Programming Idea 8: School-based interventions

What it involves: Schools are a key entry point for institutionalizing efforts to promote equitable norms early in the life course, before other norms are fully ingrained in the lives of adolescents. School-based interventions may include, for example, the socialization of boys and girls towards more equitable attitudes and norms especially in sexual relationships. They may aim to prevent bullying, sexual abuse of children and teenagers, dating violence, and young men’s perpetration of rape, as well as a focus on improving bystander behaviours (e.g. encouraging men to speak out against rape, stopping peers, interrupting incidents of violence, supporting survivors). They can include individual and group education activities, involving same-sex or mixed-sex groups and can use both interactive and didactic learning methods. Educational curricula (e.g. life skills education, comprehensive sexuality education, sexual and reproductive health and HIV education) can include: an emphasis on learning about consent in sexual relationships and empathy for survivors of violence; promote alternative ideas about masculinity and femininity, sexual orientation and gender identities; promote gender equitable attitudes and behaviours related to sexuality and violence; and help students learn how to become more proactive about taking actions to stop violence. School-based approaches can also include communication activities (e.g. posters, theatre), skills training in conflict resolution, implementing policies to create school environments that are safe from violence, and linkages to services for those who experience violence (107,119).

Summary of the evidence: The evidence base for school-based interventions and its impact on reducing violence against women is more robust for curriculum-based rather than policy-oriented interventions and hence, the latter are not reviewed here. An increasing number of school-based educational curricula are being implemented to address violence against women and to prevent HIV. A 2011 systematic review of engaging men and boys (see Programming Idea 5) to prevent sexual violence included 65 studies – 90% of which took place in school settings (107). Most interventions focused on group-based educational curricula and most used teachers to facilitate the group education. Seven out of nine studies showed significant results in reducing perpetration of sexual violence and/or at reductions in other forms of violence. Of the 47 studies that examined attitudes towards acceptability of violence, ten showed significant improvements in attitudes showing less tolerance of violence against women. Of the 25 studies that looked at gender norms, seven showed significant improvements towards more equitable norms and attitudes. The review did not report impact on HIV-related outcomes and many of the studies were designed primarily to look at gender equality and violence against women. A systematic review of comprehensive sexuality education shows that these have been effective in improving sexual and reproductive health and HIV behaviours. However, their evaluations have not included outcomes related to improving gender equitable norms or violence against women (120,121). See Annex 1.7 for examples of school-based interventions.

Conclusion: Evidence suggests that school-based educational interventions on preventing dating violence (primarily in high-income settings), or promoting gender equitable norms and non-acceptability of violence are effective in reducing perpetration of violence against women. Its impact on HIV outcomes has not been evaluated and is therefore its effectiveness is considered to be undetermined.
### Annex 1.7. Examples, programming idea 8: School-based interventions

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<th>Intervention and location</th>
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<td>Safe Dates Program United States (182–184)</td>
<td>Adolescents in the 8th and 9th grades in schools in rural North Carolina</td>
<td>Safe Dates is a group education curriculum comprising of 10 interactive sessions of 45 minutes each, taught by health and physical education teachers; a theatre production and a poster contest based on the curriculum</td>
<td>Cluster-randomized controlled trial: 10 pair-matched schools, randomized to receive the intervention, or the control which provided only services to survivors of violence Sample; n=1,700 eligible adolescents (49% boys). Post-intervention follow-up at one month, one, two and four years Outcomes: current victimization or perpetration of physical, sexual and psychological violence; acceptance of dating violence; perceived consequences of violence; attitudes towards gender roles; and help-seeking</td>
<td>At four-year follow up: statistically significant reduced likelihood of the intervention group experiencing (56%) or perpetrating (92%) physical and/or sexual violence At one-year follow up: intervention group significantly less accepting of dating violence, but no statistically significant difference in attitudes towards gender roles At one-month follow up: statistically significant improvement in attitudes towards gender roles Limitations: HIV-related outcomes not included</td>
<td>This is a rigorously evaluated intervention with long-term follow up. The effects of the programme were not modified or influenced by sex or race. Its impact on actual perpetration and victimization of violence is very encouraging The evaluation shows that changes in behaviour in terms of perpetration and experience of violence are seen over the longer term, whereas attitudinal changes started earlier The implications of such interventions in low- and middle-income resource settings are not known. A South Africa adaptation of this intervention is ongoing</td>
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<td>Project Parvartan, India (185) Adaptation of the USA based Coaching boys into men intervention (186, 187)</td>
<td>Adolescent boys – athletes (10-16 years of age) playing cricket from schools in Mumbai Athletes from a low-income neighbourhood to form community cricket teams Cricket coaches and mentors affiliated with schools and the Cricket Association</td>
<td>The intervention raises awareness about abusive and disrespectful behaviours, promotes gender equitable and non-violent attitudes and teaches skills to speak up and intervene when witnessing harmful, abusive and disrespectful behaviours Activities include: training of 26 coaches and mentors (12 days over four months) in using a toolkit to facilitate discussions on issues of respect, insulting language, harmful and abusive behaviours towards women and girls, relationship abuse and gender norms; group discussions on toolkit topics with school and community athlete teams are facilitated by the coaches and mentors on a weekly basis before the game</td>
<td>Quasi-experimental: pre- and post-survey with comparison group In-depth interviews with coaches, mentors and selected female relatives of coaches and mentors Sample; n=336 (half each from schools and community) athletes in the intervention group and 274 in the control group Follow-up at one year Outcomes: attitudes towards gender roles and violence against women and girls; intention to respond to hypothetical scenarios of abuse against girls; actual bystander behaviours to witnessing abuse; violence perpetration; self-reported behaviour change</td>
<td>Compared to control group, intervention participants showed significantly more positive shift towards gender equitable attitudes Compared to community athletes, no change in intervention group’s attitudes towards acceptability of violence against girls. There was no change in intervention group’s bystander behaviours While community athletes showed some reduction in sexual harassment of girls, there was substantial difference in baseline between intervention and control groups Coaches and mentors reported more gender equitable norms after the intervention and were less likely to justify wife beating Limitations: No randomization; data on violence perpetration limited to sexual abuse only; no data on HIV-related outcomes</td>
<td>The mentors from schools and school-based athletes were older and hence, may have more rigid gender attitudes. This may explain why attitudinal change among school-based athletes did not change significantly Mentors for community athletes were younger and closer in age to the athletes and may have held less rigid gender attitudes. Hence, they may have been able to influence the community athletes Given the short duration of the programme, the sustainability of results is questionable, particularly given that unequal norms and attitudes are deeply culturally and socially rooted. To make changes, such efforts may need to be more widely institutionalized and reinforced with other channels of communication influencing the athletes, coaches and mentors</td>
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