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Whose turn to do the dishes? Transforming gender attitudes and behaviours among very young adolescents in Nepal

Rebecka Lundgren, Miranda Beckman, Surendra Prasad Chaurasiya, Bhawna Subhedi and Brad Kerner

Men who use caring words instead of violence, and who are equal partners in nurturing their children and caring for their homes, are not formed overnight. Attitudes and behaviours that lead to gender equality are developed through a socialisation process beginning at birth. Early adolescence presents a window of opportunity to intervene before individuals solidify their ideas about gender roles and norms. The knowledge, attitudes, and skills acquired between the ages of 10 and 14 are particularly influential. Unfortunately, development research and programme initiatives addressing gender inequity have focused little on these issues. Save the Children's Choices curriculum consists of eight developmentally appropriate activities, supporting very young adolescents – that is, children aged 10–14 – to explore alternative views of masculinities and femininities. The hope is that this will lead to better sexual and reproductive health outcomes for participants and their communities in the future. This article focuses on Choices and its impact in Siraha district, Nepal. Research revealed changes in children's gendered attitudes and behaviour relating to discrimination, social image, control and dominance, violence, attitudes to girls' education, and acceptance of traditional gender norms, before and after participating in Choices.

Les hommes qui emploient des mots attentionnés au lieu de la violence, et qui sont des partenaires égaux dans l'éducation de leurs enfants et les tâches ménagères ne se forment pas du jour au lendemain. Les attitudes et les comportements qui aboutissent à l'égalité de genre sont développés à travers un processus de socialisation qui commence à la naissance. La jeune adolescence présente une opportunité pour intervenir avant que les personnes ne solidifient leurs idées sur les rôles et les normes de genre. Les connaissances, les attitudes et les compétences acquises entre les âges de dix et 14 ans sont tout particulièrement influentes. Malheureusement, les recherches de développement et les initiatives de programme qui luttent contre l'iniquité de genre ne se sont guère concentrées sur ces questions. Le programme d'enseignement Choices de Save the Children se compose de huit activités appropriées sur le plan développemental, qui aident les très jeunes adolescents (TJA) – autrement dit les enfants d'entre dix et 14

ans – à examiner d'autres vues possibles des masculinités et des féminités. On espère que cela aboutira à de meilleurs résultats sur le plan de la santé sexuelle et génésique pour les participants et leurs communautés respectives à l'avenir. Cet article se concentre sur le programme Choices et son impact dans le district de Siraha, au Népal. Les recherches ont révélé des changements au niveau des attitudes et des comportements liés au genre en ce qui concerne la discrimination, l'image sociale, le contrôle et la dominance, les attitudes relatives à l'éducation des filles et l'acceptation des normes traditionnelles de genre, avant et après avoir participé à Choices.

Los hombres que emplean palabras de cariño en vez de violencia y que comparten en condiciones de igualdad el cuidado de sus hijos y de su hogar no se han vuelto así de la noche a la mañana. Al respecto, cabe señalar que las actitudes y los comportamientos que contribuyen a la igualdad de género se desarrollan durante un proceso de socialización que comienza con el recién nacido. En este sentido, la adolescencia temprana representa una buena oportunidad para influir en los jóvenes, antes de que sus ideas acerca de los roles y las normas atribuidas a los géneros se consoliden. Los conocimientos, las actitudes y las habilidades adquiridos entre los 10 y 14 años, ejercen mucha influencia. Desgraciadamente, las investigaciones sobre desarrollo y las iniciativas programáticas sobre la desigualdad de género no se han centrado en estos temas. El programa Choices de Save the Children apoya a los AMJ –niños en edades de 10 a 14 años– a descubrir opiniones alternativas sobre masculinidades y feminidades, a través de ocho actividades apropiadas en términos del desarrollo infantil. La idea es que lo anterior, en el futuro, producirá mejores resultados en términos de salud sexual y reproductiva tanto para los participantes como para sus comunidades. Este artículo se centra en el programa Choices y en los resultados que obtuvo en el distrito de Siraha, en Nepal. La investigación constató cambios en los individuos que participaron del programa, visibles en las actitudes y en el comportamiento basado en el género, en relación a temas como la discriminación, la imagen social, el control y la dominación, la violencia, las actitudes respecto a la educación para niñas y a la aceptación de las normas de género tradicionales.

Key words: Nepal; gender; very young adolescents; projective techniques; gender transformation

Gendered hopes and dreams

A Nepali proverb states: 'Educating a girl is like watering your neighbour's garden'. This refers to the fact that while a Nepalese girl contributes immensely to her family's welfare, she is not considered worthy of investment, because she is destined to marry and contribute to her husband's household. However, despite this view, which justifies

natal families investing in the boys who will stay at home rather than the girls who will leave them, a rights-based approach to development asserts that every girl deserves equal opportunities in life. For a girl, equal rights include the opportunity to embrace her hopes and dreams, continue her education, live free from violence, and choose when to have her first child. For these rights to be realised, boys, as well as girls, need to be on board.

Gender norms and the importance of very young adolescence

Gender norms – as well as the social reproduction of these norms in institutions and cultural practices – are directly related to behaviour that affects health, and the ensuing quality of life (Greene and Barker 2011). Norms around sexual relationships, fertility control, the use of physical violence, and alcohol and drug use, are strongly influenced by gender norms which determine how men interact with their partners, families, and children (Interagency Gender Working Group 2011). In 2006, a global systematic review of factors shaping young people's sexual behaviour confirmed that gender stereotypes and different expectations about appropriate sexual behaviour for boys and girls influence sexual decision-making (Marston and King 2006). These same gendered expectations dictate the extent to which young girls can travel away from home, and the extent to which they are allowed to mix with boys (International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) 2010). Gender stereotypes also shape the way young people communicate. Girls are often encouraged to be docile and reserved, while boys are expected to dominate and use rough language. While girls may show their feelings, boys are often teased for revealing their emotions. Boys learn early that yielding power and authority over others brings them praise and recognition of their masculinity (ICRW 2010).

Changes in gender-related social norms, values, and practices can ultimately transform the way society values girls, and improve women's status. Over time, these changes should result in improved health and increased well-being for men and women. In order to influence these deep-rooted beliefs, however, development programmes seeking to promote gender equality and sexual and reproductive health must start early (Centre for Development and Population Activities 2010). Research shows that it is possible to challenge dominant roles of masculinity and femininity by modelling alternative options, and when norms become less rigid, the outcome is improved reproductive health, increased female educational attainment, and decreased interpersonal violence (Barker *et al.* 2007).

Increasingly, global practitioners recognise that early adolescence presents a unique window of opportunity to make a difference in the lives of boys and girls before their gender roles and norms are solidified. This article details the results of a gender transformative curriculum, Choices, designed and implemented by Save the Children. Choices sought to enable very young adolescents (VYAs) – that is, boys and girls aged 10–14 years old – to transform their thinking about gender norms – that is, social

expectations of appropriate roles and behaviours for men (and boys) and women (and girls); and to recognise gendered differences and inequality. The Choices programme aimed to help VYAs by identifying simple actions to reduce this 'gender gap' so that girls and boys face the future on equal terms. Choices is one of the first interventions specifically designed to address inequitable gender norms for use with VYAs. The curriculum encourages these children to explore expressions of positive gender roles – at a time in their lives when they are forming the basis of their identities, roles, and responsibilities as individuals among their peers – within their households, and within their communities.

Choices was piloted in May 2010, in Siraha district in the Terai region of Nepal. Here, orthodox religious beliefs have resulted in a higher prevalence of practices, such as early marriage, early motherhood, and *dahej* (dowry), than in other regions of the country (Bista 2008). The people of Nepal have closely held beliefs and customs based primarily on Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Women and girls in Nepal face discrimination on multiple levels by virtue of their sex, caste, and ethnicity. Throughout their lives, many women are required to practise restrictions that perpetuate gender discrimination and inhibit their full participation in school, family life, and economic activities, and are vulnerable to various forms of psychological and physical violence.

The pilot intervention was evaluated by the Institute for Reproductive Health of Georgetown University, USA. The programme evaluation provides ample opportunities to learn more about the vulnerabilities, challenges, and opportunities faced by children aged between 10 and 14. While research on gender equality and disparity is growing, there is a dearth of information about these issues as they relate to young adolescents. The World Health Organisation has recognised this as a critical issue (Dixon-Mueller 2011). Learning about this group is urgently required to ensure that development programmes – in particular, those focusing on sexual and reproductive health – effectively address the specific needs of this age group.

This article draws on the results of the Choices pilot evaluation. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods suggest that participation in Choices led to more equitable gender attitudes and behaviour. Children reported that they felt and behaved differently after participating in Choices, with boys becoming more involved in household chores, for example, and advocating on behalf of their sisters.

Choices: a gender transformative curriculum

Baseline research conducted with VYA boys and girls while developing the Choices curriculum showed a persistent gender gap regarding the division of household work, access to education, freedom to play, and overall autonomy. The Choices curriculum uses an emotion-based approach to target the key emotions and feelings that lead to behavioural choices. It does this through activities that encourage behaviour based on

an understanding and acceptance of gender equality. This results in girls, as well as boys, feeling respected, secure, and successful. Save the Children initially intended the curriculum to focus on boys; however, formative research conducted early on to identify boys' interests, beliefs, and values suggested that a relational approach – that is, involving both girls *and* boys – was more likely to be effective. The curriculum was designed to stimulate discussions between boys and girls, in which they can reflect on topics relating to power and gender, which are appropriate to their stage of development. Examples are hopes and dreams, actions that are fair and unfair, communication and respect.

The curriculum explored the following themes:

- Gender inequity and power; including the recognition that gender equity begins with small actions that earn respect from others.
- Boys can be respected even if they treat girls as equals.
- Social norms restrict boys from treating girls as equals.
- Boys and girls can express emotions and realise their hopes and dreams.
- Boys can empower girls to achieve their dreams.
- Girls can empower themselves to achieve their dreams.

Choices was piloted in 12 child clubs in the Bhawanipur and Pokharvinda Village Development Committees (VDCs) in the Siraha district of Nepal. Save the Children supports over 140 active child clubs in Siraha district in collaboration with local partner non-government organisations (NGOs). Child clubs are community based and governed and facilitated by children, with help from partner NGOs. Membership is open to all children in the community, both boys and girls and from all ethnic castes. Recruitment is done through children with a special emphasis on targeting marginalised children. The child clubs hold meetings every weekend of the year. Choices was implemented in weekly two-hour sessions during regular child club meetings, over a three-month period from May 2010 to July 2010. Implementation was overseen by a team of trained 18–20-year-old child club graduates from the community, one male and one female per club. A total of 309 children (48 per cent of whom were girls) participated in Choices. A further 294 children were used as a control group in our evaluation. They attend 12 child clubs in Chandraudhayapur and Devipur VDCs. The control group was matched to the experimental group on a range of factors such as access to roads, language, schools, and socioeconomic characteristics.

Evaluation methods: shifting the balance of power from researcher to participant

The evaluation of Choices set out to measure whether participation in the programme resulted in a statistically significant change to boys' and girls' attitudes to gender

issues, and whether this led in turn to a change in behaviour and practices. The evaluation used both quantitative and qualitative data. Outcomes measured in the evaluation are shown in [Table 1](#).

Young people in the experimental group were interviewed before and after participating in Choices. Structured interviews were conducted with members of both groups at baseline and endline, the latter one month after completion of the final session of Choices. Qualitative information was collected at the end of the programme only, with a selection of participants. In-depth interviews were conducted with 36 children from both the control and experimental group, and 24 boys and girls from each group participated in Photovoice: a technique in which participants are provided with cameras to capture issues of importance to them. Maithili-speaking field researchers conducted individual interviews and group discussions with young people and their parents. In keeping with ethical standards for research involving minors, Child Club facilitators held introduction sessions for parents and guardians to gain consent for their children’s participation. Informed assent was obtained from the children themselves. The research protocol and tools were approved by ethical review boards at Georgetown University and the Ministry of Health in Nepal.

The literature suggests that interviewer-led quantitative surveys and focus group discussions do not work well with VYA, who often have difficulty articulating their responses clearly, and may feel pressured to please the interviewer (Chong et al. 2006; Powers and Tiffany 2006). Most research methods advantage adults in terms of social and communication skills and knowledge; in light of this, the Choices evaluation developed participatory, visual, game-based methods which shifted the balance of power from researcher to participant (Dell Clark 2011). These more empowering

Table 1: Outcomes measured in the evaluation

Attitudes	Behaviours
Girls and boys can imagine a life in which men and women have equal opportunities.	Girls and boys talk about their feelings and dreams with each other.
Girls and boys accept non-traditional gender roles.	Girls and boys promote gender equity in their lives.
Girls and boys value relationships based on equality, respect, and intimacy.	Boys take action to improve the lives of their sisters.
Girls and boys value the role of men caring for their family as well as providing financial support.	Girls and boys don’t tease their peers for behaving in ways which are not consistent with traditional gender norms.
Girls and boys expect to make decisions jointly with their spouses.	

methods include techniques designed to tap into underlying motivations by offering youth stimuli on to which they can project their feelings (Soley and Smith 2008). These methods, often called projective techniques, are especially useful when respondents have contradictory attitudes, are reluctant to discuss sensitive topics, or are unable to articulate responses. Because there are no right or wrong answers, participants are often more comfortable providing honest responses than when asked direct questions (Soley and Smith 2008). For example, showing photos to respondents (photo interviewing) may trigger submerged responses, sharpen memories, and keep them focused on the topic. The Photovoice technique, which entails providing cameras to study participants to take photographs on a given topic and then facilitating discussion of respondent-selected photos, has proven particularly effective in engaging youth and promoting dialogue (Hergenrather *et al.* 2009).

Both the structured and in-depth interviews with VYA and parents used a mixture of rigorously pre-tested techniques such as card games, pile sorts, case studies, drawings, and a chore-tracking calendar. In-depth interviews included projective techniques using photos to explore boys' and girls' hopes and dreams, and to measure gender roles and attitudes. The interviews also included a projective drawing activity, asking children to draw a boy or a girl who had not participated in the Choices curriculum holding something that they value. They were asked to write something the child might say and then to draw that same child after completing the Choices curriculum. This technique quickly identified children's perceptions of their changes in behaviour and practices. In addition, six focus group discussions were held with 54 randomly selected parents (28 control, 26 experimental) to determine whether the children discussed gender topics at home, or had incorporated any changes into their routines since participating in Choices. The results of the in-depth interviews and group discussions were coded and analysed manually by theme.

Quantitative data were collected using four methods: a card game, an exercise sorting photographs, a scenario game called Arun's Dilemma, and an activity collecting brothers' and sisters' time-use data. In the next section, more details are given of each of these methods and the results are discussed. In addition, scales were developed to measure statistically significant changes in attitudes to gender norms and roles. These were used during baseline and endline interviews with children in both the experimental and control groups. Most of the data were compiled into scales measuring discrimination, gender roles, and gender-equitable behaviours and practices.¹

What was the effect of Choices participation?

Quantitative perspectives

1. *Gender attitudes: card game.* To explore gender attitudes, a deck of colour-coded cards was printed with gender value statements. In interviews with individual boys and

girls, they were asked to read the statement on each card (while the interviewers also read the statement out loud to make sure they understood well) and place them into a container marked agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. Each of the statements was grouped into one of five scales: discrimination, social image, violence, control/dominance, and girls' education (Table 2).

Our findings show that the attitudes of boys and girls, as measured by each of the scales, were significantly more equitable after participating in Choices (see Table 3). For example, the mean score of participants expressing gender-equitable attitudes towards girls' education increased from 0.43 to 0.78 (scores ranged from 0 to 1, where values closer to 1 represent more gender-equitable outcomes than scores closer to 0). No significant differences were observed between the attitudes of youth in the control and experimental groups at baseline, and slight or no changes were observed in the control group over time.

2. *Gender roles: photo pile sort.* Children were asked to review a deck of cards with photos of common household duties or roles traditionally categorised as either male or female. Participants sorted the cards into envelopes indicating whether they felt that this task could be performed by a male, female, or someone of either sex. Figure 1 shows that baseline measures for this scale were similar at baseline in the control and experimental groups, with a significant change in the experimental group only (from 0.33 to 0.82). Thus, boys and girls who participated in Choices were more likely to consider a broad range of household roles such as washing dishes or sweeping the floor as gender neutral, tasks that should be performed by both boys and girls.

3. *Gender inequality: Arun's Dilemma.* To further assess gender role attitudes, the evaluation used scenarios to elicit the children's opinions in response to a fictional character. Participants were presented with a story about Arun, who wanted to help his sister with her chores, but feared the reaction of his parents and friends. During baseline and endline interviews, children were asked to state whether they agreed or disagreed with gender role statements related to the story. Most agreed with the traditional gender norms when interviewed at baseline, in both control and experimental groups; but after Choices, the experimental group rejected the idea of such rigid, stereotypical gender norms, their score increasing significantly from 0.49 to 0.85 (Figures 2 and 3).

4. *Gender-equitable behaviour: brother/sister time and task distribution.* This activity, which measured gender inequality, was limited to sets of opposite-sex siblings (brothers and sisters) who were both participating in the child clubs. A total of 31 sibling pairs participated in this activity in the experimental group; in the control group, 31 pairs participated at baseline, and 33 at endline. Siblings were asked to indicate on a pie chart the frequency with which they performed household chores, assisted siblings with schoolwork, and expressed affection for their brother or sister in the past week, as well as how frequently their sibling had performed that same activity. Expressing affection was included as a goal of the intervention because the formative research results

Table 2: Gender attitudes scales

Scale name and description	Items included in scale
Discrimination scale: discrimination based on sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daughters should be sent to school only if they are not needed to help at home. • A woman should not expect to inherit her father's property. • It's more important for boys to get an education than it is for girls. • Daughters should have just the same chance to work outside the home as sons. • Boys should have more free time than girls. • If a family can only afford for one child to go to school it should be the boy. • At home boys should always eat first.
Social image scale: perception of social image and expectations from men/women in society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The more successful the boy is in his profession the more he deserves to get dowry. • Boys who help with chores are considered weak by their friends. • A boy who expresses his affection for his sister is weak.
Violence scale: attitudes toward gender-based violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is okay for a man to hit his wife if she disagrees with him. • A woman should tolerate violence to keep the family together.
Control/dominance scale: social norms toward control and dominance over women within the family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A girl who disagrees with her brother in public is impolite. • A good woman never questions her husband's opinions, even if she is not sure she agrees with them. • When I get married, I would rather my spouse be obedient than educated.
Girls' education scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daughters should be sent to school only if they are not needed to help at home. • Giving dowry to a daughter is more/as important than investing in her education. • It's more important for boys to get an education than it is for girls. • If a family can only afford for one child to go to school it should be the boy.

revealed that boys were motivated to change their behaviour by receiving appreciation from their sisters. Answers were converted into percentages and compiled into a scale. While the number of participants in this activity is too small to test statistical

Table 3: Gender attitudes – card game results

Scales	Baseline		Endline	
	Control (n = 294)	Experimental (n = 309)	Control (n = 294)	Experimental (n = 309)
1. Discrimination	0.388	0.421	0.475	0.823
2. Social image	0.401	0.426	0.419	0.786
3. Control/dominance	0.372	0.364	0.419	0.629
4. Violence	0.457	0.457	0.440	0.812
5. Girls' education	0.322	0.385	0.434	0.778

significance, there is an apparent shift toward more gender-equitable behaviour among boys who participated in Choices. Self-reported increases in gender-equitable behaviour (e.g. boys helping girls with their schoolwork) were corroborated by their siblings.

Qualitative perspectives

As stated earlier, three qualitative components captured the words of children and their parents on gender roles and attitudes: an in-depth interview using photo interviewing and projective drawing techniques; Photovoice; and focus group discussions with parents. A total of 76 randomly selected children participated: 36 participants each

Figure 1: Change in acceptance of gender roles before and after Choices.

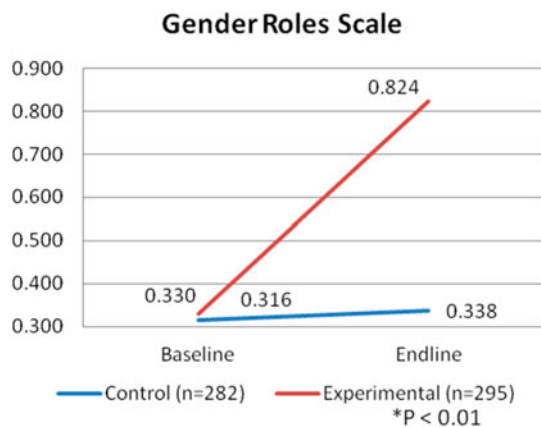
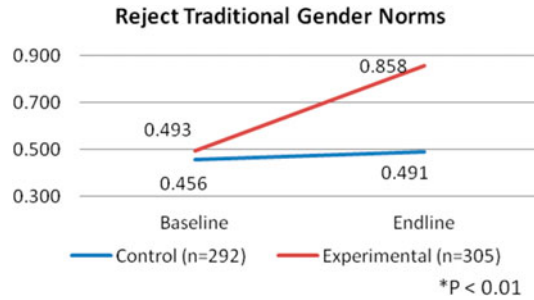


Figure 2: Changes in scale rejecting traditional gender norms.



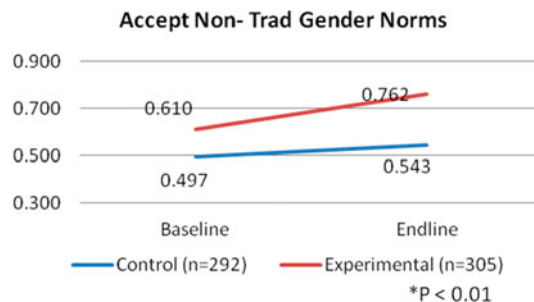
from the control and experimental group for the in-depth interview, and 48 for Photovoice. Equal numbers of boys and girls were selected. Three focus groups were conducted with parents in both the control and experimental groups, using similar activities to those employed in the in-depth interviews with young people.

1. Photo interviewing: hopes and dreams.

After I learn to read and write I will be able to educate my family. I will also teach my sister and help her in her work. (Boy, from experimental group, Focus Group Discussion, Siraha, August 2010)

This activity used photos of a wide variety of doors (some open, others closed, locked, simple, ornate, new or old and broken) to help children visualise their hopes and dreams for the future. Children were told to choose a door, imagine walking through it and were then asked to describe the future awaiting them on the other side. Girls and

Figure 3: Changes in scale accepting non-traditional gender norms.



boys alike, from both control and experimental areas, dreamed of becoming doctors and teachers, earning respect and money, and supporting their family. Most also mentioned their hopes for a happy family and the ability to educate their children. Choices participants were optimistic about their futures; all, except one boy, expressed the belief that their dreams would come true, with hard work, discipline, attentive study, and support from their families. Control group members were less confident, and more fatalistic; out of 18 boys, seven reported that their dreams would not come true, and five others were unsure. The results of the girls in the control group were similar. Several boys stated that they were working toward equality in their village, and advocating for their sisters' education.

2. *Photo interviewing: 'What I want in my spouse'*. This activity measured VYAs' ideas of adult masculinity and femininity in a way that would be relevant to them. Participants examined photos depicting Nepali men and women performing different activities and responded to questions about what they desire in their future spouse. All children valued education, with girls also emphasising financial stability and a man's ability to express affection to both his spouse and children. 'We often see mothers playing with children, but to see a father play with his children is really important for me', commented a girl in the experimental group.

Boys from both groups stated that a girl roaming independently or freely was not desirable. Boys in the control group expressed greater disapproval of wives who perform non-traditional roles, such as working outside the home, than those in the experimental group. In contrast, boys in the experimental group valued a woman's financial contributions. Spousal traits that girls cited as undesirable included: alcohol use, domestic violence, fighting, being 'quarrelsome', irresponsible, lazy, and 'Eve-teasing' (sexual harassment), the latter cited only by girls in the experimental group.

3. *Photo interviewing: gender roles.*

If everyone's brother was like this, life would be better. (Girl, experimental group, Focus Group Discussion, Siraha, August 2010)

The country will develop with girls' independence and change the living standard. (Boy, experimental group, Focus Group Discussion, Siraha, August 2010)

This activity explored VYAs' attitudes towards gender roles, empathy towards girls, and awareness of gender inequity. VYAs were shown photographs of boys and girls in traditional and non-traditional gender roles, such as boys studying while girls washed dishes, or boys helping their siblings with female-associated chores. Subsequently, they were asked to share their opinions of the situation depicted in the photos and their feelings for each of the individuals pictured. Choices participants were much more likely to express acceptance of non-traditional gender roles and to value the role of

men providing emotional support than were non-participants. VYAs in the experimental group were also more confident discussing their feelings and promoting gender equality. For example, Choices boys consistently mentioned that they were acting to improve the lives of their sisters, most notably assisting them with their work and advocating for their continued education. They also appeared less likely to tease their male peers when they engaged in tasks commonly associated with women, such as housework. It is important to note that although boys from the control group expressed discomfort with the idea of performing 'girls' work', they also felt empathy for girls, and discomfort with situations where boys received preferential treatment. Girls do not need the Choices curriculum to understand that their lives are difficult. For example, one girl looked at a photograph and commented, 'This girl must feel hurt and wish she had time to study'. Choices girls were more likely than their counterparts in the control group to state that their brothers should help them.

4. *Projective drawing: journey of change.*

People laugh at a man who cooks food in their home. But from the day we have taken Choices classes, our brothers have started helping us and we help them too. We will teach the same to our friends in our village as well. (Girl after participation in Choices)

A projective drawing activity entitled 'Journey of Change' collected information on VYAs' perceptions of changes in their attitudes and practices after completing Choices. The 18 participants were instructed to fold a piece of paper in half and draw: (1) a boy or a girl holding something they value; (2) images in the background depicting their life situation; and (3) a comment they might make, before and after completing the curriculum. Children in the control group were asked to complete the same activity for the present moment only. Drawings from the control group included girls cooking food, cutting grass, sweeping the house, returning from school and washing dishes, and boys going to school, playing games, studying, and working in the house. Few girls drew photos of girls studying, and only one drew a girl playing a game.

Most girls who completed Choices sketched sickles to cut grass, brooms, and washing dishes in the 'before' sketch, and books and pens in the 'after' sketch. Boys drew farming, ploughing, smoking cigarettes, teasing girls, hanging out, herding animals and grass cutting 'before', and drew pictures of going to school in the 'after' sketches. Boys and girls alike wrote phrases encouraging school attendance and sibling co-operation. When discussing the sketches, girls stated that they were too focused on household chores prior to the Choices curriculum, and now give priority to their education and made an effort to express their love and thanks to their brothers. Choices seeks to encourage siblings to express affection because the formative research revealed that boys are motivated to act in gender-equitable ways when they receive positive feedback from

their sisters. Boys stated that they now realise how important it is to advocate on behalf of their sisters and help them with their chores and schoolwork.

5. *Photovoice*. Previous research has shown that in order to change gender norms, it is necessary to show that alternative gender norms exist in the community. Photovoice was selected as a method of exploring young people's expectations of gender roles in their community. Forty-eight VYAs, from both control and experimental groups, were given disposable cameras, and instructed to take photos with the guiding question: 'What is life like for boys and girls in your community?' Children were taught how to use the cameras, but the guiding question was not qualified. After the photos were developed, two groups each of children in the control and experimental areas discussed their opinions of the situations depicted in their photographs. Facilitators guided the discussions, but the children selected the photos they wanted to talk about, directing the course of the conversation and eliciting the themes important to them.

The images of gendered behaviour captured by Choices participants differed markedly from those of the control group. Participants photographed community members acting in non-traditional roles, for example men and boys cooking, washing dishes, or helping women and girls with household chores. Most photos from the control group reflected difference-based gender stereotypes, with only a few photos depicting individuals challenging these stereotypes through adopting atypical roles.

The discussions that followed in the experimental and the control groups had similarities as well as differences. Almost all of the boys in both groups recognised that life for boys and girls is not equal in their community. In response to one photo, a Choices boy commented, 'I don't feel good about my culture and the roles assigned to boys and girls. He [the boy in the photo] should talk to his parents about his sister's education. [The boy] doesn't know about gender equality and relationships'. Participants discussed educational disparities, explaining that boys are sent to higher-quality private schools, while girls tend to be sent to the less-desirable government schools, and then only if they can manage school in addition to their household chores. Boys stated that men enjoy freedom and they can hang out or play cards in their leisure time, while girls must remain at home. Boys in both groups recognised their potential role as advocates for their sisters, and nearly all stated the need to work toward gender equality.

A difference noted between Choices participants and members of the control group is that most participants in Choices stated that girls in their community were unhappy and would be happier if they had more opportunities and freedom like their brothers. Both boys and girls said there should be no discrimination between sons and daughters and that parents should strive to provide equal opportunities for both. Girls participating in Choices said that women are capable of doing all things; earning money, working in the field, and cutting wood. They further stated that when men and boys wash clothes or prepare meals at home, they are ridiculed; but after participating in Choices, girls' brothers started helping them, and they encouraged their friends to do the same.

In the control group, by contrast, some boys stated that work should be assigned based on gender norms. Most boys felt it was beneficial for girls to be groomed to be good housewives, although a handful stated that girls may want to study, and might not be happy with their lives. Girls in the control group said there is discrimination between girls and boys in terms of the division of work, education, and mobility; but most also expressed acceptance of the status quo.

6. *Focus group discussions with parents.* Parents in control and experimental areas were selected, based on their availability and willingness to participate, for three single-sex and mixed-sex focus group discussions, using the method of photo interviewing described earlier. None of the parents participated in Choices directly, but parents of children in the experimental area had attended an orientation about Choices, and were aware of their children's participation. In the control area, parents were only aware that their children were in child clubs. Focus group discussions with parents were used to determine whether they perceived any changes in their children's attitudes and/or behaviour in relation to gender roles within the household. If parents were able to report such changes, they were asked how they had reacted to those changes, and what the impact of those changes were.

Parents in both groups recognised inequality in the photo of the boy studying while the girl did her chores. They disagreed with the division of gender roles portrayed in the photo, felt empathy for the girl, and stated that the boy would probably prefer that his sister also attend school. While discussing photos depicting brothers and sisters co-operating, parents whose children participated in Choices stated that although it was unusual to see brothers helping sisters, in the past three months (the duration of the curriculum) it had been occurring in their households, suggesting that participation in Choices did impact behaviour, and also mentioned increased 'harmony' in their home. Mothers in the control area commented that their sons did not help their sisters like this and they do not see this type of co-operation in their community. Participants were also shown photos of parents and children talking. Only parents of Choices participants reported that their sons talked to them about equality for their sisters.

Conclusions about the programme impact

The results of this evaluation suggest that participation in Choices led to more equitable gender attitudes and behaviour. Statistically significant changes were observed in the pre- and post-test scores of the experimental group, while no differences were seen in the control group. Qualitative data support this conclusion: VYAs reported that they felt and behaved differently after participating in Choices. Parents noted changes in their children, and siblings noted changes in each other. Participation in Choices appeared to broaden children's perception of gender roles, including the role of women as wage earners and men as nurturers. It also seemed to have helped them recognise that sexual harassment and teasing boys who step out of the 'gender box' is inappropriate. Choices

boys started expressing love and thanks to their sisters by helping them with their household chores and school assignments. Choices girls began speaking out in peer discussions and felt empowered to talk to their parents about their future. Some talked with their parents about staying in school or delaying marriage. Girls also reported that their brothers advocated with their parents on their behalf.

While parents did not participate directly in Choices, the results of the parent focus groups suggest that the programme did encourage parent–child communication, and exposed parents to new ideas and ways of behaving through their children. Parents in the experimental group remarked that brothers and sisters were more co-operative, helping each other with household chores and studies.

However, despite these promising results, it is worthwhile noting that the study was limited geographically and applied over a short time period, so the results may not be generalisable to other contexts. Moreover, demonstrated gender-equitable forms of behaviour observed during the intervention may fade over time without adequate reinforcement.

Future directions: gender-equitable hopes and dreams

The results described here suggest that implementation of Choices at greater scale, along with complementary activities for parents, and interventions to address structural factors, could make a significant contribution to efforts to achieve greater equity between men and women in areas such as education, household decision-making, and sexual relationships. Choices effectively used the period of early adolescence, when children are rapidly changing, and receptive to influences which challenge their attitudes and beliefs, through the use of participatory and reflective approaches, to engage VYAs and help them develop more gender-equitable behaviours. Scaling up the curriculum through schools and engaging parents through complementary programming is part of a multi-prong approach to community-level mobilisation to advance gender equity that Save the Children is pursuing in Nepal and other countries around the world. Indeed, gender transformative programmes for VYAs, such as Choices, have the potential for widespread scale up through existing organisations such as child clubs, schools, and other faith-based organisations. In Nepal alone, for example, there are over 30,000 child clubs run by NGOs and multi-lateral and government organisations.

These findings suggest that even short-term interventions for children in the very young adolescent phase can, if well-planned, make a difference, and it is probable that a longer-term intervention could have sustainable impact. Challenging gender disparities and norms through reflection and action should not be restricted to older adolescents and adults; early adolescence is an opportune moment to lay the foundation for transformation of gender-equitable norms. Many programmes struggle to 're-form' gender norms among youth who have already reached puberty; our experience in Nepal suggests that efforts to 'form' pro-social, equitable gender norms

at younger ages may be an easier route to gender equality. VYA programmes could also complement other gender equity initiatives, laying the foundation, for example, for sexual and reproductive health interventions for older youth. In addition, interventions such as Choices that engage emotions as levers of change can prepare the ground for gender-equal policies designed to elevate women's status.

Early adolescence, the developmental stage in which children begin to move from concrete to semi-abstract thinking, represents a real window of opportunity for sowing the seeds of gender equity. During this phase, children begin to understand the concept of fairness and equity. In fact, recent research on the brain suggests that VYA are naturally inclined to feel empathy for others (University of Chicago 2008). Therefore boys, for example, can begin to understand the sadness of girls who are unable to aspire to the same futures dreamed of by their brothers.

Some may ask, 'Is it fair to encourage girls to develop hopes and dreams which they are unlikely to achieve?' It is our belief that girls, as well as boys, have a fundamental right to dream big, and cherish their hopes. When boys realise that their sisters aspire to the same dreams they do, but see little hope of achieving them, they are taking an important step along the road to gender equality. Our hope is that this journey will help create healthier, happier, and more productive families and communities.

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Note

- 1 PASW Statistics18 software was used to develop scales to measure gender attitudes and roles. Scores ranged from 0 to 1, where values closer to 1 represent more gender-equitable outcomes than scores closer to 0. Items which expressed gender-inequitable norms were reverse coded, such as, 'If a family can only afford for one child to go to school it should be the boy'. Analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of greater than 0.60 for each scale, signifying good internal consistency or reliability of the variables used to measure each theme. Independent sample *t*-tests were conducted to assess statistical differences in means between the control and experimental groups at baseline and endline. The results of the in-depth interviews and group discussions were coded and analysed manually by theme.

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