

Working with Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Approaches, Challenges, and Lessons

Sector Brief: Education

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Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is the most widespread form of abuse worldwide, affecting one third of all women in their lifetime [1]. It is widely acknowledged that men and boys have a key role to play in eliminating VAWG. However, not only does ending VAWG require the engagement of men and boys, but it also requires coordinated work with men and boys across multiple sectors [2, 3].

Such approaches are grounded in understanding the links between social constructions of masculinity and men's use of violence. Social constructions of gender almost always confer a higher social value on men than women, and privilege the masculine over the feminine. Male VAWG is born of this privilege. The term "positive masculinities" has emerged in recent years as a way to characterize the values, norms and practices that gender-based work with men and boys seeks to promote in order to end VAWG.

Background and Methodology

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) commissioned a literature review to investigate documentation of work with men and boys on VAWG outside the health sector in the Global South; and to identify promising approaches to, and emerging lessons from, this work that can guide future funding priorities and program development. The review covered the following five sectors:

- 1- Economic Growth, Trade, and Agriculture
- 2- Education
- 3- Governance, Law Enforcement, and Justice

Systems

4- Conflict, Post Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance

5- Social Development

Search Methods. A broad definition of violence was used, including physical and sexual violence against intimate partners and non-partners as well as harmful traditional practices such as child marriage, bride abduction, honor killing, acid throwing, burning, and female genital mutilation. The review conducted a search of general online sources, published literature databases, and relevant organizational websites and research platforms. Email queries to select key informants were also used to gather information.

Inclusion Criteria. The review focused on interventions that seek to be "gender transformative," in that they seek to transform gender norms and promote more gender-equitable relationships between men and women. Programs were included in the review on the basis of evaluated impact, lessons learned documentation in the absence of evaluated impact, and/or innovative program design that can guide future programming.

This brief summarizes the findings from the **education** sector.

Education

Violence against girls in and around schools is one of the most serious threats to girls' access to education, attendance and completion rates, learning and attainments [4]. Harmful norms of masculinity and femininity fuel such violence, by

condoning the violence or blaming women and girls if it occurs. Operating in ‘cultures’ of male entitlement, boys and men are directly involved in perpetrating VAG in formal and informal educational settings. Thus, working with men and boys to create safe environments in and around educational settings must be a critical strategy to engage men in ending VAWG. The report identified **two** approaches to working with men to end VAWG in this sector: **1) Creating safe and gender equitable educational environments** and **2) Promoting gender equitable youth peer groups.**

Under each approach, this brief highlights the context within which male engagement work is conducted, identifies the areas of work with men and boys used to address VAWG, touches on select program examples, and summarizes evidence base findings from the review for the areas. The brief concludes with a list of the key challenges and lessons learned to help guide future programming and implementation.

Approach 1 – Creating Safe and Gender Equitable Educational Environments

Areas of Work

- (1) Whole School Approaches
- (2) Curriculum-focused approaches
- (3) Teacher training and Codes of Conduct
- (4) Ending corporal punishment in schools

Educational institutions are critical sites of gender socialization as they help to shape boys and girls’ understanding, attitudes, and practices regarding masculinity, femininity, sexuality, violence and gender equality. The review found four different areas of work focused on ending violence against girls in schools.

Whole School Approaches use schools as entry points for preventing VAWG, date violence, and sexual abuse and for socializing young people into gender equitable attitudes and behaviors. The review highlighted two evaluated examples. The

first program, implemented in Ghana and Malawi, used an integrated set of interventions across societal levels. In Uganda, a toolkit is being used in schools to ensure marginalized young girls complete primary education. Key program components included forming a collective vision for and strategy to create safe and gender equitable learning environments; a Code of Conduct for responding to GBV; teacher training about GBV, discussions about violence prevention, relationships, and life skills with students using curricula; reporting and accountability mechanisms; and community level awareness raising to cultivate supportive environments for individual change.

Curriculum-focused approaches are also crucial to improving students’ knowledge, attitudes, and behavior about preventing and responding to VAWG. Programs in India and the Balkans, targeted youth at key times, held information and discussion sessions through school channels of communication, provided opportunities for boys to reflect on gender equitable norms and carried out social marketing campaigns to help shift male peer group norms.

Teacher training and Codes of Conduct also helped to institutionalize prevention and response to VAWG across schools systems. These two strategies were identified as key to engaging men in efforts to end VAWG by increasing accountability and reducing impunity for male staff perpetrators of violence in schools. Teachers were trained on children’s rights, critical thinking, gender norms and youth, how to implement codes of conduct, and teacher’s roles and responsibility to ensure safe and gender equitable learning environment for students.

Ending corporal punishment in schools has recently emerged as important to promoting non-violent social relations including changing patriarchal norms that sanction VAWG [4]. The review identified a globally implemented program

that seeks to end corporal punishment of children by raising awareness about the links between corporal punishment and the many forms of GBV.

As yet there is no evidence base for assessing teacher training, implementing codes of conduct and ending corporal punishment in schools. Contrastingly, both the evidence base for Whole School and curriculum-focused approaches are positive and show some effectiveness in terms of violence-related factors such as improvements in gender equitable attitudes among male teachers and students. Only curriculum-focused approaches show some promise in terms of reducing GBV.

Approach 2 – Promoting Gender Equitable Youth Peer Groups

Areas of Work

- (1) Working with young adolescent youth groups
- (2) Working with boys and young men through sports programs

Youth peer groups are another source of messages and pressure related to masculinity, femininity, and sexuality for youth. Because peer group norms can strongly influence an individual's choices and behaviors, working with these young male peer groups is critical to promoting more gender equitable masculinities [5].

Working with young adolescent youth groups is a strategy used to promote equitable relationships and question harmful masculinities among youth. Examples from Nepal and from a six-country program focused on changing gender norms and attitudes early on in the socialization process of young adolescents. These two innovative, evaluated, and gender synchronized [6] programs utilized interactive curricula that stimulated discussion related to power and gender among adolescents and provided gender-mixed and gender-exclusive safe spaces for youth to explore their particular challenges as adolescents.

Working with boys and young men through sports programs has also been used as an entry point to cultivate male peer groups supportive of positive masculinities with boys and young men [7]. Two evaluated examples from India and Brazil used a sports mentorship program in school and communities (India) to transform gender attitudes and a soccer tournament (Brazil) that complemented workshops and campaigns covering the consequences of VAW perpetrated by adult and young men. A third innovative and globally implemented example used an online soccer game to educate boys about GBV and its effects.

An emerging evidence base suggests that these two approaches show promise in terms of fostering more gender equitable attitudes among boys and young men, though impact on their behaviors, including their use or acceptance of violence, is harder to determine. Nevertheless, positive results of a quasi-experimental study of Brazil's Program H indicating a decrease in self-reported violence reinforces the significance of sports based strategies.

Challenges Faced

The review identified the following challenges faced by the different programs:

- Translating attitudinal change into behavior change
- Working at the emotional level to foster behavior change
- Facilitating reflection on and discussion of gender and sexuality by skilled facilitators
- Responding to survivors' needs in educational settings
- Enforcing institutional policy to hold perpetrators accountable and address culture of impunity
- Addressing issues of social marginalization and the intersections between class, ethnicity and other social hierarchies

Lessons Learned

It is clear that engaging men and boys is crucial to ending VAWG in the education sector. The review identified the following lessons from male engagement programming:

- Start young
- Involve young people in program design
- Look for opportunities for gender synchronization
- Strengthen young men's skills for gender equality
- Develop young men's gender equitable leadership
- Engage male stakeholders in the community
- Foster peer groups for positive masculinities

- Use social messaging and social marketing to promote positive masculinities

Although more research and evaluation is necessary to better understand actual impact, applying the lessons learned from this review may prove beneficial from programs working in the education sector to address gender inequality, change violent forms of masculinity, and end VAWG.

To read the full report—*Working with Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Approaches, Challenges, and Lessons*—please visit [<http://www.usaid.gov/engaging>].

References

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