

# Preventing risky behaviours among adolescents in conflict-affected communities

The eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is slowly rebuilding after more than 20 years of conflict. Because of the prolonged conflict, adolescents living in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to risky behaviour, such as drinking alcohol and using violence. This study builds on a successful partnership with PAIDEK, an established Congolese microfinance organisation, to examine locals' perceptions of youth engagement in alcohol consumption and violence, and the consequences of these behaviours.

## APPROACH

Data from an ongoing study, "Rabbits for Resilience", was collected at three

intervals (baseline, nine months and 25 months) and analysed to identify risk and protective factors at the individual (youth aged 10-15) and caregiver level that influence adolescents' behaviour. In addition, the project team conducted one-on-one interviews with 28 youths, 20 caregivers and 20 stakeholders (such as teachers, traditional leaders and healthcare providers) in three rural communities in South Kivu in the DRC.

## FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH RISKY BEHAVIOUR

Quantitative findings suggest that young men who have experienced traumatic events are more likely to use violence. Furthermore, a caregiver who reported

symptoms of anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder was more likely to have a child that used violence.

Perceived stigma – a measure of whether people think they will be devalued or discriminated against by others – was also assessed. Youth who reported less perceived stigma or had a caregiver who perceived less stigma were more likely to consume alcohol.

During the interviews, participants identified various factors associated with alcohol consumption and violence

## GRANT DETAILS

**PROJECT:** Primary prevention of sexual and intimate partner violence for male and female adolescents who have been exposed to severe stress

**ORGANISATION:** Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing

**PROJECT LOCATION:** South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo



## Rabbits for Resilience

Rabbits for Resilience is a hybrid microfinance and asset transfer intervention in rural DRC that aims to improve youth health and well-being. Adolescents are given a female rabbit as a loan and are taught how to care for their rabbit. After raising and breeding more rabbits, they pay back the loan with two rabbits, which are then provided as new loans to other adolescents. After repaying the loan, participants own the original rabbit and its offspring, and continue to receive support. These rabbits are a food and economic resource for youth and their families.

For more information, see <http://www.svri.org/blog/pigs-peace-and-rabbits-resilience-congolese-livestockanimal-microfinance-initiatives>

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## FACTORS ASSOCIATED with youth drinking alcohol and using violence

- To escape their thoughts and problems
- Peer influence
- Parental neglect
- Poverty
- Witnessing parents drinking alcohol
- Curiosity and poor decision-making
- Male youth wanting to exhibit masculine/adult male traits
- Having too much free time because they are not in school or working

### ALCOHOL USE



- Alcohol consumption
- Use of other substances
- Peer influence
- Inadequate parental guidance
- Having unsupervised free time
- Being angry/having an angry character
- Jealousy or a desire for material objects
- Rebelling against parents
- Family poverty

### VIOLENCE



activities that could be included in a violence prevention intervention, such as building sustainable economic means for parents to pay for their children's education; starting small business activities for youth, such as an animal husbandry project; and engaging youth in sports, social or community activities.

Participants also emphasised how important it is for family and community members to guide and reprimand youth in order to change their behaviour.

### NEXT STEPS

The research team plans to use the study findings to develop a community-based prevention intervention with youth and families. ■

among youth, including peer influence, parental behaviour, not being enrolled in school and the consequences of living in poverty. For example, if children cannot attend school because their parents are unable to pay their school fees, they are unsupervised during the day when their parents are working and tend to go to places that sell alcohol.

Participants also identified destructive behaviours associated with youth drinking and violence, such as a lack of respect for parents and community members, disobedience, physical and verbal violence, theft and sexual assault.

Several adult and youth participants raised sexual assault as a risk associated with problem drinking in both age groups. Parents expressed concern for their children's safety and the consequences of rape (such as pregnancy and forced marriage), as well as wider consequences such as damaged family and social relationships, and reduced educational productivity and promise.

### DEVELOPING A PRIMARY PREVENTION INTERVENTION

Study participants proposed a range of social, educational and economic

## KEY FINDINGS

**Various risk factors particular to the post-conflict environment, such as high levels of poverty, trauma and children not enrolled in school, are associated with a higher likelihood of youth in South Kivu consuming alcohol and using violence. An intervention that attempts to address risky behaviours needs to reduce adolescents' exposure and vulnerability to these risk factors and enhance protective factors to ensure success.**

### THIS BRIEF IS BASED ON THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH:

Kohli, A., Remy, M.M., Binkurhorhwa, A.K., Mitima, C.M., Mirindi, A.B., Mwinja, N.B., Banyewesize, J.H., Ntakwinja, G.M., Perrin, N.A. & Glass, N. 2017. Preventing risky behaviours among young adolescents in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: A qualitative study. *Global Public Health*. DOI: 10.1080/17441692.2017.1317009.

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