

RWANDA

Assessing the long-term impacts of empowerment training on gender based violence and household energy use in humanitarian settings in Rwanda

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BACKGROUND

Globally, more than 65 million individuals have been forcibly displaced as a result of violence, conflict or natural disasters (1). Over 22 million of these live as refugees, often in refugee camps (1). In these settings, women and girls are at high risk of experiencing both non-partner and partner gender-based violence (GBV) as basic aspects of daily living are extremely challenging. Normal tasks related to cooking can become a health hazard. Women can spend up to 5-7 hours collecting firewood for cooking (2). In addition to the drudgery, travelling large distances outside camps can put women at significant risk for harassment, assault and sexual abuse (2). The failure to produce cooked food due to a shortage of fuel may increase the risk of violence within the home. Clean cookstoves are a valuable commodity, and we need more research to understand the benefits and potential unintended consequences of their distribution. Given the multiple challenges associated with management of cooking, the fuels needed to do so and GBV in these complex and often dynamic settings, innovative interventions are needed.

WHY IS THIS PROJECT IMPORTANT?

This study proposes to understand the long-term impacts and the potential pathways through which an integrated behavioral intervention—Individual-Agency-Centered Training (I-ACT)—focused on personal and economic empowerment and uptake and use of efficient and clean cooking technology can impact GBV in a refugee camp setting. Inclusion of male engagement in the empowerment training will be a unique enhancement to this intervention. Due to the need to halt deforestation of surrounding communities, Rwanda is instituting a ban on firewood distribution in refugee settings. This will be accompanied by access to cleaner cookstoves and fuels that will necessitate significant behavior change. The on-going research study will be testing the impacts of I-ACT and optimization of household cooking on clean cookstove uptake on GBV. This additional research will allow for assessment of the robustness of I-ACT in increasing adoption and promoting consistent use, improving partner relations and reducing GBV.

I-ACT

Individual-Agency-Centered Training (I-ACT) is personal agency-based empowerment training which aims to improve mental health and social functioning, increase personal agency and enhance household management of energy including uptake and use of clean fuels/cookstoves. This targeted personal empowerment training, conducted over 3-4 days with groups of individuals, has been shown to enhance productivity, self-efficacy, increased mastery of one's social environment, positive relations and fortitude (3). While this intervention has historically been conducted with women, this study includes a brief male engagement component.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project objectives:

1. To carry out a longer term, quantitative follow up of an on-going randomized controlled trial at 12 months post intervention to better understand the longer-term impacts of I-ACT on GBV.
2. To conduct a robust qualitative study to support the quantitative findings of the trial and understand in greater depth changes in women's clean energy uptake, firewood collection patterns, economic empowerment and its subsequent effects on both partner and non-partner violence.
3. To disseminate the findings and lessons learnt from this research more widely amongst national, regional and international partners through existing global networks.

PROJECT METHODS

This mixed methods study builds on an existing RCT assessing the short-term impact (6 month) of I-ACT and clean cookstove distribution. The proposed study will build upon this existing research by extending the post-intervention follow up to 12 months so the longer-term impacts of the intervention can be assessed and by including a more robust qualitative component that focuses on understanding the pathways that lead to a reduction in GBV. An in-depth exploration of men's perspectives on the intervention will also be undertaken to develop more focused activities and theory that would improve partner relations and increase uptake of clean cooking technologies.

PROJECT OUTPUTS

This research will contribute to the larger body of evidence in three distinct ways:

1. Building the evidence base for inter-sectoral action to prevent SIPV: This research will examine if and how the uptake/use of cleaner and more efficient cookstoves/fuels is associated with gender-based violence within a refugee setting.
2. Research to explore the linkages between SDG Goals 5 and 7: The research proposes a unique consortium of partners for this work that allows direct translation of research findings to the broader policy and practice community in the clean energy sector.
3. Involving men to support women's empowerment in conflict settings: Traditionally, I-ACT has been implemented with women alone. The current intervention plans to work with partners of women who are recruited into the parent study.
4. Understanding long-term impacts and pathways of change: This grant will extend the post-intervention follow up and include a more robust qualitative component to better understand the pathways of change.

References

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