REIMAY: REACHING PAPUAN PROSPERITY

ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE TO CHANGE SOCIAL NORMS AND PROMOTE GENDER EQUITABLE RELATIONSHIPS

POLICY BRIEF

Talk, listen, engage: Improving communication between adolescents and caregivers

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reimay: Reaching Papuan Prosperity engaged adolescent girls and boys, and their caregivers, in participatory educational sessions to change social norms that increase the risk of intimate partner violence (IPV) and violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Papua, Indonesia. An independent evaluation of the intervention established that participants, both adolescents and caregivers, reported a reduction in harsh punishment of children and adolescents, more open communication in the family, and changes in attitudes to violence, reproductive health and gender equality. Incorporating interventions such as Reimay: Reaching Papuan Prosperity into village-level plans across Indonesia is an opportunity to encourage open and healthy engagement between adolescents and their caregivers in order to prevent IPV in the long run.

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the Government of Indonesia enacted the Village Law to move power from the capital in Jakarta to the country's villages. While decentralization has been on the government's agenda for many years, the Village Law pushes it further into the hands of the people, 50 percent of who reside in villages. This law guarantees an allocation of funds to the approximately 74,000 Indonesian villages to develop their own budgets based on local needs and priorities.[1] There have been benefits and drawbacks. The Government's focus on economic development and using village planning to reduce inequality and poverty[2] has meant that issues related to family development and gender are not prioritized in villages' agendas. However, at the same time, the Village Law makes provisions for the involvement of community representatives from different groups, such as women, to ensure their participation in village planning and budgeting. These village consultative forums (Musdes) create a rare opportunity to involve the voices of multiple marginalized groups in the community, and have the power to bring issues concerning family development to the fore.

Particularly important is the opportunity to address violence against women and girls, an issue that remains absent from village agendas. This is in spite of the fact that in Indonesia, 26 percent of all rural men admitted to perpetrating intimate partner violence.[3] Jayapura District, has some of the highest incidence of IPV at 60 percent.[4] More specifically, 38 percent of men reported using physical violence against an intimate partner and 49 percent reported using sexual violence against an intimate partner at some point in their lives. Further, 23 percent of men in Jayapura claim to have perpetrated rape against a non-partner and 7 percent reported involvement in a gang rape. Notably, a high percentage (60%) of perpetrators had committed an act of violence by the age of 19 years. Interestingly, a significant proportion of men in Jayapura (60%) reported childhood experiences with violence, with 74 percent of these men reporting physical violence in school.

These numbers can be explained through a growing body of research that suggests that exposure to violence at home, school and within the community as a child is a risk factor for perpetrating or being a victim of VAWG as an adult.[5] This intergenerational impact of exposure to violence makes men more vulnerable to becoming perpetrators and women to becoming victims.[6] Studies suggest that preventive measures for adolescents based on gender equality and open communication with families and caregivers can be effective in curbing the development of violent behaviour.[7] Interventions structured around promoting conversations on violence between adolescents and parents/caregivers have proven to be powerful in transforming attitudes to violence and anger among young men.[8]

1 https://asiafoundation.org/2016/02/17/indonesias-village-law-a-step-toward-inclusive-governance/
2 https://localsolutionstopoverty.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/village_law_pasa_q2_2016.pdf
3 http://www.partners4prevention.org/resource/mens-experiences-violence-against-women-indonesia-and-how-we-can-begin-prevent-it
4 http://www.partners4prevention.org/sites/default/files/resources/ind_0.pdf
5 https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/983-the-importance-of-integrating-efforts-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-children.html
6 ibid.
7 http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0080-62342016000100134#B29
8 http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(11)00718-X/abstract

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Reimay: Reaching Papuan Prosperity

Reimay: Reaching Papuan Prosperity was a 10-month intervention in Papua, Indonesia, that concluded in December 2017. The intervention was designed to engage adolescent girls and boys (in Nendali Village the age of participants was 12 to 15, and in Nolokla Village it was 14 to 16 and their caregivers, along with religious leaders, teachers and youth service providers. Participatory group education sessions were provided to change social norms that increase the risk of VAWG, such as gender inequality and harmful constructions of masculinities; a lack of understanding of sexual and reproductive health; poor skills in relationships, conflict resolution and communication; the acceptance and normative use of interpersonal violence; and poor stress management skills. A total of 12 sessions were given to the 131 caregivers and 22 sessions were provided to the 131 adolescents that took part in the intervention. Jayapura was selected as the intervention site as earlier studies indicated a greater acceptance of violence among men than two other sites in Java and Jakarta.[9] In addition, there were higher rates of depression, and over a quarter admitted to a drinking problem.[10]

Reimay: Reaching Papuan Prosperity focused on creating an enabling environment and engaging with adults, both men and women, who are influential in the lives of adolescents. Special focus was given to building supportive attitudes and behaviours related to social norm transformations among adolescents as well as promoting an environment of care, comfort and support between adults and adolescents. To promote sustainability, the intervention included a volunteer component so that the programme could be embedded in the community and grow even after the formal project period ended. Volunteerism builds on the Indonesian tradition of gotong royong (communal work) and local cultural values of reciprocity, and promotes community ownership of the programme as well as wider dissemination of ideas central to the primary prevention of violence. This spirit of volunteerism was channeled by the earlier efforts of UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women to create violence free villages (VFV) through a community watch system for early detection, reporting and referral. These VFV committees are run by volunteer community members committed to the ongoing implementation of these policies and practices, which demonstrates the motivation for and feasibility of a volunteerism component.

The intervention was implemented as a partnership between Indonesian Planned Parenthood Federation (PKBI, Perkumpulan Keluarga Berencana Indonesia) and LP3AP (Lembaga Pengkajian dan Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Anak Papua, or the Institute for the Study and Empowerment of Women and Children Papua), with support from P4P and UNFPA.

9 http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0886260514539844

10 http://www.partners4prevention.org/resource/mens-experiences-violence-against-women-indonesia-and-how-we-can-begin-prevent-it

IMPACT

To understand the impact of the intervention, an evaluation was conducted using qualitative methods such as focus group discussions and key informant interviews, before and after the intervention. A total of 39 adolescents and 19 caregivers took part in the baseline focus groups, and 42 adolescents and 24 caregivers participated in the endline focus groups. The questionnaire was completed by 81 adolescents and 71 caregivers before the intervention and 40 adolescents and 56 caregivers after the intervention.

Reduction in harsh violent punishments and violence towards adolescents

"We've learnt anger and shouting is violence too." – Adolescent participant

Before the intervention, both adolescents and caregivers referred to extreme methods of discipline and punishment in the community. Withholding meals and repetition of instructions, for example, were cited as regular means of ensuring that adolescents fall in line and follow the directions of adults. After the intervention, adolescents reported that caregivers and adults were calmer, listened more and were supportive instead of being angry. It was reported that adults changed their behaviours and communication styles towards adolescents and made it possible for new negotiation and conversation skills to be used between the two groups. Caregivers and parents also acknowledged a change in parenting styles, moving away from a usual "controlling" form of parenting to a more open and communicative engagement with adolescents. They acknowledged the importance of the programme in helping them understand the problems with harsh punishments.

Improvement in intergenerational communication

"Before, if mama asked us to do something we'd wait until she got angry before we did it. But since going to the sessions, even if we don't do the work, mama doesn't get angry, she just says 'you are growing up so we have to understand each other, there is no way one person can do all the housework alone'." – Adolescent participant

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At the baseline, participants had recorded their hesitance to bring up difficult issues with their parents and caregivers, such as bullying in school. However, after the intervention, they felt more comfortable discussing these matters with the adults in their lives. It was clear that participants had changed their practices of 'rebelling' against parents to trying to be more understanding. Caregivers and parents also pointed to a big gap in communication with adolescents before the intervention and felt that they didn't know how to open up a conversation with them. Caregivers, largely women, agreed that they had learnt new ways of approaching and conversing with their adolescents through the programme. However, communication relating to dating or sexuality continued to be a challenge, even though caregivers felt they were more open to talking about these issues. One caregiver even described that she had discussed menstrual hygiene with her daughter when she found her child looking for answers on the internet. Adolescents clearly stated that they didn't expect their parents to understand some of their concerns and problems.

Improved conflict resolution skills

"Don't use violence. Listen first, understand first, then act. I've experienced a change from taking this approach in my family." – Caregiver participant

The most common ways for a caregiver to discipline was through denying their adolescents pocket money, confiscating their mobile phones or sending them away from the house. Some participants, both girls and boys, also mentioned physical punishment. Parents believed they gained submissiveness from adolescents through punishment and that it was required to teach proper behaviour. Many youths, especially boys, felt they would use violence against their own children to discipline them as well. At the end of the intervention, participants recognized different kinds of violence, including verbal and emotional violence, and were less accepting of it. Even caregivers realized that the use of physical violence isn't an effective tool of parenting. Adults reported reducing the use of violence in their homes as a result of the programme. Some caregivers even claimed to teach their children the merits of non-violent engagement and described the use of the positive parenting, communication and conflict-resolution skills acquired through the intervention.

Increased equity in gender attitudes and practices

"We learned about gender equality, and it was interesting to learn that there is no difference between males and females, I mean in terms of what work they can do." – Adolescent participant

Significant inequities in how boys and girls were valued, treated and expectations of them were described by the adolescent group, prior to the engagement. It was agreed that boys were considered more important in terms of taking the family name forward and taking on leadership roles. The different rules and freedoms for boys angered the girls who felt typically ignored in their homes. During the programme, adolescents understood different ways of thinking about gender norms, and understood the importance of the equal value of boys and girls. These ideas contributed to a re-evaluation of the perceived inferior status of women, and fostered new confidence among girls. Even among caregivers, there was a clear distinction in how men and women were perceived. Before the intervention, it was widely acknowledged that women were the primary parent in most households. The programme was unable to change some attitudes about parenting norms as female caregivers still considered themselves the main parent. However, the female caregivers felt confident in implementing the lessons on gender equality learnt from the programme and being supportive of their adolescents in positive ways. There was also a significant shift in the way adolescent participants understood 'women's work' or 'men's work'. Boys who participated in the programme started contributing more to household work.

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

While the programme helped bring about some significant behavioural and attitude changes in participants and was thought to be beneficial and enjoyable, there are some considerations that can strengthen the programme's impact.

1. The participation of women in the adolescent and caregiver sessions was very good, and provided some excellent perspectives in the discussion. However, while there were male participants in some sessions, more meaningful numbers proved to be difficult to organize in both groups. This meant that the voice of an important and influential section of the community was not entirely represented, given that men contribute to family values and influence behaviour on gender and violence. It is critical to involve men in the conversation to ensure that the lessons of the programme permeate across the community and families.

2. The programme, despite its short duration of 10 months, was able to demonstrate its potential, and make noticeable changes in engagement between adolescents and adults. This illustrates the fact the primary prevention of violence is organic and even short programmes can be effective. A longer more sustained intervention would amplify this impact, contributing to more fundamental and sustainable changes to harmful gender norms.

3. The participants engaged with the programme and understand the lessons in each session, and understood the value of actions and behaviour such as open communication, verbal conflict resolution and gender equality. However, it was difficult to link the need for improvement in intergenerational communication and its role in reducing IPV. This is particularly challenging given that reduction in IPV is difficult to measure.

4. Volunteerism from villages and the VFV committees was central to the sustainability of this initiative. Linking with other volunteer networks, such as religious institutions, on issues of IPV and VAWG, will extend the impact and involve more stakeholders in the programme.

CONCLUSIONS

The linkage between violence experienced as a child and perpetration of violence at a later stage in life is well established in literature. Gender-inequitable attitudes and practices are also directly linked with increased violence against women and girls. This intervention provides an opportunity for villages to invest in a family development programme that helps, in a short 10-month timeframe, to improve intergenerational communication and gender-equitable attitudes, thereby reducing the potential exposure of children to violence. Given that exposure to violence as a child increases the likelihood of perpetration and victimization of IPV, this kind of investment could contribute to reducing violence in the long term.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The programme's success depends on the involvement of the village-level leadership, who could consider the following suggestions:

1. Integrate primary intervention of violence into village, district and provincial government plans across Indonesia and strengthen the implementation of existing policies on VAWG prevention and response.
2. Engage men in planning responses to VAWG using community intervention strategies at the village, district and provincial-level governments.
3. Invest in interventions, such as Reimay: Reaching Papuan Prosperity, that reduce the use of harsh parenting and caregiving methods and provide alternative parent-child communication methods to reduce the overall climate of violence in the village.
4. Expand investments to enable schools and religious institutions to become a conduit for improved relationships between parents and children, as influential and well-respected institutions in the community that often have an influence and impact on the actions of families.
5. Involve local volunteers and groups to engage on the issues of IPV and VAWG and through them engage more men in programmes related to family development.
6. Improve channels of communication between the village leadership and Musdes on gender-related matters in the community and to include family development in the village plans.

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