

Bandebereho / Role Model

Fathers and couples programme reduces domestic violence by 44%



Almost two years after participating in a MenCare+ fathers and couples programme in Rwanda, men are nearly half as likely to use violence against their female partners and spend almost one hour more per day doing household chores, revealed a randomised controlled trial. The evaluation, released by PLOS ONE journal was led by Promundo, Rwanda Biomedical Center and Rwanda Men's Resource Center (RWAMREC). It is one of the studies, which show that engaging men as they become fathers and focusing on improving couple relationships can be an effective strategy to reduce men's use of violence against women and improve relationships within the household.

FATHERS AND COUPLES PROGRAMME IN RWANDA

The *Bandebereho* couples intervention engaged men and their partners in participatory, small group sessions of critical reflection and dialogue. The RWAMREC, a local Rwanda non-governmental organisation, implemented the intervention as part of MenCare+, a four-country initiative to engage men in sexual, reproductive, and maternal health. The MenCare+ programme was coordinated by Rutgers and Promundo, and financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

COUPLES, POWER AND GENDER ROLES

The MenCare+ programme in Rwanda **reveals 40% less violence in men against their partners**. The programme in Rwanda (known as *Bandebereho*, meaning 'role model' in Kinyarwanda) built the skills needed to have stronger, more equal and non-violent relationships among couples. Focusing on power and gender roles, the programme transformed ideas and norms about who does what and who has power in the household, as well as in intimate relations.

The *Bandebereho* intervention was conducted with expectant fathers and fathers of young children (ages 21-35), and included their spouses across four districts in Rwanda. The programme used a 15-session curriculum adapted to the Rwandan context from Program P, which provides concrete strategies and activities to engage men globally in active fatherhood. The curriculum includes sessions on: gender and power; fatherhood; couple communication and decision-making; violence; caregiving; child development; and engaging men in reproductive and maternal health. The skills needed to have stronger, more equal and non-violent relationships among couples were developed. **By focusing on power and on gender roles, the programme transformed ideas and norms about who does what and who has power in the household, as well as in intimate relations.**

HOPES AND FEARS

Men met weekly with the same peer groups from their own communities, over a period of 4-5 months and women joined their partners for approximately half of the sessions. The sessions provided the opportunity, often for the first time, for men and women to talk about their hopes and fears as they become parents. They discussed specific topics such as: pregnancy; contraception; violence; and how to improve relationships with their partners, including communication, conflict resolution, and sharing caregiving responsibilities.

THE IMPACT

Some outstanding results from the randomised controlled trial include:

- **Lower rates of physical and sexual violence:** 33% of female participants having experienced physical violence from a husband or partner in the past year vs. 57% in the comparison group; and 35% of female participants having experienced sexual violence from their husband or partner vs. 60% in the comparison group.
- **Greater contraceptive use:** 70% of women in the MenCare+ programme vs. 61% in the comparison group report currently using modern contraception.
- **Lower rates of violence against children** by both men and women in the MenCare+ programme than in the comparison group, among those couples who already have children.
- **Greater sharing of caring for children and the home** and men spending more time doing unpaid care work.
- **Greater involvement of women in decision-making in the household:** 56% of women in the MenCare+ programme say the man has the final say about the use of weekly/monthly income and expenses vs. 79% who say so in the comparison group, a difference of about 30%.

Targeting the transition into fatherhood, and supporting couples with skills to make their relationships stronger and more equal, can lead to more equitable and less violent relationships, additionally leading to less violence against children.