reductions in other adolescent criminal activity. While these gains partly reflect reduced exposure to abusive fathers, we show that father removal also leads to declines in mothers' substance-related mental health problems, consistent with improved maternal capacity. Together, these results indicate that gender-based violence is a learned behavior developed during childhood and that reducing exposure to abusive fathers can meaningfully weaken its intergenerational persistence.