



PROGRAMME SUMMARY

The REAL Fathers Initiative in Northern Uganda

PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE

The Responsible, Engaged and Loving (REAL) Fathers programme supported young fathers (aged 16 to 25 years) in Northern Uganda to build the knowledge and skills to practice non-violent parenting and non-violent intimate partner relations. The Initiative combined a 12-session curriculum for mentors, a mentoring programme for young fathers, awareness raising activities and community celebrations as a strategy to reduce intimate partner violence (IPV) and violence against children (VAC). An evaluation (RCT) showed that the programme reduced men's perpetration of both IPV and physical punishment of children, and provides a successful model for adaptation in future violence prevention initiatives. It could potentially be improved through further engagement of female partners and addressing young fathers' needs for safety and protection.

BACKGROUND

Few evaluations have been conducted on interventions targeting fathers to address both VAC and IPV—particularly in developing country settings. The REAL Fathers programme in Northern Uganda was designed to address this gap. It worked with young fathers to build their knowledge and skills, and transform gender norms that underpin the use of IPV and VAC.

This intervention is one of the few parenting programmes that has shown promising results in reducing VAC and IPV, and demonstrates how addressing the intersections between violence against women and their children (VAW/C) is important for successful violence prevention in families in diverse contexts.

PROGRAMME CONTEXT

Rates of IPV and VAC are high in Uganda. According to the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey, 56% of ever-married women reported ever experiencing physical, emotional or sexual violence by their current partner or spouse and 39% reported experiencing IPV in the past year.⁴

Childhood violence is even higher. The recently published Uganda VAC Survey shows that 59% of girls and 68% of boys had experienced physical violence in childhood.⁵ Almost half of the time, the perpetrators of this violence are parents and caregivers.⁶ Research globally⁷ and in Uganda⁸ shows that exposure to violence in the home as a child can increase the likelihood of a boy perpetrating violence as an adult man and a girl experiencing violence as an adult woman.

The REAL Fathers intervention was first developed and piloted in Attiak sub-county, Amuru district, Acholi region in Northern Uganda (2013–2015). This area was heavily affected by a 20-year war between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Uganda's national army. In this region, there were high levels of displacement, injury and death

and many adults who are now parents and caregivers were witnesses and victims of IPV, VAC, violent crimes and the loss of a primary caregiver in childhood.⁹ The later scale up (2016–2018) was expanded to other parts of the Acholi region and adapted for the Karamoja region.



PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

The 2013–2015 REAL Fathers Initiative worked with 500 young fathers 16- 25 years old who had young children aged one to three years old and were married or cohabiting. They were recruited from villages across all eight parishes of Attiak sub-county.

The Initiative aimed to reduce the use of IPV and physical punishment of children, improve parenting attitudes and confidence in using non-violent discipline and foster acceptance of non-traditional gender roles in parenting.

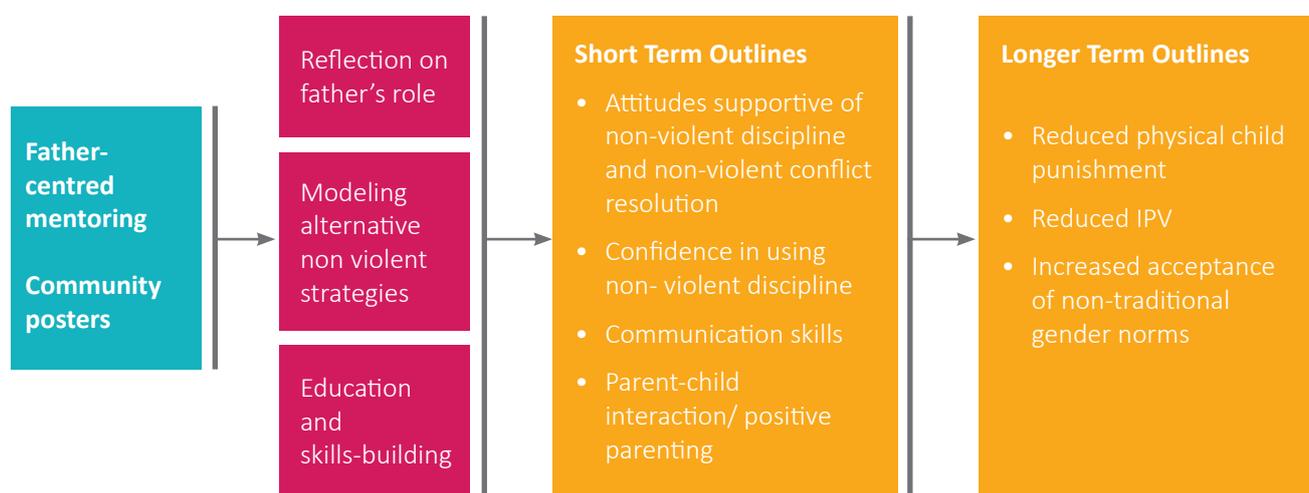
- The programme models positive masculinity, engaged fatherhood, non-violent discipline and conflict resolution to improve fathers’ parenting and communication skills and prevent their use of violence at home against women and children.
- It is based on social cognitive theory,¹⁰ which posits that individuals’ attitudes and behaviours are socially learned

in response to expected gender roles and behaviours across a range of social experiences and contexts.

- The intervention takes a life course perspective. It deliberately targets young men before their relationship expectations, attitudes and behaviours are set, using early fatherhood as a gateway to changing harmful attitudes and practices.
- It purposefully reaches fathers of young children as studies show caregiver violence starts when children are young—often in response to not having the skills to correct young children’s behaviour—and continues as children grow.

REAL Fathers was a collaboration between Save the Children UK and the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University. USAID and the OAK Foundation provided funding for programme development and evaluation.

PROGRAMME THEORY OF CHANGE



PROGRAMME COMPONENTS

Training Curriculum for Mentors : The programme consisted of 12 sessions covering a range of topics:

Topic	Content
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding gender values and norms
Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflecting on the type of father a man wants to be • Respecting the child and the child’s mother • Spending time with children • Disciplining with love • Being a role model and teacher • Talking and listening to children • Showing love
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a mutually respectful relationship with his partner • Identifying goals for the family and how alcohol abuse is an obstacle to achieving these goals • Developing effective communication skills with his partner to resolve differences without violence • Clarifying parenting goals, style and commitments between the couple
Emotions management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to deal with stress and managing emotions

Mentoring Programme: Mentors were identified by young fathers and their spouses participating in the programme. They were asked to select men in the community that they respected, were parents themselves and from whom the father would feel comfortable seeking advice. Mentors were also selected for characteristics including the ability to work well with young men in a non-judgmental, open and proactive way. After young fathers selected a mentor, the selection was verified with local leaders to ensure that the identified mentors were respected and their values and behaviours consistent with the programme.

Following their training, each mentor usually supported four fathers. Mentors were expected to meet with fathers each month at home and in group mentoring sessions for six months. The group sessions brought together 3–4 mentors with their mentees to discuss the monthly theme and reveal the community poster. Two of the six home and group mentoring sessions included female partners.

At each mentoring session, fathers were provided with homework to practice skills learned during the session. A complete mentor protocol and 5-day training curriculum with accompanying resources can be downloaded [here](#).

A final group discussion, before the community celebration, is held with wives alone to discuss fathers behaviour and participation in the programme.

Awareness raising campaign: Each month community posters were placed in central locations in the community. The six posters included emotion-based messages and images designed to reinforce the theme highlighted in the monthly mentoring session. The locations of the posters were strategically chosen by young fathers and community members with the purpose of catalysing conversation and demonstrating community support and commitment to the values on the poster, thus encouraging fathers' behaviour change.

Community celebrations: At the end of the curriculum, community celebrations are organised with fathers, their partners, family members and community members. These celebrate fathers' changed behaviour, gain their commitment to sustaining these changes and demonstrate community support for fathers.

PROGRAMME COSTS

There is currently no full costing available for the intervention, but the cost components include:

- Costs for the mentors (mentor training and incentives);
- Venue (if a public venue is not available);
- Adaptation of the curriculum;
- Workshops with community members' material production (design and printing of community posters);
- Management costs for the implementing partner (Save the Children);
- Costs for monitoring and evaluation research (Georgetown University).

PROGRAMME TIMEFRAME

- REAL Fathers is a 10-month intervention, including time for preparation, adaptation of intervention materials, training of mentors and implementation. This included 6 home visits and 6 group mentoring sessions carried out over a 6-month period.
- The programme took place in two parts: A pilot with an evaluation was conducted in 2013–2015 in Amuru District and a scale up with evaluation was conducted between 2016–2018 in Karamoja region.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The pilot programme included an impact evaluation in Northern Uganda, conducted in 2014. Participants in the trial included 340 fathers (N=170 in control group) aged 16–25 years and parents of young children between one and three years old. Participants were randomly assigned based on village registers. The evaluation had three components: i) a rigorous pre-test/post-test control experimental design, including randomisation and control groups (RCT); ii) focus group discussions with mentors; iii) qualitative interviews with some mothers. The key outcomes measured were:

- Primary outcomes: Intimate partner violence (IPV); use of harsh physical punishment by fathers.
- Secondary outcomes: Positive parenting by fathers; confidence in the use of non-violent discipline methods by fathers; father-child interactions; couple communication; attitudes justifying IPV.

The evaluation results show that, compared to the control group, in the intervention group:

- (i) A significantly lower proportion of men reported IPV perpetration at endline and one year after intervention;
- (ii) Significant reductions in physical child punishment by participating men at endline and long-term follow-up;
- (iii) Positive impacts on parent-child interaction, positive parenting practices, attitudes rejecting IPV and VAC and men's confidence in using nonviolent discipline over time.

Fathers also reported high levels of satisfaction with the programme as well as with their role as confident fathers, saying that they felt more engaged in their child's upbringing. A second impact evaluation was conducted on the scaled up intervention in 2016–2018 (see accompanying study summary).

PROGRAMMING LESSONS

- The REAL Fathers initiative proves that it is possible to design and implement a successful VAC and VAW prevention programme through a single intervention.
- Although the programme has so far only been tested in Uganda, it is likely that replication and adaptation of the programme to other contexts would be possible. The curriculum is easy to understand and could potentially be simple to translate to other contexts.
- It is important that programme participants are able to have a say in the selection of their mentors and that the programme's contents are made transparent to the communities. Guidelines for Adaptation and use of the curriculum have been developed.
- The programme showed limited effects on men's attitudes towards traditional gender roles at endline, demonstrating the challenges in addressing gender norms and practices in the family context, particularly in a short-term intervention.
- While many of the behaviours were sustained one-year post intervention according to the RCT results, qualitative interviews with women highlighted that behaviour change was not always sustained and



some reported that their partner had reverted to using violence, often accompanied by alcohol use. It would therefore be useful for future programmes to engage wives and other key individuals in the family or community, and explore the types and ways of family and community support may foster more significant and sustained changes in attitudes and behaviour.

- The programme did not focus on the protection needs and services for young fathers, many of whom are still children themselves (16–18 years). It would be useful to explore further with child protection practitioners, what specific needs and support young fathers enrolled in the programme may require especially if they experienced childhood abuse in the home.

SOURCE DOCUMENTS

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- **REAL Father Initiative results brief**, available at: http://irh.org/wp-content/uploads/REAL_Fathers_Results_Brief.pdf
- **REAL Fathers Implementation Guidelines**. Available from: <http://irh.org/resource-library/real-fathers-implementation-guidelines/>

ENDNOTES

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The Prevention Collaborative works to strengthen the ability of key actors to deliver cutting edge violence prevention interventions informed by research-based evidence, practice-based learning and feminist principles. For more information go to www.prevention-collaborative.org

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