Violence is Preventable

Six key principles for violence against women prevention programming

Recent evidence from research and practice demonstrates that it is possible to prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG) in low and middle income countries. Changes in attitudes and behaviours, that were once thought to take a generation can be accomplished within several years (Abramsky T et al. 2014;Wagman J et al. 2015) if intervention models adhere to key principles of effective VAWG prevention. There is a need to build on this evidence, support existing promising practical models, and invest in new innovations for violence prevention.

Six key principles, as highlighted by activists in the 2014 Lancet Series on Violence against Women (Michau et al. 2014) can help to guide the investment of time and resources toward effective, quality prevention programming. Central to this investment should be women's organizations and movements that have led and sustained advocacy and action to prevent violence against women. They remain central actors in the design and implementation of quality violence against women and girls prevention.

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Principle 1:
Work across the ecological model

The various sectors (health, criminal justice, security, faith, education, civil society) must work together and use diverse strategies across the social ecology to achieve meaningful change within social and political structures and for individuals and communities.

Less effective
Working in sector or population silos

More effective
Integrated and/or coordinated programming that engages both women and men, multiple sectors across multiple levels (Heise L. 2011; Fergus I. 2012; Waisbord S 2001)

Less effective
Individual behaviour change interventions

More effective
Programming that works towards social norm change (Burgess G. 2011; Bandura A. 1977; Lacayo V 2013)

Principle 2:
Use an intersectional gender-power analysis

Effective interventions need to target the key driver of violence in these settings – unequal gender-power relations – and how these shape individual and collective attitudes, norms and behaviours.

Less effective
Technical programming that treats VAWG as individual acts

More effective
Programming based on a systemic analysis of drivers of VAWG from a gender-power perspective (Lacayo V. 2013; Bicchierri C. et al 2014)

Less effective
Treating VAWG as a single monolithic phenomenon that is the same in all contexts

More effective
Understanding specific context and culture, related issues/oppressions, and broader context (Fergus I. 2012)

Principle 3:
Sustained, multi-sector co-ordinated efforts

Given the scale of VAWG, innovative collaboration and coordination across sectors is necessary, as well as sustained and intensive programming.

Less effective
One-off activities/trainings/ events/media campaigns;ad hoc, sporadic efforts

More effective
Systematic,coordinated, programming (Waisbord S. 2001)

Less effective
Legal reform as a punitive strategy for deterrance

More effective
Legal reform as a strategy to support social norm change (Morrison A. et al, 2007)

Principle 4:
Theory and evidence informed approaches

Programming should be informed by theories of change that address the complexity of individual and social change processes. Theory-informed programming also facilitates the development of programme components that are complementary and mutually reinforcing rather than stand-alone interventions.

Less effective
General awareness-raising or information-based campaigns

More effective
Evidence informed communication campaigns (Dutta-Bergman MJ. 2005)

Less effective
Programming based on linear cause-and-effect models

More effective
Programming grounded in theories of change that take into account the complexity of violence and systems that perpetuate VAWG (Burgess G. 2011; Lacayo V. 2013; Usdin S. et al 2000; South Asian Campaign to end all violence 2011)

Principle 5:
Programming that facilitates personal and collective critical reflection

Effective programming uses 'benefits-based' interventions that encourage critical thinking and questioning established norms by presenting positive alternatives, and holds governments accountable whilst also acknowledging the central role of individuals and communities in the process of change.

Less effective
Stereotyping victims and perpetrators, fear-based or alarmist messaging, punitive 'shame and blame' interventions

More effective
'Benefits-based' interventions using discourse of safer, happier relationships between women/girls and men/boys (Waisbord S. 2001)

Less effective
Stereotyping victims and perpetrators, fear-based or alarmist messaging, punitive 'shame and blame' interventions

More effective
Holding governments accountable while recognising responsibility and leadership role of indviduals, communities, media and private sector in preventing VAWG (Montalvo Liendo N. 2009; Waisbord S. 2001; Lacayo V. 2013)

Principle 6:
Aspirational programming that inspires individual and collective activism

Programming needs to be guided by the realities of communities, led by activists within those communities and inspire processes that facilitate critical thinking and reflection on gender inequalities. These participatory and reflective processes require longer term investment but are essential if efforts to change social norms are going to be sustained.

Less effective
One-way instructional messaging that prescribes how people should think and what to do

More effective
Participatory processes that facilitate critical thinking and reflection (Fergus I. 2012)

Less effective
Models that consider NGOs as experts and communities/stakeholders as beneficiaries

More effective
Commuities'/stakeholders' realities, experience, skills and acions guide process (Bandura A. 1986)

Conclusion

As research highlights the drivers of violence against women and girls and evaluates existing interventions, results provide emerging evidence about what works to prevent violence. These six principles help to summarise how this emerging evidence can be integrated into violence prevention programming. Taken together these six principles point towards the need to transform power relations between men and women, boys and girls across the ecological model to bring shifts in public discourse and social norm change. Community-level work, led by activists, is necessary to make this broader and sustained change at a population level.

This brief is adapted from 'Prevention of violence against women and girls: lessons from practice' Lancet Series on Violence against Women (2014) Lori Michau, Jessica Horn, Amy Bank, Mallika Dutt, Cathy Zimmerman.

For the original article go to: **http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(14)61797-9.pdf**

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