

Engaging men and boys to prevent violence against women



**Prevent Violence
Against Women**



WORLD BANK GROUP
Gender



SVRI sexual
violence
research
initiative



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While women must remain at the centre of and lead efforts to prevent the violence against them, men must join the movement as allies, and gender transformative interventions that engage men in thoughtful ways can be highly effective. The process of engaging men and boys in the prevention of violence against women has gained momentum over the past 20 years, with growing evidence that well-designed and holistic interventions involving both men and women can work. Interventions focusing solely on men are ineffective in shifting strongly entrenched social norms that drive violence against women, and we must support structural policy changes.¹

Between 2016 and 2020, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI), in partnership with the World Bank Group, funded several studies into interventions that engage men in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and North African region. These studies address local gender norms and context-specific risk factors associated with men abusing women.

The SVRI will continue supporting research that builds evidence for accountable, effective and sustainable programmes that engage men in preventing and responding to violence against women in low- and middle-income countries.

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¹ UN Women. (2020). Discussion paper: Work with men and boys for gender equality. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/head-quarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/discussion-paper-work-with-men-and-boys-for-gender-equality-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3559/>. Accessed 14 May 2021.



Transforming social norms to end intimate partner violence in Uganda

Evidence from recent research is being used to design a framework for involving men and boys in the prevention of intimate partner violence against girls and women in south central Uganda. The framework will take a gender transformative approach to reduce male perpetration of violence – researchers hope it will lead to a sustained transformation of social norms relating to gender and masculinity.

The Rakai Health Sciences Program, a well-established HIV, other infectious diseases and reproductive health research and service organisation, previously implemented an intimate partner violence prevention intervention, the Safe Homes and Respect for Everyone (SHARE) Project.

A trial to evaluate the impact of the SHARE Project found that the exposure to the intervention was associated with reduced rates of violence and HIV infection in the population. However, men's and boys' participation in the programme was low. With funding from the SVRI and the World Bank Group, additional research was done to address gaps and to understand men's and boys' attitudes towards intimate partner violence and gender norms in south central Uganda. The research was also designed to assess what restricts and what enables men's and boys' participation in SHARE activities relating to gender violence.

The researchers found that men and boys have a range of perspectives about being a man (and masculinity). There were two main interpretations of masculinity: one more concerned with respectability, the other with reputation. Both masculine norms were used to justify dominance over women and the use of intimate partner violence.

Recommendations for future intervention suggest a shift away from a focus on western concepts of masculinity towards providing local men and boys with the chance to reflect on dynamic, often conflicting, ideals of masculinity and manhood.

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Building the evidence for working with men to create change

In Peru, the high prevalence of gender-based violence is accompanied by social tolerance. In response, the Cayetano Heredia University pioneered a new approach to preventing gender-based violence through the programme Men Renounce Violence.

To build the evidence base for further policies and programmes, formative research on male sexuality and the use of sexual violence against women in three cities in Peru has been completed by the project Masculinidades Y Prevención De La Violencia Sexual (Masculinities and the Prevention of Sexual Violence). The research team from Cayetano Heredia University used a qualitative methodology that included interviews and focus group discussions to explore the norms and attitudes of two generations of men towards sexuality and the prevalence and acceptability of sexual violence.

Their [study](#) showed that – from childhood – men build their masculine identity in sexist contexts where they internalise the idea of masculine power associated with the submission of women. They learn to repress emotions that denote vulnerability due to fear of being feminised. The belief that men have the right to access the bodies of their partners and to sexually harass women in public spaces is still very prevalent. A high level of complicity was found among men who consider various forms of sexual violence to be legitimate. These men believe that there is sexual violence only when physical force is used, and they continue to attribute the “guilt” to the victim.

The study’s findings have been used to develop and pilot a training curriculum for community activists and government staff who work with men to prevent gender-based violence.

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Preventing intimate partner violence among newly married couples in Jordan

The project “Preventing intimate partner violence among newly-weds in Jordan” has assessed two national interventions in Jordan: a pre-marriage course provided by the Supreme Judge Department,² and a complementary preventive intervention, Health and Reproductive Awareness. The pre-marriage course is a national programme that targets would-be married couples under the age of 18 to help them understand marital rights and legal rights in Sharia law. The second intervention is a nine-month mentoring programme that focuses on the importance of family life, women’s status, spousal rights, sexual and reproductive health, and ways of resisting psychological pressure.

The project team surveyed 1 270 couples participating in the course to understand their knowledge, behaviour and attitudes about marital life, gender norms and violence. More than 30 percent of the male sample tended to use and justify violence against the wife; and 30 percent “don’t know” if men have the right to use physical violence with their wives. About 10 percent of the respondents agreed to participate in a second intervention to receive awareness messages and attend awareness sessions. In parallel, a capacity-building programme was implemented for 20 health and social providers.

The project concluded that the pre-marriage course gave legal information on rights and duties but the focus on girls under 18 was potentially a justification for early marriage. The programme could be useful, especially in introducing women’s rights and available services, if it were expanded to different ages. The Health and Reproductive Awareness intervention helped to increase knowledge about those issues and the support services available. The most positive impacts were the cases in which the husband participated in the programme too.

The project recommends more in-depth study of the resistance to, and young men’s engagement with, change in knowledge and attitudes, as well as harmful norms that contribute to violence against women. It also recommends exploring the use of WhatsApp or other tools to promote positive messages and support those that need help most.

Project partners are the Try Center for Training and Education – currently NAGAT and Hakoura (Jordan), Cambridge Reproductive Health Consultants (USA), and the Institute for Family Health (Jordan).

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² The Supreme Judge Department is a government entity providing administrative supervision of the Muslim courts.



Working with male partners in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Nearly a quarter of women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have experienced conflict-related sexual violence including rape, and nearly two-thirds have experienced violence from a male partner. Being exposed to war and traumatic events can put men at risk of using unhealthy and destructive coping mechanisms that include violence against women.

The Living Peace initiative is a psychosocial intervention working with couples in the DRC to reduce male violence against women by changing men's harmful coping mechanisms. It targets the husbands of female survivors of war-related rape and intimate partner violence. The project has been implemented and evaluated by Promundo-United States and the Living Peace Institute, DRC. Initially piloted in 2013, the Living Peace initiative helps men who have experienced conflict to examine harmful ideas about masculinity, and to begin to use nonviolent coping strategies.

An impact evaluation found that the programme created important and sustained change over three years. Prior to the evaluation, the initiative had already been scaled up to reach tens of thousands of individuals, additional communities, and even the police, military and former combatants in the eastern DRC. There is now strong research-based evidence suggesting lasting impact to support future interventions.

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Using a mental health intervention Problem Management Plus to support men to reduce gender based violence

A recent study in Kenya has helped to answer the following question: If we support men with common mental health problems, particularly those linked to harmful alcohol and substance use, will intimate partner violence be reduced?

The feasibility study evaluated a World Vision Kenya project in two communities. The project targeted men with common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, acknowledging the links between men with mental health problems, alcohol and substance use and high incidences of intimate partner violence. World Vision Kenya had previously verified the effectiveness of the World Health Organization's Problem Management Plus (PM+) programme for women with a history of gender-based violence in Kenya. For this project, they adapted PM+ for men with a history of alcohol abuse.

The feasibility study showed an improvement in mental health outcomes for men who completed the PM+ programme; this included a reduction in alcohol consumption, reductions in men's impaired functioning and psychological distress, reduction in perpetration of violence, and less violence reported by partners. These outcomes were sustained (and in many cases further improved) three months after treatment. Statistics indicated nearly all results were statistically significant.

The project also contributed to the scalability of PM+ through partnership with the Kenya Ministry of Health. The consultative partnership also developed *The Kenya Ministry of Health Framework for the Implementation of PM+* to accompany the Kenya mental health policy. This was piloted in four counties, establishing ways PM+ can be scaled up and rolled out nationally.

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Additional reading

Another grant given for research into working with men and boys was:

Promoting female empowerment and preventing intimate partner violence (IPV) through a multi-sectoral intervention targeting couples in Ibadan, Nigeria

Lead agency: College of Medicine, University of Ibadan

[Read about this here.](#)