

Parenting interventions

PARENTING AND VIOLENCE

Being treated in a cruel or violent manner has both short- and long-term negative consequences for a child's physical and mental health. When coupled with harsh parenting practices as a result of poverty and adversity, a child's risk of later becoming a perpetrator or victim of violence is increased. Identifying effective and scalable primary prevention interventions is critical to stem this cycle of violence. However, evidence of effective, culturally relevant parenting programmes in low- and middle-income countries is limited.

Of the handful of programmes that exist, few deliberately aim to address the consequences of intimate partner violence and child maltreatment, or change attitudes and behaviour.

The Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) funded three studies focused on parenting interventions through the SVRI Grant and an Oak Foundation grant.

BOOK-SHARING INTERVENTION

The "Benefits of Early Book-Sharing" trial¹ is taking place in Khayelitsha, a low-income peri-urban township in Cape Town. It is evaluating the impact



of book-sharing on early risk factors for violence, such as lack of cognitive stimulation, harsh parenting practices and aggression in early childhood.

The intervention builds on a previous book-sharing trial that successfully improved children's cognitive development: their vocabulary and attention span increased, and their comprehension improved.²

A facilitator trains caregivers in supportive book-sharing with young children. Training is carried out in small groups over eight weeks. Each session focuses on teaching caregivers different techniques to apply when reading to their children. For six months after the last session, the facilitator visits the participants to deliver a new picture book and discuss book-sharing.

The books deal with themes relating to emotions, intentions, perspectives and pro-social behaviour. The content promotes parenting skills to improve children's social understanding and reduce their aggressive behaviour, and encourage

discussion about emotions between parents and their children.

Since the intervention is brief and, with modest levels of training, readily deliverable in low- and middle-income countries, a demonstration that it is of benefit to children's cognitive and socio-emotional development would be significant in addressing South Africa's high levels of violence.

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The Sexual Violence Research Initiative is hosted by the South African Medical Research Council

POSITIVE PARENTING INTERVENTION

“Sikhula Ndawonye”^{3,4} (“Growing Together”) is an early parenting intervention for mothers in peri-urban and rural communities in KwaZulu-Natal. It aims to increase responsive and sensitive parenting, which helps protect against violence, by improving the relationship between the parent and child.

The intervention involves five three-hour facilitator-led sessions with mothers of children younger than 12 months. Each session is divided into three modules and uses a participatory, problem-solving approach, building on the group’s existing knowledge. Two of the sessions are delivered when the mother is pregnant; the remaining three sessions follow after the baby is born.

Each session focuses on a particular topic and uses a short film to convey a key message. Participants are encouraged to practise what they see and learn from the films with their infants in the group session and at home. At the beginning of each new group session, they are invited to provide feedback on their experiences at home.

Although the intervention has yet to be formally evaluated, the initial research shows that the films are

acceptable to and applicable within the broader community, and have the potential to increase caregivers’ knowledge of parenting.



PARENTING FOR RESPECTABILITY

Masculinity in Uganda is based on respectability and reputation. Fathers feel the need to maintain their family’s respectability. In large part, this is seen to be achieved through ensuring that families behave “appropriately”.⁵ This motivation has informed the design of the “Parenting for Respectability” intervention. This initiative aims to reduce spousal violence and encourage sensitive parenting. It is also intended to reduce violence against children, and reduce the risk that children will perpetrate or become victims of violence in future. The intervention consists of 16 sessions, divided into nine women-only and men-only sessions and seven combined sessions, which are delivered once a week by local facilitators.

A research team led by Makerere University is evaluating the intervention’s effectiveness in improving parent-child relationships and relationships between partners, and reducing intimate partner violence. The study is being conducted in collaboration with the University of Glasgow’s MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, the MRC/UVRI Uganda Research Unit on AIDS and the Sexual Violence Research Initiative. The Oak Foundation is funding the study. ■

KEY TAKEAWAY

These parenting interventions have broad applicability.

They make use of lessons, group discussion, videos and guided play between parents and their children to promote positive behaviours.

If successful, they have great potential to be implemented in other low- and middle-income countries.

¹ Dowdall, N., Cooper, P.J., Tomlinson, M., Skeen, S., Gardner, F. & Murray, L. 2017. The Benefits of Early Book-Sharing (BEBS) for child cognitive and socio-emotional development in South Africa: Study protocol for a randomised controlled trial. *Trials*. 18(118). DOI: 10.1186/s13063-017-1790-1.

² Vally, Z., Murray, L., Tomlinson, M. & Cooper P.J. 2015. The impact of dialogic book-sharing training on infant language and attention: A randomized controlled trial in a deprived South African community. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. 56(8): 865-873. DOI: 10.1111/jcpp.12352.

³ Crankshaw, T., Gibbs, A., Butler, L., Tomlinson, M. & Inglis, R. 2016. *Research report: Development of a parenting intervention to promote effective parenting practices in South Africa*. Durban: Health Economics and HIV and AIDS Research Division, University of KwaZulu-Natal. Available: http://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2016-08-12/Report_Development%20of%20a%20parenting%20intervention_final.pdf [2017, May 30].

⁴ Crankshaw, T. & Dartnall, E. 2016. *Sikhula ndawonye – developing an early parenting intervention for women with infants <12 months of age*. Available: <http://www.svri.org/blog/sikhula-ndawonye-%E2%80%93-developing-early-parenting-intervention-women-infants> [2017, May 19].

⁵ Siu, G.E., Seeley, J. & Wight, D. 2013. Dividuality, masculine respectability and reputation: How masculinity affects men’s uptake of HIV treatment in rural eastern Uganda. *Social Science & Medicine*. 89: 45-52.