GUY TO GUY PROJECT
Engaging young men in violence prevention and in sexual and reproductive health - Rio de Janeiro

Instituto
PROMUNDO
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Summary

This case study presents the experience of Instituto PROMUNDO in engaging young men as change agents in gender-based violence prevention and the promotion of sexual and reproductive health. The change agents — or peer promoters — are young men from low income areas of Rio de Janeiro who reach other young men with: (1) educational materials (that they themselves developed and produced), (2) condoms (with a brand and distribution system specifically targeting young men); (3) a lifestyle magazine with messages about gender equity for and by young men, and (4) a play about reducing violence against women and promoting greater involvement by young men in sexual and reproductive health. The project was based on baseline research that identified young men who were "more gender-equitable" than prevailing norms in the communities, and identified factors that contributed to more gender-equitable behaviors and attitudes in the young men. These factors were in turn incorporated in the program. Additional (qualitative and quantitative) baseline research identified barriers to condom use, which led to a condom social marketing strategy specifically for and with young men.

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I.) WHY ENGAGE YOUNG MEN IN GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH? YOUNG MEN IN A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

In the last 10 years, there has been a growing international consensus of the need to more adequately include boys and young men in reproductive and sexual health initiatives and gender violence prevention:

- The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing provided a foundation for including men – young men – in efforts to improve the status of women, including sexual and reproductive health.
- UNAIDS focused its 2000-2001 World AIDS Campaign – with the slogan "Men Make a Difference" – on men and boys, recognizing that their behavior puts themselves and their partners at risk of HIV infection.
- The World Health Organization's Adolescent and Child Health and Development division initiated a multi-year research and training initiative on the health and psychosocial needs of adolescent boys, including sexual and reproductive health needs. At the country and local levels, various ministries of health, local health authorities and NGOs have also recognized the need to more adequately include boys and young men in reproductive and sexual health initiatives, and in gender-based violence prevention, and many have started initiatives to do so.

PROMUNDO has been working closely with UNAIDS, WHO, PAHO, UNFPA, the White Ribbon Campaign and other organizations nationally and internationally to work with young men to engage them in sexual and reproductive health issues and in gender-based violence prevention and to carry out research on these issues. In these discussions, we have affirmed four major reasons for engaging young men on these issues:

1.) Young men have sexual and reproductive health needs of their own, including the need for information, the need for dealing with doubts and concerns and the need for services for untreated and undiagnosed STIs, among others. In terms of gender-based violence, young men may themselves have been witnesses or victims of such violence and often require spaces where they can talk about these issues.

2.) Encouraging young men to take a greater role in reproductive health and care for their partners and children and interacting with their partners with respect rather than violence is necessary for achieving greater gender equity.

3.) From a developmental perspective, styles of interaction in intimate relationships are "rehearsed" during adolescence. Viewing women as sexual objects, using violence against women, delegating sexual and reproductive health concerns to women, using coercion to obtain sex and viewing sex as a performance generally begins in adolescence (and even before) and may continue into adulthood.

4.) Young men are often more willing and have more time to participate in group educational activities than do adult men.

From research with young women and young men in Brazil, as well as in much of the world, we know that in the majority of instances, it is men – generally young men – who decide and control how and when the sexual activity of young women happens. By holding greater power in intimate relationships, by having more sexual partners and by starting their sexual activity earlier than young women, young men are at the center of the HIV epidemic in the Americas region, and in large part dominate the reproductive choices of young women. To improve the lives of young women – and to address young men’s own needs – we must engage young men.

For us, applying a gender perspective to
young men means both examining the specific health and other needs that young men have because of the way they are socialized (what we call gender specificity), and working with young men to redress gender inequities that women face (what is commonly called gender equity).

We have found it necessary, and we continue to emphasize, that we do not propose working with young men on these issues instead of working with young women, but rather in addition to working with young women.

WHAT EXISTING RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT YOUNG MEN, SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN BRAZIL

Worldwide, young men generally have penetrative sex earlier and with more partners before forming a stable union than do young women. After forming stable unions, young men are also more likely than young women to have occasional sexual partners outside their stable relationship. This greater number of sexual partners and longer sexual experimentation stage for young men compared to young women has major implications for HIV transmission and is another rationale for seeking to understand their needs and realities and directing services and education to them.

Young Men, Sexuality and Sexual Experiences

Boys generally go through puberty during the ages of 10-13, when hormonal changes drive physical changes, including the production of sperm. Most boys have their first nocturnal emissions or “wet dreams” during this period. These changes and sexual energies are a natural part of life, but often bring confusions and doubts for boys and girls. Boys are generally not encouraged to talk about pubertal changes. In some cases boys may receive more information about women’s bodies than about their own. When we discourage boys from talking about their bodies and sexual health at early ages, we may be starting lifelong difficulties for men in talking about sex. In Brazil, as in most of Latin America, boys tend to become sexually active earlier than girls, but trends in Brazil suggest that there has been a general approximation between the median age of first vaginal intercourse between boys and girls (Singh, et al, 2000).

Studies from around the world find that young men often view sexual initiation as a way to prove that they are “real men” and to have status in the male peer group (Marsiglio, 1988). Boys often share their heterosexual “conquests” with pride with the male peer group, while doubts or lack of sexual experience are hidden. In our interactions with young men, we have seen how not having become sexually active is a source of ridicule in the peer group. One young man, trying to defend himself against criticism in the group for not having become sexually active, said: “What is the problem with being a virgin ……? Everyone is born a virgin.” Indeed, the young men we work with say they have to constantly prove their manhood through sexual activity, or risk having their virility questioned.

Boys often pretend they know much about sex, when they are frequently uninformed or misinformed. In various group discussions with young men, they have told us that sex is “something you do, not something you talk about.” This ‘bravado’, or know-it-all attitude often masks young men’s misinformation. Research conducted by Instituto PROMUNDO and Instituto NOOS in Rio de Janeiro, among 750 men ages 15-60, found that only about 36% of the men correctly identified the female fertile period (Instituto PROMUNDO & Instituto NOOS, 2002). Adolescent boys largely rely on the media and their self-taught peers for information about sex.

Boys, Contraceptive Use and Condoms

Condom use among young men in Brazil has
increased in the last 10 years but is still inconsistent, and varies according to the reported nature of the partner or relationship (e.g., occasional, regular, sex worker). National data on condom use in Brazil found that in 1986 fewer than 5% of young men reported using a condom during their first sexual intercourse, compared to nearly 50% in 1999 (UNAIDS, 1999). Young men’s self-reported condom use is more frequent with an occasional partner, including sex workers. In our research with 225 young men ages 15-24 in one low income neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, 52% of young men reported using a condom the last time they had sex with a stable partner versus 77% with an occasional partner (Instituto PROMUNDO & Instituto NOOS, 2002).

Studies from various parts of the world have confirmed that knowledge about HIV/AIDS and knowledge about condoms are not enough to insure condom use. Numerous studies have concluded that for adolescents (and adults), knowledge of or awareness of unsafe sexual behavior and actual sexual behavior are often far apart. Barriers to young men’s greater use of condoms include cost, the sporadic nature of their sexual activity, lack of information on correct use, reported discomfort, social norms that inhibit communication between partners and rigid “sexual scripts” or norms about whose responsibility it is to propose condom use. The sexual script for young men in many settings is that since reproductive health is a “female” concern, women must suggest condom use or other contraceptive methods. At the same time, the prevailing sexual script frequently holds that it is the male’s responsibility to acquire condoms, since for a young woman to carry condoms would suggest that she “planned” to have sex which is often seen as “promiscuous” (Webb, 1997; Childhope, 1997).

In baseline research carried out by PROMUNDO with 225 young men ages 15-24 in one low income neighborhood Rio de Janeiro, we found that price and access to condoms could also be a barrier. Condoms from pharmacies were reported to be expensive and condoms available through the public health sector were reported to be unattractive and hard-to-access. More than half – 52% of young men – said that at least once they wanted to use condoms but did not have access to them.

Adolescent Men, STIs and HIV/AIDS

Research in various parts of the world is finding that young men’s sexual health needs may be more prevalent than commonly thought, and that young men frequently ignore such infections or rely on home remedies or self-treatment. Our joint research project (with Instituto NOOS) with 749 men ages 15-60 in three neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro (2 low income, one middle income) found that 15% of all men reported having had an STI at least once, but only 42% said they informed their partner of this STI (Instituto PROMUNDO & Instituto NOOS, 2002).

Related to relatively high rates of STIs among adolescent boys is the increased risk of HIV infection. Presently an estimated one in four persons infected by HIV/AIDS in the world is a young man under age 25 (Green, 1997). In Latin America and the Caribbean, including Brazil, young men have consistently higher HIV prevalence rates than young women, generally two to three times higher.

Boys, Same Sex Sexual Activity and Homophobia

Boys are typically socialized to believe that being a “real man” means not being a woman or a girl, with polarized notions of what is masculine and feminine. As we have seen and documented in our work in low income settings in Rio de Janeiro, young men who diverge from these norms, including those who have same-sex orientation or behavior are likely to be ridiculed or criticized, as may be (but

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1 Condoms are available free of charge in the public health posts in the community (and in Brazil nationwide), but obtaining them requires signing up for a quota system and participating in an obligatory educational session on HIV/AIDS and STI prevention.

2 By “sexual script” we refer to the common or prevalent ways that sexual activity takes place in a given setting. By using the word “script”, we do not imply that such common patterns are fixed or the same for all young people. Nonetheless, from qualitative data we know that there are common ways in which sexual activity is viewed and practiced in a given setting.
to a different degree) boys who act more gender-equitable in their relationships with women. At the same time, research from around the world finds that between 1-16% of young men report having had some sexual contact with a male partner (PANOS, 1998; Lundgren, 1999; Barker, 2000b). Our study with adult and young men found that 6.6% of 749 men aged 15-60 said they had had a sexual relationship with another man at least once (Instituto PROMUNDO & Instituto NOOS, 2002).

One result of these tendencies is that young men who have sex with men are stigmatized. In the survey conducted by PROMUNDO and NOOS with 749 men in Rio de Janeiro, 32% affirmed that they “would never have a gay person as a friend.” The rigid socialization of boys into gender norms, which includes using homophobia to criticize boys who act in alternative or non-traditional ways, hinders the promotion of more gender-equitable behavior.

**Boys and Fatherhood**

Adolescent fathers and young men’s roles as fathers have been noticeably missing from research and program agendas related to adolescent reproductive and sexual health. While various reproductive health surveys have asked young men whether they have ever gotten a partner pregnant, research on young men’s attitudes toward fatherhood, their experience and needs as fathers, their involvement as fathers, or their desire for involvement as fathers, is lacking. In our baseline research with young men previously cited, 28% of 225 young men ages 15-24 interviewed were already fathers, and 38% of those had more than one child. In most of the world, deep-rooted gender stereotypes hold that a father’s main role – whether an adolescent or adult – is that of financial provider. Only recently have a handful of programs in several parts of the world started to examine the multiple roles of fathers and to promote a greater involvement by fathers in child care and maternal health. Programa PAPAI in Recife, has been at the forefront of rethinking the needs and realities of young fathers.

**Young Men and Gender-Based Violence**

In most program and policy-level discussions about domestic violence in Brazil, men have mostly been considered aggressors. There has been little discussion or questioning of when, where and how to involve men in preventing gender-based violence. We know that an estimated 300,000 women report being the victims of violence by their husbands or partners each year in Brazil. Our research with men ages 15-60 in Rio de Janeiro, found that 25.4% said they had used physical violence at least once against an intimate female partner. In the companion document entitled “Men, Gender-Based Violence and Sexual and Reproductive Health: A Study with Men in Rio de Janeiro”, we explore the factors associated with men’s use of violence against women – and present the results of our research on this issue.

Specifically, in terms of young men, as this baseline study confirms, violence against women – and attitudes supporting such violence – start in adolescence, affirming the need for us to engage young men on these issues. Studies in various parts of the world have confirmed that having been a victim of or witnessing violence in one’s home of origin increases the likelihood that a man will use violence in his own intimate relationships. Our research confirms this point: one of the main factors associated with using violence against a partner was either witnessing or being a victim of violence in the home. In our baseline study of 749 men, 40% of men had witnessed violence by a man against a woman in their home of origin and 45.5% percent reported having been victims of violence in their homes. In both cases, men who reported being victims of or witnessing violence in their homes of origin when they were younger were more likely to report using violence against a partner. In Brazil as a whole, there is evidence that boys are subject to higher rates of physical abuse (excluding sexual abuse) in the home than girls, a factor that may be related to some men’s subsequent use of violence in their intimate relationships. In a study carried out in Bangu by PROMUNDO and CESPI/USU with
adolescents ages 13-19, boys were nearly twice as likely to be victims of violence: 23% of young men ages 13-19 compared to 11% of young women said they had been victims of violence in their homes (CESPI/USU & PROMUNDO, 2001).

This suggests that one of our points of entry with young men on gender-based violence is helping them talk about family violence they have witnessed and experienced. We also know from our research that not all young men in these communities use violence, either against other young women or against other young men. In our interviews and interactions with young men in various communities in Rio de Janeiro, we have heard the voices of young men who oppose violence against women. Many of these young men came to question men’s violence against women because they had a space or a person to whom they talked to about the violence. By talking about the pain they experienced, by “making sense” or constructing meaning out of the violence, they were able to rethink how they acted in their intimate relationships. Thus, in our work in the Guy-to-Guy project, we have focused on talking about the violence one has witnessed or been a victim of can be a way to prevent the intergenerational transmission of violence.

II. OBJECTIVES AND HISTORY OF THE GUY-TO-GUY PROJECT

Finding and Recruiting More “Gender-Equitable” Young Men

From its start, the Guy-to-Guy Project has been grounded in research in the low income communities where the project operates. In addition to the survey data reported, we also carried out extensive qualitative research with young men in one of the communities (Maré, see Barker, 2001). This qualitative research focused on identifying, understanding and eventually recruiting those young men who already questioned the use of violence against women. Specifically, starting in 1999, we carried out a one-year qualitative research project with a group of young men identified by community leaders, staff at health clinics, and local NGOs who act in ways that are more gender equitable than the prevailing norms in the community. Research methods included observation and interaction with 25 young men ages 15-21 two days a week for one year; focus group discussions with young men, young women and adults in the community; a three-part life history interview with nine boys; interviews with family members of some of the young men; and key informant interviews in the community (Barker, 2000a & 2001).

In life history interviews with some of these young men — those whom we called “more gender equitable” — we identified factors that apparently contributed to them having more progressive values and attitudes related to gender, included in Box 1.

From Research to Action

Our research and other studies with young men have clearly affirmed the importance of the peer group (often an all-male peer group) and community norms about gender and masculinity in influencing the behavior of young men. Indeed, studies from many parts of the world conclude that from an early age, boys generally spend more time on the street or outside the home in unsupervised circumstances than do girls (Evans, 1997; Bursik & Grasmick, 1995; Emler & Reicher, 1999).
Some researchers have suggested that the male peer group is the place where young men “try out and rehearse macho roles”, and that the male street-based peer group is the authority that determines which acts and behaviors are worthy of being called “manly” (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988). In urban, low-income areas in some parts of the world, such as Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, where women-headed households are common, this tendency of boys to find their male role models in the street-based peer group may be even more prevalent. Thus, a centerpiece of our work has been focusing on changing peer group norms, or seeking to support those peer group norms that encourage more gender-equitable attitudes.

Specifically, based on this baseline research, several programmatic implications emerged, including:

1.) The need for group and individual activities with young men to promote reflections about life histories and help young men perceive the “costs” of some traditional versions of masculinity;

2.) Offering young men opportunities to be mentored, or to have thoughtful interactions with more gender-equitable men in the community;

3.) Promoting more gender-equitable norms in young men’s peer groups and at the community level.

These implications in turn informed the specific objectives of the project:

1.) To recruit, train and supervise young men from low income communities in Rio de Janeiro to act as peer promoters in gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health to reach approximately 1000 adolescent boys through informational presentations each year;

2.) To work with these peer promoters to develop educational materials for boys on gender based violence and relevant health needs and concerns;

3.) To provide other skills training and leadership training for the peer promoters;

4.) To document and disseminate the program experiences through case studies and other formats, encouraging other organizations (particularly in the public sector) to replicate the idea of engaging “more gender-equitable young men”;

5.) To engage adult men, families, NGOs and governmental organizations (including the public health sector) in the communities in promoting male involvement in reproductive and sexual health, domestic violence prevention and promoting more gender-equitable behaviors; and

6.) To develop and implement a condom social marketing initiative for and with young men, with a distribution and sales system designed by the young men themselves, both as a way to promote condom use and to provide an ongoing income for the project.

III. THE GUY TO GUY PROJECT IN ACTION

The Peer Promoters

Given that the baseline research showed that having an alternative peer group or having alternative role models was key, one of our first steps was to recruit several of these more gender-equitable young men as we could to work as peer promoters. We also engaged several adult men from the community who showed an interest in the issue, some of whom had already formed a group called “Male Consciousness” that engage men in various community service projects. We hired these men to act as facilitators, and at the same time to serve as role models for the young men.
Identifying, training and recruiting young men into the project has been one of our central challenges. The young men were recruited via community contacts from the initial research project; for young men in the second community, we asked community groups and contacts to identify young men who showed an interest in these themes, had free time to participate and were at least somewhat more gender-equitable. This process was made easier by the fact that several of the community facilitators knew the youth; in some cases they knew the families of the young men. Final selection for the peer promoters was via an interview process with facilitators.

The recruitment process was not always easy. Many young men were suspicious at first of participating in an all-male group; some questioned its purpose. One young man mentioned that at first he was reluctant to take part because “guys don’t get together to talk”. Some said that it would be more interesting if young women were also participating. Nonetheless, after the first few sessions, the young men saw the importance of having a male-only space where they could discuss their doubts and concerns in a non-critical setting and without having to feel as if they were “performing”.

The criteria for participating in the group were: (1) being enrolled in school, which has been a constant challenge for some of the young men; (2) participating in at least 80% of sessions; and (3) making a commitment to live up to the norms promoted by the group itself, including being responsible in one’s sexual behavior, taking responsibility for children they may have and not using violence against partners and against other young men, and not being involved with drug trafficking gangs (comandos) in the community.

Not all the participants have found it easy to live up to these criteria. Some of the young men had ties to drug trafficking gangs, or sometimes wore the colors or style of the gangs. One previous member of the group is currently in prison because of his association with the comandos or gangs. One young man hit his girlfriend during the course of his involvement; others got into fights with other members of the group. Each of these incidents was dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and appropriate responses were discussed and decided on by the group itself. One project staff member affirmed the issue of not turning our backs on the violent behavior of the young men, but also not accepting their behavior: When asked about the process of dealing with violence, for example, one of the group’s facilitators said:

“The response [when one of the young men uses violence] is one of regret. We do not like it...”

Recruiting adult men from the community — men who are themselves more gender-equitable — has been a key to the success of the project. From the beginning it was clear to us that the young men needed to have interactions with men from their communities (and elsewhere) who demonstrated and reinforced more respectful, non-violent ways of interacting with women. We wanted these facilitators to model relationships based on respect and dialogue rather than based on power. When asked how he saw his role, one of the facilitators said:

“I’m a facilitator of process. I want to integrate the group with other groups in the community and eventually help the young men find a space in the world of formal work. [What is necessary to do this?] …to be available for change; to enjoy helping others; to be present. To take advantage of what the group proposes even when you have an idea of your own that you think is better …...”

Most of the community facilitators also know the youth on a more personal level given that they live within the same community. Therefore, community facilitators are aware of the daily challenges that the youth experience, for example, attaining access to school and employment. Equally important, the young men observed the adult men facilitators in their interactions with others and with their families – seeing them worry about their children, show respect for their partners and resolve conflicts without violence. The young men also had a chance to interact with men from outside their communities, particularly staff from PROMUNDO and men involved with other partner NGOs who offered alternative ways of thinking about “being men.”
when this happens. We talk to them as if they were our sons. We listen to their justification… we talk a bit about our own experiences. We figure out together that violence takes away from the energy of masculinity. We avoid judgments”.

At one point in the project, an adult affiliated with the program used violence against a young man and the same rules were applied. The group discussed the issue and decided to ask him to leave the project – at the same time affirming their friendship with him and understanding that he was passing through a difficult personal moment.

During the course of our engagement with the young men, at various times we have found it necessary to use specific conflict resolution strategies. One of these strategies was the “Talking Stick,” an activity based on Native American rituals, described in Box 3.

A stipend (bolsa) is given to group participants on a monthly basis. The reality is that many young men would not be able to participate if they did not receive a financial incentive. For some, this stipend is the only income their families have. The stipend is also meant to help create a work ethic. That is, it helps create an environment of responsibility for the work the youth do; we treat the young men as professionals and the stipend helps reinforce this professional relationship. Transportation and a lunch are provided by the program. Some of the youth travel an hour by bus to get to the group meetings. Moreover, all the youth have t-shirts and photo identification cards that provide some safety for them to travel within and outside the community.

**The Play and the Photonovela**

In the first year of the project, presenting a play on gender-based violence emerged as a centerpiece of their activities. From the beginning of the project, a central challenge was working with the young men to feel empowered to be peer promoters. The young men are from low income backgrounds; many have incomplete schooling. While enthusiastic about the project, they had limited experience in public speaking, with public presentations and working in a structured project like this. Initially we had

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**BOX 3: KEYS TO SUCCESS THE TALKING STICK**

The talking stick originated with Native American groups in North America, who used it in ceremonies as a type of scepter. At times, groups of men from the tribe sat down in a circle at the end of the day to discuss conflicts or for older members of the tribe to pass on information and oral traditions to the younger members. The talking stick represented the power of the tribal chief or leader. When he took the stick, it was a sign for the others to remain quiet and listen to his words. When another man wanted to speak, he asked permission to hold the stick, and then he was acknowledged by the others as having the right to speak next. Symbolically passing on the stick signified passing on the power and the right to be heard also by the other members of the tribe.

The objective of the talking stick is to promote understanding and dialogue, symbolically and literally distributing power among everyone. Each member of the group has the right to ask for the stick, and must respect the person that is holding it, waiting for him to stop talking. Each person who holds the stick must also be ready to give it up.

We used this activity with the young men during the first few months the group was being formed. Initially many of the young men were not used to waiting their turn to speak, and showed little respect when someone else was speaking, whether it was an adult or a young person. The conversation or discussion among them sometimes led to threats of force, albeit half-hearted, criticism and laughter concerning what the others were saying. With the use of the talking stick activity, we observed a striking change in attitudes at the group meetings. They began to listen to one another and the young men themselves began to insist on the use of the stick and compliance with the rules. After some time (over six months) we stopped using the stick because the practice of listening had already being incorporated into the group.
envisioned that the young men would divide into groups of three or four young men and hold discussion groups with other young men. It quickly became clear, however, that most of the young men did not feel empowered to lead group sessions with their peers. They said that they would be ridiculed, and that they did not feel they had the information and poise to be able to lead a group session like this.

In brainstorming about how to feel “secure” in front of other young men, the idea of the play emerged. In sharing their personal stories within the group, two members wrote short texts about violence against women; one was fictional, the other was based on his family experiences. The texts were submitted to an essay contest on family violence at the University of São Paulo, and one of them one received and honorable mention. Inspired by this, the text was subsequently turned into a play (see a description of the play in box 4).

All 15 young men participate in the play, which has been presented to more than 3000 people in the first two years of the project. Audiences have included young people in various communities and schools around Rio de Janeiro, staff from city and state government organizations working in health promotion and violence prevention, and youth and youth leaders at various conferences and seminars.

One challenge in developing and presenting the play has been the fact that all the actors are male, although they also play female roles. Presenting female roles required the young men to confront their feelings of homophobia. Many asked: “Will they think I am gay if I play a woman?” Several sessions were spent discussing this issue, and helping the young men feel comfortable when responding to audience members, who indeed, asked the question: “Are you gay?” We worked with the young men to discuss how to respond to questions like this, and how to feel comfortable playing a female character – even if some of the audience may think that they are gay.

A typical presentation of the play starts with a skit called, “The Rescue of the Citizen”, in

Our direct interventions and activities with the young men started by listening to their personal experiences with gender-based violence. Many of the young men had seen men in their households use violence against women. Based on these personal stories, the young men wrote a play and a photonovela that uses their language and words to enjoin other young men not to use violence against women. The play tells the story of a young couple who meet, decide to form a family and have two children. The man loses his job and the woman ends up supporting the family (a common occurrence in the community as more service industry jobs are being created and taken by women). The man, frustrated by his unemployment and by the fact that his partner is working longer hours, becomes aggressive and eventually physically violent toward her. She leaves him, takes the children, and he is left contemplating the impact of his actions. A neighbor subsequently invites him to join a men’s discussion group, where men of various ages talk about relationships, domestic violence and health issues. This discussion group presented in the play is also a model of the Guy-to-Guy sessions themselves and is similar to an intervention for men who have used violence against women that Instituto NOOS carries out. A photonovela, with pictures from the community and using the young men’s own words, is distributed at each presentation of the play. This title of the play and the photonovela — “Cool your head, man”— is the young men’s own phrase, used to enjoin their peers to reflect before they act and to “cool down” when they are angry rather than use violence. The play also includes a discussion of condom use. The photonovela also includes a story of sexual violence – a group of young men have sex with a drunken young woman – and the connection between sexual violence and STIs. This story was also taken from experiences and events in their communities.
which the young men question some of the stereotypes about young men. For example, when one character says: “If a guy has red eyes, he must be using drugs,” another youth says: “No, a young man with red eyes may be sad or suffering. He needs your help.” During one performance to a group of 600 youth, the audience cheered so loudly after this declaration that it was difficult to hear what followed.

After this introduction, the play – called “Cool your head, guy” – is performed. At the end, the young men present a rap song written and choreographed by the group itself. The song, entitled “United for Peace”, calls for “learning the art of loving instead of the art of killing.” In the chorus, the young men sing: “Put your hand on your conscience and stop and think awhile.” They enjoin young men not to use violence against each other (particularly at the funk dances in the community where violence is common) nor against young women.

Audience members tend to be curious about their experiences within the group and how it has changed them. At one event, a young person in the audience asked what it was like for the youth to be involved in such a group. One member of the Guy to Guy project responded: “I’ve been given an opportunity to learn to be different from friends who abuse their girlfriends.”

### The Condom Social Marketing Project

In the second year of the project, the young men were eager to broaden their peer promotion activities to include promoting condom use. There was also a need to plan for financial sustainability of the project. In partnership with JohnSnowBrasil, a Brazilian social consulting firm and SSL International, an international condom manufacturer, PROMUNDO and the Guy-to-Guy project launched a condom social marketing project to promote the use of condoms and other more gender-equitable behaviors among young men in Bangu. The profit from the sales of the condoms will provide an ongoing income for the project activities by 2003. As of December 2002, the project consisted of eight core steps:

**Step 1: Defining the target audience:** The group created a fictional character based on young men in the community called Calixto, a young man, aged 19, from Bangu who likes to play football, to go to funk dances and hang out in the square. He likes to take care of himself and keeps his hair short. Calixto had sex for the first time at 13 with his cousin Suzi. He does not use condoms often. He once gave his girlfriend a slap because she asked if he would use a condom. He got a bit nervous, thinking that she was not being faithful or that she thought he was not being faithful. He talks to his friends about his sexual conquests. Some of his friends use condoms from time to time, but often just the first time in the night, but not the second time. Calixto has the basic information, but he does not worry too much about STIs. Simultaneously, PROMUNDO undertook research with 224 young men in Bangu to have a broader understanding of the sexual behavior of young men in the neighborhood. Box 5 presents some of the key findings.

**Step 2: Figuring out why Calixto does not use condoms:**

In the group and in focus groups with other young people in the community, the young men identified three main reasons why young people do not use condoms. These are:

- They do not have a condom with them “in the heat of the moment”;
- They are not sure about how to use a condom;
- They do not know how to negotiate the use of the condom with their partner.

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3 Social Marketing is a strategy that can be used to design programs that aim to reduce the price incurred by an individual of adopting a social product, such as nonviolence towards women or condom use, by implementing effective and targeted promotional and distribution strategies.
Step 3: Learning about condoms: Next, the peer promoters felt the need to learn about condoms themselves. They discussed the history of the condom, had workshops on how to use condoms and lubricants and also visited the national condom testing center, where they saw first-hand the different tests that a condom goes through before being certified.

Step 4: Developing a youth-targeted condom brand: The peer promoters decided to develop a youth-targeted condom that would encourage the “Calixtos” to use a condom “in the heat of the moment.” They came up with over 20 names for the condom. The finalists were: Q pressão é essa (What pressure is this?) and Hora H (which roughly translates as “The Heat of the Moment”). In the focus groups with other young men, Hora H was the preferred name.

Step 5: Developing a logo and packaging for Hora H and making the instructions youth-friendly: With a name selected, the peer promoters discussed the key words that they hoped to transmit with the logo and chose new, young, safe and pleasure. Then they worked with a graphics company to develop a logo for the condom that would transmit these messages and test these with one-on-one interviews and focus groups in the community. Next, the young men worked on the instructions for use of the condoms, to make the language simpler and more interesting for young people, and also made some changes to the standard diagrams that are used for the condoms distributed for free by the Ministry of Health.

Step 6: Making Hora H more accessible: The peer promoters and young men in the focus groups confirmed that they are embarrassed to get condoms from pharmacies or clinics. To reduce the embarrassment, they decided to develop a magazine for young people that they personally would sell along with three condoms. Buying a magazine, they argued, was much easier than buying condoms. The magazine would also promote safer sex behaviors and be another vehicle for communicating gender-equitable messages to more young people in the community. With the help of a journalist and a photographer, they began to develop the magazine and went into the community to interview local well-know people, do a report on a funk dance and write pieces for the magazine. Finally, the group decided to call the magazine Hora H and after further market research, to distribute it for free as a

BOX 5: SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH WITH 224 YOUNG MEN, AGES 15–24

- 91% of young men reported having their first sexual relationship at the age of 15 or younger.
- 52% of the young men said they had sex with two or more partners over the last six months and 29% said they had sex ten times or more in the last month.
- 80% of the young men are single (not married or living with their partner), but 62% of these single young men are in some form of romantic relationship. 54% of these romantic relationships are defined as sporadic.
- 77% of the young men used a condom the last time they had sex with a casual partner. 52% reported using a condom when they had sex with a stable partner.
- 26% of the young men agreed partially or completely that a man needs a second woman, even if their first relationship is going well.
- 28% of the young men are fathers and 38% have more than one child. The average age that these men had their first child was between 18 and 19 years of age. 14% of the young men said they had participated in the decision to end a pregnancy.
- 10% of the young men have had a sexually transmitted infection. While all reported seeking treatment for STIs, only 60% said they informed their partner when they had an STI.
promotional product for the launch of Hora H condoms in Bangu.

**Step 7: Sales and promotion activities:**
The first Hora H condoms will arrive in Brazil in December 2002, imported by JohnSnowBrasil. Once the condoms are available, the young men will work with PROMUNDO to distribute and sell Hora H condoms, and promote the condoms, condom use and gender-equitable behaviors in general. The group has developed a number of raps about condoms and a short sketch to promote condom use, which they will present to youth groups and schools in the community. They have also practiced a variety of one-on-one sales and promotional approaches through roll-play to prepare them for individual interaction with other young people in the community. They also came up with the idea of developing a leaflet on why to use a condom, how to use a condom and where to get condoms in the community (including the clinic) to hand out to young people, even when they do not want to buy Hora H condoms. The profit generated will be re-invested into the project to provide ongoing funding for peer promotional activities. These promotional activities will be increasingly led by the young men themselves.

**Step 8: Evaluating the impact:** The last step in the process is confirming the impact of this work with young men involving an in-depth evaluation with 250 young men, their partners and family members in Bangu, which is being financed by Horizons/Population Council. This evaluation seeks to measure changes in attitudes and behaviors in terms of gender norms among young men as a result of the Hora H project.

**Involving the Young Men in Other Interventions**

In addition to our direct work with young men, PROMUNDO develops materials and carries out research related to young men, gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health. The young men in the Guy to Guy project have served as advisers in this process, serving as a space to test activities and helping us develop a video for other young men. The young men worked with us on the video, “Once upon a Boy,” an animated video on what it means to be a man that accompanies the Project H Manual Series: Working with Young Men. The peer promoters helped us construct portions of the story of the video and in general were informal advisors to the process. Other young men in the group have been hired to serve as interviewers or research assistants on research projects carried out by PROMUNDO with other partner organizations. The young men have received numerous international visitors, such as organizations interested in working with young men. These visits have been important for the young men to learn how to present themselves before foundations, UN Agencies, governmental officials and others. The young men have also been instrumental in launching the White Ribbon Campaign in Brazil (www.lacobranco.org), a campaign of men working to end violence against women.
It’s a hot day in Bangu and the young men are meeting to discuss Hora H. The group is meeting in a community hall. Up until now the group had been meeting in the neighborhood association club but had to be moved because of a recent violent event where five youth from the community were killed in the ongoing drug-related violence (in both neighborhoods where the project works, rival drug trafficking groups fight for space). Community facilitators are concerned for the safety of participants and the co-facilitators of the group. The guys are all wearing t-shirts that identify them as project participants and are known as community inhabitants, however, the group facilitators are not as widely known. During the session, one of the young men said he was “tired of attending funerals,” a clear indication on the extent of violence in the communities.

The group session begins with a facilitator asking what they thought of last week’s visit to the national testing laboratory where the Hora H condoms will be tested. The youth remain quiet until a community facilitator speaks of his disappointment. He shares how he was embarrassed at how the youth behaved when they were given the opportunity to take condoms home. The condoms were in a container and, the community facilitator said, “everyone just grabbed as many as they could without thinking about what was fair”. Another group facilitator reframes the concern and relates it to the purpose of the group. He identifies the theme of condom distribution and asks how youth will distribute condoms to the community knowing that there will be some youth who will want more than others. So he asks, “what would be fair?” One says that he is not sure how they will distribute condoms and that they have more to learn about marketing. The group facilitator agrees and says that the group is working toward this. He then asserts that before they reach this stage, they must understand better the barriers to condom use.

The focus then turns to myths about condoms, more specifically: What beliefs inhibit young men from accessing and/or using condoms? A group facilitator posts three signs up that read: “agree”, “disagree”, “have some doubts”. He then introduces this exercise by explaining that before condoms can be distributed to youth within the community there has to be an understanding of personal reservations/beliefs. Statements are then read individually. After each statement the young men move to the spot where the sign offers the best response to what they believe is true for them. Discussion becomes animated and honesty becomes apparent. When the statement, “I know how to use condoms” is read, many youth stand under the sign, “disagree”. One talks openly about how he uses condoms but does not know if his doing to right. “So I don’t know if I’m really doing anything to prevent pregnancy and STIs/AIDS”, he says. Others shake their head in agreement and some laugh. Another youth says “we need to learn how to do it properly because of all the confusion”, referring to the mixed messages they receive.

Just before the group ends there is some discussion on the embarrassment and uncertainty of negotiating the use of condoms with a sexual partner. Many talk about the fear that a partner will think that they have an illness or think they are “dirty.”

The group ends with a hand stacking ritual. Everyone stands in a circle and one person at a time places their hand in the centre, one on top of the other. Once everyone has placed his hand on another person’s hand they all move in an upward motion and loudly say “Calixto”, which is the name of the identified youth they would be marketing the condom to.

Eliza Fernandes
IV. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Challenges

In our work with young men, we have confronted a number of challenges. Central among these has been skepticism about whether involving men was even possible or cost-efficient, if young men would even show up if we offered activities on sexual and reproductive health and gender violence prevention, and questions about whether funding for our work would take away from existing, and generally limited, funding for work with young women.

Addressing the question of whether our funding is taking away from funding that would otherwise go to organizations working with women, to the extent that a foundation or governmental organization funds us and not one of these NGOs, the answer is yes. However, we have worked to demonstrate that our work is not to replace but to complement and add to the fundamental work of women’s rights groups. We have also in all of our projects worked in collaboration with NGOs that have a history and track record of working with women, in the process learning from their experience and as far as possible combining our energies, creativity and experience.

Another major challenge has been getting beyond the “jewel box” nature of our work – i.e. a small program that works well to reach only a few special young men – to reaching large numbers of young men. To attempt to address this challenge, we have formed a collaboration (Project H) with other NGOs in Brazil, and regionally in Latin America, to disseminate our ideas and experiences via training materials that are available in Portuguese, Spanish and English. At the local level, we have taken steps to include our concepts and experiences in the municipal adolescent program. At the state level, we have provided training to staff that run public violence prevention campaigns for the state government of Rio de Janeiro. At the national level, we have provided input, research and program ideas to policymakers working in gender and family violence prevention and in sexual and reproductive health.

BOX 7: CHALLENGES AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

Stereotypes about male youth affected accessibility in securing space for group sessions. During the onset of the work with young men there were health professionals who complained about the noise level and made comments about the behaviors of the youth. This stereotyping was discussed with the participants and a new location was sought that was more accepting of the work and the youth.

History of exploitation and mistrust within low income communities. Some community members are suspicious of non-governmental and governmental initiatives, and of “outsiders” in general. Concerns about creating an economic and/or emotional dependency on the program were also mentioned. There is a general feeling from community members of not wanting to be “used”. Participation and dialogue with community leaders were a part of the project from the beginning.

Offering a stipend without creating dependency. The reality is that the young men would not be able to participate if there were no financial benefit. At the same time, some young seem to participate only for the stipend. Numerous meetings and discussions have been necessary to insure that participation and interest in the themes are genuine. Some young men have been asked to leave the project by the other young men themselves. The stipend is envisioned as short-term. In the next year, the young men will not receive a regular stipend, but instead will be paid only when working on specific projects – projects they will lead.
Successes and Lessons Learned

While our work in gender violence prevention and sexual and reproductive health promotion with young men is only two years old, in this short time we have achieved several important successes and in the process derived important lessons:

**Rousing the public imagination about including young men in gender violence prevention and sexual and reproductive health.** For large portions of the general public and policymakers, including men in sexual and reproductive health and gender violence prevention is a non sequitur. In several important ways, we have roused the public imagination to reconsider this. Audiences – ranging from a group of their male peers to policymakers at the state level to groups of advocates working on women’s rights – have been favorably moved upon meeting a group of young men from a low income setting talking about gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and why these are also their issues.

**Getting the issue of engaging young men on gender violence and in sexual and reproductive health in the public agenda.** Through presentations of our work and research at numerous local, national and international events, we have helped put these issues on the public agenda. At the national level in Brazil, the Ministry of Health is supporting efforts to reach and engage young men. National-level campaigns about gender violence and domestic violence have also started to include men, again in large part because of the advocacy work we have contributed to along with other key partner organizations. At the local level, demand for our research findings, our publications and our training has grown tremendously in the last year. At the city level in Rio de Janeiro, the city’s health department has included discussions about engaging adult and young men in sexual and reproductive health – in part because of our efforts.

**Finding and maintaining allies.** A central part of our success and key to our success has been engaging and maintaining partnerships with other key NGOs – and governmental organizations – working in gender violence prevention and male involvement in sexual and reproductive health. Forming alliances and partnerships is slow and sometimes painful and time-consuming but it is necessary to achieve success in the face of limited funding and to have greater impact.

**Engaging and maintaining interest of low income young men and engaging them as protagonists in the process.** Gender violence and sexual and reproductive health as themes are not necessarily the most pressing issue to the young men we work with. Being men from low income communities, they are typically most concerned with finding employment, completing school and staying out of the way of the gang-related violence in their neighborhoods. Nonetheless, we have been successful in keeping their interest by including these multiple issues and by working with them to examine the multiple ways that gender-based violence has caused pain in their lives and to their families, and helping them see the benefits to themselves and their partners when they participate in sexual and reproductive health concerns. Furthermore, over time the young men themselves have taken over increasing leadership of the process. They now propose ideas, are starting to engage potential funders and partner groups and will determine where the project will go in the future.

**The importance of combining research with practice and then getting other organizations to take on the ideas.** Grounding our work in solid data and research has helped us “make the case” of the need to include men in gender violence prevention at the policy level and to prove our case empirically. Furthermore being a relatively small NGO, and working with other relatively small NGOs, it has been important to disseminate our research and program results
so that organizations at the national level – particularly at the public level – take on these ideas and findings.

Promoting young men’s engagement in gender violence prevention and in sexual and reproductive health from a perspective that focuses on potential not deficit. The general view of and toward men in the field of gender violence prevention and sexual and reproductive health in Brazil – as elsewhere – is that men are aggressors and the “problem” rather than being part of the solution. In the case of low-income young men, the general stereotype has been that they are “inherently” likely to use violence against their partners, and that young men will not want to participate in sexual and reproductive health issues. We have worked diligently to emphasize the point that some – maybe even many – men, including those in low-income settings, oppose violence against women and that many already participate in reproductive and sexual health concerns. Furthermore, by recruiting adult and young men who are willing and interested to participate in gender violence prevention and in promoting sexual and reproductive health, we have been able to show the tremendous potential of men to be engaged, respectful and non-violent partners.

Presenting new models of what it means to be a man. One of the key outcomes and lessons learned with the project is that it is possible to change and question what it means to be a man, even in settings where such attitudes are widespread. Group discussions and role modeling have led to youth questioning gender stereotypes. Participating in a group that enables and encourages young men to show their feelings, to talk about frustration and to be different – i.e. more gender-equitable – have been key.

Accepting and coping with adolescent parenting. The common discourse about adolescent parenting – for adolescent fathers or mothers – has been largely negative, that having a child while still young is complicated given the challenges of completing education and finding work. During the course of the first two years of the project, nearly half of the young men became fathers. At first we considered this to be a sign of failure of our interventions. As we observed the young men however, we saw that all of them were involved and participating actively in prenatal care, and in caring for their children, in the cases of those whose children were already born. Furthermore, we had to recognize the limitations of our work. In these low income communities, childbearing starts early and is generally not considered a “problem”, the way it is in many middle class settings. While recognizing the challenges to being young fathers or young parents, we have sought to support their choices – and above all emphasize their responsibility in caring for the children they father.
PROMUNDO’s work in gender violence prevention and sexual and reproductive health promotion with young men is still in its initial stages, having started in 1999. Nonetheless, at the community level it has proved important in supporting the voices of young men and adult men who already sought to be and were, to some extent at least, more gender-equitable, and opposed to men’s violence against women.

Our work has helped contribute to the notion that men are not inherently violent – that men’s violence against women is in no way “natural” or “just the way things are”, but is instead rooted in the way boys are socialized and in how societies create and recreate gender inequalities. Our experiences suggest the need to engage various organizations in the community in seeking to change both the public perception about domestic violence, and to change community values around domestic violence. If it is true that many men in various settings around the world are violent toward women and subjugate women in a variety of other ways, including in sexual and reproductive health, there are at least some exceptions. And it is these exceptions that can offer us insights on how to deconstruct negative aspects of masculinity and reconstruct and emphasize the positive aspects.

For the future, we plan to expand our alliances, to carry the ideas from our work to broader sectors of the general public – to unions, schools, sports groups and other settings where men gather in large numbers. We plan to continue to build a body of knowledge about the issue and to exchange ideas with other groups in Brazil and elsewhere on these issues. And through our work with young men, we hope to train the next generation of leaders who will take the issue even further.

For the near-term future, we are focused on creating sustainability – of generating income through project activities to ensure the continuity of the project. We are also promoting progressively increasing levels of participation and leadership by the young men themselves. They are increasingly framing the future of the project. In the short term, some of the young men will become the next generation of group facilitators who will recruit the next generation of peer promoters. We are also planning to expand the project to Brasilia, and perhaps other cities in Brazil – again with the young men themselves taking the lead.
References


