

REAL FATHERS INITIATIVE



RESPONSIBLE, ENGAGED and LOVING (REAL) FATHERS INITIATIVE

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Violence prevention mentoring program for young, first time fathers aged 16-25 years old

PILOT EVALUATION PERIOD

2013 - 2015

PARTNERS

- Institute for Reproductive Health, Georgetown University
- Save the Children International

PILOT LOCATION

Amuru District, Northern Uganda



Violence against women and children is a global public health problem. In Uganda, six out of ten women report experiencing emotional, physical or sexual violence from a current or recent partner.¹ In a survey of 1,000 children aged 8 to 18 years across five Ugandan districts more than 98% of children reported experiencing physical or emotional violence and 76% reported sexual violence.²

Early childhood experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) and/or harsh physical punishment are cyclically linked to perpetration of violence later in life.³ Fatherhood programs can be an effective entryway to break this intergenerational cycle of violence. Becoming a father is an important life transition that presents the opportunity to introduce positive masculinities and more gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors, including non-violent conflict resolution and positive discipline.

What is REAL Fathers?

Grounded in formative research, REAL is a community-based mentoring program that works with young fathers (16-25 years old) who are parenting a child 1-3 years old. REAL aims to:

- Improve parenting attitudes and confidence in using nonviolent discipline
- Decrease use of intimate partner violence and physical punishment of children
- Foster acceptance of non-traditional gender roles in parenting

HOW DOES REAL WORK?

Community Selection of Participants

Local chiefs identify eligible young fathers from their community to participate in the program. Then, selected young fathers and their wives reflect on the qualities of someone whom they respect and can turn to for advice, and choose a man from their community to serve as their group mentor. For the pilot, 64 mentors in 8 parishes were recruited and trained in two one-week sessions.

Mentoring Program

Over a period of six months, selected mentors have 12 points of contact with young fathers:

- Four individual sessions
- Two couple sessions
- Six group sessions with three mentors and their mentees (once with wives)

At each session, mentors give the young fathers homework that involves practicing new skills such as child care and communication. In the pilot, mentors received a bicycle to facilitate visits to young fathers, but no other stipend.

Curriculum Themes

1. *Fatherhood*
2. *Tips and Tricks to Being a REAL Father*
3. *Loving My Family*
4. *Dreams of My Family*
5. *Communication*
6. *Parenting*



Awareness-Raising Campaign: Posters

A community awareness campaign to support norm change is conducted in all pilot villages. Pre-tested images with messages related to each of the six themes are displayed on large posters. The locations of the posters are strategically chosen by young fathers in each community, with the purpose of catalyzing conversation. The group sessions are also held around these posters to reinforce group commitments.



Community Celebrations

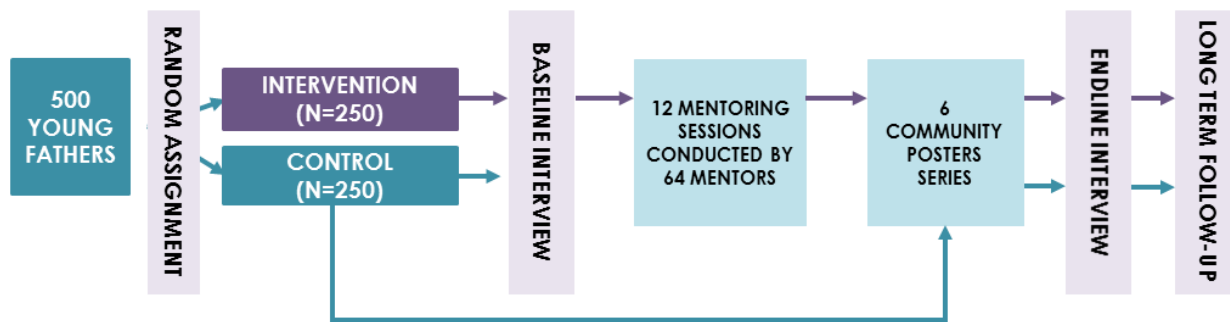
After the final session, a Community Celebration is held for young fathers come to together with their families and community elders to share what they have learned. This public forum provides an opportunity for community members to share successes and challenges, and for young fathers to express their commitment to sustain the positive changes they have made.

HOW WAS REAL EVALUATED?

To evaluate REAL, 500 young fathers were randomly assigned to either participate in the full set of activities (250), or to a control group, receiving only the community poster series (250). We wanted to understand what difference REAL made both over a short and long term period, in addition to exploring young wives experiences' with the program. To assess these, we conducted:

- Surveys with 500 young fathers at three time points: before REAL began (baseline), three months after the project ended (endline), and one year after the project ended (long term follow-up)
- Life history interviews at endline with 20 young fathers to understand their participation in REAL, challenges in adopting new practices, and changes in their lives
- In depth interviews with ten wives of young fathers at endline, triangulating their insights and perspectives on the program

Research Design



Although young fathers were originally randomly assigned to control and intervention groups, we could not track group assignment over time due to confidentiality issues and the sensitive nature of the study topic. As a result, survey data were analyzed by comparing young fathers who participated in at least one individual and one group mentoring session (256 exposed young fathers), versus men who did not (179 unexposed young fathers) after the intervention, and again one year later.

WHAT WAS THE REAL EFFECT?

Improvements in Intimate Partner Relationships

REAL had a significant, long term effect in reducing use of any IPV by young fathers. Young fathers exposed to REAL were half as likely as those unexposed to report using any form of IPV (physical, psychological, or verbal) at endline and one year after project end. Specifically, REAL appeared to have a stronger effect on psychological and verbal violence, with young fathers exposed to REAL being half as likely to use either forms of violence at both endline and the long term follow-up. Likelihood of physical violence also decreased among young fathers in REAL, but the effect was weaker and insignificant.

Improved couple communication skills were significant and sustained over time for young fathers participating in REAL. Young fathers exposed to the intervention were more than twice as likely as those not exposed to use couple communication skills – such as listening to their partner and telling their partner that they appreciated them – in both the short and longer term.



Pilot Results After 1 Year Decreased use of any form of violence sustained

2014
↓ .48
(0.31, 0.76)**

2015
↓ .47
(0.31, 0.77)**

Adjusted for employment, exposure to violence as child, alcohol use and couple communication. P-values: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$



Before this mentorship, I was a drunkard and violent (...) after REAL Fathers, (...) my violence vanished, I started communicating and working well with my wife. I am responsible now. I look after our child at home most of the time. I advocated to my friends to stop drinking alcohol and battering their wives."

YOUNG FATHER, NORTHERN UGANDA

Positive Parenting Practices and Child Interaction

The REAL package had a significant effect on reducing use of physical child punishment in the long term, but not in the short term. One year later, young fathers participating in REAL were half as likely to use physical child punishment. However, the effect was weaker and insignificant in the short term, immediately after the intervention.



Pilot Results After 1 Year Use of physical punishment decreased over time

2014
↓ .84
(0.55, 1.28)

2015
↓ .52
(0.38, 0.82)**

Adjusted for employment, exposure to violence as child, alcohol use and couple communication. P-values: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Significant positive intervention effects were also found on rejecting the use of physical child punishment and increasing father-child interaction, both of which were significant at both time points, and became even stronger over time. For instance, young fathers participating in REAL were twice as likely to engage and interact with their child in activities such as playing, singing songs, and naming or counting things at the end of the project. This effect was even stronger one year later, when the same young fathers were almost three times as likely to engage in the father-child interaction activities. In some cases, young wives interviewed also shared how their partner's involvement in REAL improved their own relationship with their children.

“What I like to do with my children, for example when I return from the garden, I sit and chat with them, I teach them some good things for life (...) In the past I used to be so rough with them so they kept a distance from me, and now they like me so much, they run to welcome me and also play with me.”

YOUNG WIFE, NORTHERN UGANDA

Interestingly, the REAL package had no significant effect in the short term in shifting young father's attitudes around traditional gender roles in caregiving and decision-making. However, the effect became stronger and significant at the long-term follow-up, with young fathers exposed to the intervention being half as likely to agree that “bathing and feeding the child is the woman's responsibility,” among other norms. This finding suggests that shifting attitudes and gender norms around child care and caregiving decision-making takes time and practice, requiring more intensive, repeated, and longer term activities.

1. Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and ICF International Inc. (2012), Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2011. Kampala, Uganda: UBOS and Calverton, Maryland: ICF International Inc.
2. Naker, D. (2005). Violence Against Children: The Voices of Ugandan Children and Adults. Raising Voices and Save the Children.
3. Heise, L. L. (1998). “Violence Against Women.” Violence Against Women 4(3): 262-290.

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What is next for REAL?

Given the positive short and longer-term effects, the next step is to explore the feasibility of scaling up REAL to achieve impact at a population level. With this in mind, REAL is now being integrated into Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and Youth Initiative for Employment program and Sustainable Livelihood and Development (YIELD) programs in Karamoja and Northern Ugandan regions, respectively. A new family planning component has also been added to test whether the REAL Fathers model can increase modern family planning use. Final long-term evaluation results of the scale-up phase will be available in 2018.

What can you do?

Technical Experts, Policy Makers, and Program Managers:

- ✓ Invest time and resources to engage young fathers in programs and research
- ✓ Document and share lessons learned about involving men and fathers in parenting and violence prevention programs
- ✓ Advocate for programs and research that engage young fathers and communities

FOR MORE INFORMATION: WWW.IRH.ORG/PROJECTS/REAL-FATHERS-INITIATIVE

