

Can gender-transformative education make young men less violent?



In brief

- Violence against women and girls is pervasive in India. Working with young men from an early age to transform traditional gender norms has been proposed as a potential solution to reduce violence against women and girls. However, little is known about whether young men who are exposed to gender-transformative life skills education turn out to be less violent.
- This study compared attitudes about violence against women and girls and perpetration of violence within intimate partnerships among a group of young men who were exposed to the *Do Kadam* intervention – a gender-transformative life skills education and sports coaching intervention – five years after their participation.
- Interviews were conducted with 431 participant and 422 non-participant young men who belonged to youth clubs supported by the Nehru Yuvak Kendra Sangathan in Bihar.
- We found that the *Do Kadam* intervention had a sustained impact on young men's gender role attitudes and attitudes about violence against women and girls.
- Findings lend support for promoting gender-transformative life skills programmes for adolescent boys that will encourage them to question gender stereotypes and promote new concepts of masculinity and femininity, develop self-esteem, and strengthen their skills in problem-solving, decision-making, communication, and interpersonal relations and negotiation.

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Background

“Gender-transformative programmes for boys and young men have been recognized as an effective strategy for modifying stereotypical gender attitudes and reducing violence against women and girls globally”

Violence against women and girls is pervasive in India. Although the number of crimes registered reflects only the tip of the iceberg of violence against women and girls in the country, every hour, 46 cases related to crimes committed against women were registered by the police department in 2019 (National Crime Records Bureau, 2020). Cruelty by husbands or their relatives top the cases registered under crime against women. Adverse health and social consequences of intimate partner violence have been widely documented and include such outcomes as unintended pregnancy, limited pregnancy-related care, foetal and infant mortality, symptoms of RTI/STI, and mental health disorders (Jejeebhoy et al., 2014; World Health Organization & London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). Key risk factors include norms justifying partner violence, women’s limited agency and options, intergenerational transmission of violence, alcohol consumption and limited help-seeking when faced with violence among others.

Gender-transformative programmes for boys and young men have been recognized as an effective strategy for modifying stereotypical gender attitudes and reducing VAWG globally (Levy et al., 2019; UNFPA, 2016; WHO, 2007). In India, recent interventions have aimed to change gendered norms among boys and young men in varying settings, including schools, clubs and other institutions, including sports teams and workplaces (Achyut et al., 2011; Das et al., 2012; Dhar et al., 2020; Freudberg et al., 2018; Jejeebhoy et al., 2017). Evaluations of most interventions targeted at young men globally were conducted soon after the conclusion of the intervention implementation; most had assessed the effects of exposure to the intervention on attitudinal measures and had not included violence against women and girls as an outcome (Dworkin et al., 2015; Fulu et al., 2014; Levy et al., 2019; Ricardo et al., 2011). The extent to which newly internalised gender egalitarian notions are sustained over time and result in adoption of protective actions, remains largely unexplored in India too. One study that followed boys and girls who were engaged in classroom discussions about gender equality from grades 7 and 8 onwards for two and a half years reported that intervention contributed to boys and girls adopting gender egalitarian attitudes shortly and two years after the completion of the programme (Dhar et al., 2020).

Drawing on a cluster randomised controlled trial, *Do Kadam*, a programme implemented by the Population Council, Centre for Catalysing Change and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, with the support of UKaid, was conducted in the state of Bihar. This study compared attitudes about violence against women and girls and perpetrations of violence within intimate partnerships among a group of young men who were exposed to *Do Kadam* intervention five years after their participation in the intervention and their counterparts who were not exposed to the intervention. The follow-up study was conducted among young men aged 19-27 who had participated, as 13-21-year-olds, in the *Do Kadam* evaluation and who had consented to be re-interviewed at a later point in time.

The follow-up survey was conducted from November 2019 to January 2020, almost five years after the completion of the trial, among 853 young men.

Table 1: *Do Kadam* intervention

<p>Target group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boys who were members of youth clubs supported by the Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) • Aged 13-21 and unmarried at the time of joining the intervention
<p>Main components</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a gender-transformative life skills curriculum • Capacity-building of peer mentors for imparting the curriculum • Transaction of life skills curriculum • Sports (cricket) coaching • Community events
<p>Contents of the life skills education curriculum</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age-appropriate information on growing up (physical maturation, emotional development, sexual and reproductive health, vocational and career opportunities, where to seek help if needed information and services for sexual and reproductive health matters, education, and career-related matters) • Sessions to promote critical thinking about gender roles and violence and the consequences of VAWG (power, respect, and consent in relationships; gender roles and attitudes; forms of VAWG; rights of women and girls; respectful behaviour towards women and girls; communication and negotiation skills to resolve conflict) • Introspection into young men’s own behaviour (teasing, verbal harassment, unwanted touch, forced sex, and so on against girls and ways in which young men can intervene to stop VAWG)
<p>Selection, capacity-building and mentoring of peer mentors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two club members with leadership, communication and sports skills selected and trained to conduct the life skills education and sports sessions in each club • Peer mentors underwent • A 4-day training workshop prior to the launch of the intervention • Three 2-day refresher training workshops over the course of the intervention • Supportive supervision by project staff and a cricket coach on a regular basis

Curriculum transaction methodology, frequency, duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory learning sessions—case studies, role play, and group discussions • Weekly sessions of 2-hour duration – 1 hour for life skills education and 1 hour for cricket coaching • 42 weekly sessions over a period of 18 months
Sports coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cricket-coaching sessions, 35 sessions • Discussions about the importance of commitment to the team, complying with rules and regulations of the sport, team spirit and the spirit of fairness • A cricket kit given to each club in both intervention and control clubs* • A cricket league tournament organised in both intervention and control clubs at the completion of the project*
Community events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 community events to engage communities (painting and essay competitions on themes related to VAWG and ways to prevent violence in their community; slow cycling and gender power walks aimed at encouraging a violence-free community and preventing gender discrimination; and a public pledge-taking ceremony in which all club members pledged to end VAWG)

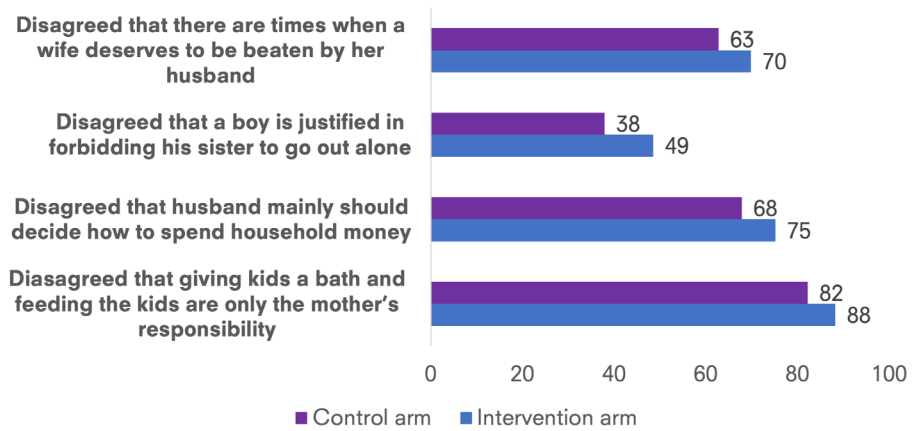
Note:* No other activities were organised in the control clubs; adapted from Gupta and Santhya, 2020

Key findings

1. The *Do Kadam* intervention had a sustained impact on young men’s gender role attitudes and attitudes about violence against women and girls

A significantly larger proportion of young men in the intervention than control arms expressed egalitarian gender role attitudes and rejected attitudes justifying violence against women and girls. For example, more young men from the intervention arm disagreed that there are times when a wife deserves to be beaten by her husband or that the husband should mainly decide how to spend household money. More young men from the intervention arm rejected attitudes justifying the right of men and boys to control the female in their life; for example, half of young men in the intervention arm compared to fewer than two-fifths of their counterparts in control arm disagreed that a boy is justified in forbidding his sister to go out alone.

Figure 1: Percentage of young men who disagreed with selected statements reflecting traditional gender role attitudes and notions of masculinity by treatment arms, follow-up survey, 2019-20

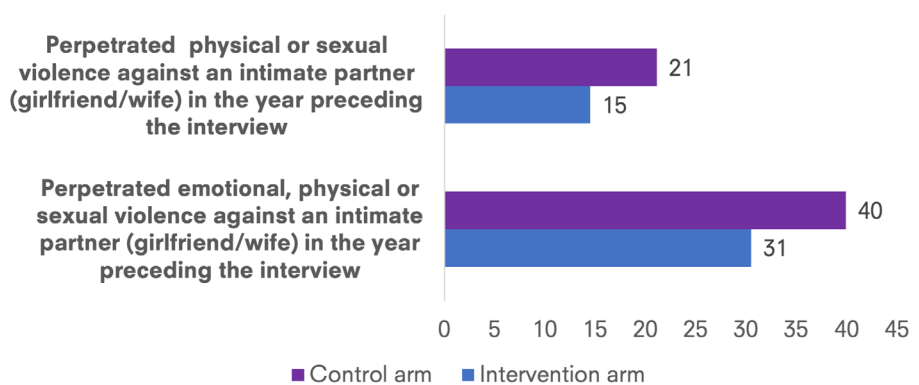


Note: Difference between intervention and control arms was significant at $P < 0.05$ or better

2. The *Do Kadam* intervention had helped reduce perpetration of violence within intimate partnerships

Although violence within intimate partnership was reported by young men in both the intervention and control arms, a smaller proportion of those from the intervention arm than control arm reported that they had perpetrated any violence against their partner in the one year preceding the interview. For example, among young men who reported a romantic relationship or who were married, one-third of young men from the intervention arm compared to two-fifths from the control arm reported that they had perpetrated emotional, physical or sexual violence against their romantic partner or wife in the year preceding the interview.

Figure 2: Percentage of young men who reported perpetration of violence against an intimate partner by treatment arms, follow-up survey, 2019-20



Note: Difference between intervention and control arms was significant at $P < 0.05$ or better

3. Regular participation in gender-transformative programme is the key

Our findings show that long-term effects of *Do Kadam* intervention were observed among young men who participated regularly, that is, those who attended life skills and sports sessions 2-3 times a month or more frequently. For example, the odds of reporting perpetration of emotional, physical or sexual violence against a romantic partner or wife was lower for young men who participated regularly compared to young men from control arm after controlling for other covariates (odds ratio 0.639; $p=0.062$). Gender role attitudes and notions of masculinity and perpetration of violence reported by young men who participated irregularly were no different from those reported by young men in the control arm.

4. Early exposure to gender-transformative life skills education is more effective than later exposure

The intervention was more effective among boys who were exposed to the intervention when they were aged 13-14 than when they were aged 15 and above, both immediately after the completion of the trial and in the long run. The mean number of gender-egalitarian attitudes espoused by younger boys was 0.78 higher and by older boys was 0.65 higher in intervention clubs than those espoused by older boys in control clubs in the short run after adjusting for baseline differences in outcomes and covariates and extent of regular exposure to the intervention. A similar pattern persisted in the long run, although effect size was reduced.

Programme recommendations

The *Do Kadam* intervention has shown sustained impact on modifying traditional gender norms and notions of masculinity among young men and reducing young men's perpetration of intimate partner violence. Several programme recommendations can be drawn from the *Do Kadam* trial and the follow-up study.

- **Promote gender-transformative life skills programmes for boys and young men:** The *Do Kadam* model lends support for promoting gender-transformative life skills programmes for adolescent boys that will encourage them to question gender stereotypes and promote new concepts of masculinity and femininity, develop self-esteem, and strengthen their skills in problem-solving, decision-making, communication, and interpersonal relations and negotiation. Models like *Do Kadam* must be replicated or scaled-up as appropriate, and the potential that programmes such as the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the NYKS youth club programme of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and

Sports as well as schools hold for scaling-up lessons learned from these intervention models must be exploited to reach a critical mass of boys and young men.

- **Ensure regular participation of boys and young men in gender-transformative life skills programmes:** Our findings have shown that the intervention had little effect on those who attended irregularly soon after the completion of the trial and in the long-run. Findings reiterate the importance of regular attendance, and they call for measures that accommodate work- and education-related time commitments of boys and young men, and ensure that sessions are interactive and fun.
- **Invest in early adolescence:** Our findings highlight the potential value of investing early with intervention models to change deeply entrenched gender role attitudes and attitudes justifying the entitlement of men and boys to perpetrate violence on women and girls.
- **Invest in pre-intervention and regular refresher training for peer mentors:** The *Do Kadam* intervention was delivered by peer mentors who were selected from among the youth club members based on their leadership, communication and sports skills and who underwent pre-intervention and regular refresher training. They were also supported by an adult mentor, in the form of the core trainer and the coach, who attended sessions and supported the peer mentors in delivering the gender-transformative life skills education programme, and inculcating a spirit of fair play. Our findings indicate that while peer-led programmes are promising, such programmes, including the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram, with its emphasis on peer mentors, must invest in pre-intervention and regular refresher training.

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