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Reconstructing masculinity? A qualitative evaluation of the Stepping Stones and Creating Futures interventions in urban informal settlements in South Africa

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Evidence shows the importance of working with men to reduce intimate partner violence and HIV-risk. Two claims dominate this work. The first is that interventions ‘reconstruct’ masculinities – these new formations of masculinity exist in opposition to existing ones and are healthier for men and less harmful for women. The second is that to be successful, such interventions need to address men’s exclusion from the economy. Using a qualitative longitudinal cohort study of young men who participated in a gender transformative and livelihood strengthening intervention, as well as dyadic interviews with men’s main female partners, we explore these claims. Data suggests men saw some improvements in livelihoods and relationships. However, challenging social contexts, including high rates of unemployment, peer networks and a dominant youth masculinity, limited change. Rather than reconstructing masculinity, a more subtle shift was seen with men moving away from ‘harmful’ aspects of a dominant youth masculinity towards a form of masculinity whereby male power is buttressed by economic provision and attempting to form and support ‘households’. Working with men on their livelihoods at an instrumental level encouraged participation in the intervention. Beyond encouragement, men’s improving livelihoods afforded men the opportunity to materially demonstrate the social changes – in the form of shifts in masculinity – they were seeking to enact.

Keywords: violence; IPV; gender; livelihoods; structural; men; HIV; economic

Background

Globally, 30% of women have experienced sexual and/or physical violence from an intimate partner (IPV) (WHO 2013). The impact of IPV on women’s health is wide-ranging, including higher levels of depression and suicidality (WHO 2013) and, in southern and eastern Africa, acquiring HIV (Jewkes et al. 2010).

Reviews emphasise the promising nature of participatory interventions engaging men for gender equality as pathways to reduce IPV and HIV-risk (Barker, Ricardo, and Nascimento 2007; Dworkin, Treves-Kagan, and Lippman 2013). This has led to a significant shift in emphasis of many IPV- and HIV-prevention programmes and interventions away from working only or primarily with women to resist patriarchy, and towards working with men to reduce gender inequalities and their use of violence and risk behaviours.

There is also recognition of how men’s investment in gender inequitable masculinities undermines their health and wellbeing (Connell 2005) and how working with men to

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transform gender inequalities may improve their health. In South Africa, a recent cross-sectional study explored men's use of condoms; it found men who were more violent and/or gender inequitable were less likely to use condoms than others (Shai et al. 2012). Other work suggests inequitable masculinities limit access to HIV-testing and ART uptake (DiCarlo et al. 2014).

Two claims dominate work to transform men's gender norms and build gender equality. First, through such interventions men will 'reconstruct' their understandings of what it means to be a man. It is assumed that these new formations of masculinity will exist in opposition to current ones and will be healthier for men and less harmful for women (Greig et al. 2008; Dworkin et al. 2013). Indeed, Sweetman (2013) suggests that in such interventions: 'These norms [of masculinity] need to be re-formed, around an ideal of non-violence, building a sense of male pride and dignity based on progressive, gender-equitable ideals' (2013, 5).

Second, interventions working with poor, under- or un-employed men on transforming masculinities need simultaneously to work on men's economic exclusion from the capitalist system (Greig 2009; Gibbs et al. 2012; Silberschmidt 2012). Research globally traces how men's violent practices and HIV-related risk behaviours can be partially understood as responses to their disenfranchisement from economic processes, and that such practices represent men's attempt to establish respect and masculinity through a range of alternative and accessible strategies (Silberschmidt 2012; Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014). In turn, authors suggest the need to tackle the multiple-interlocking forms of exclusion men face (Greig 2009). Others go further, suggesting that attempts to transform masculinities without building livelihoods are bound to fail:

... I seriously doubt that poor, frustrated men with no access to income-generating activities, who are not respected by their wives because of lack of financial support, who are blamed for their extramarital activities, and whose self-esteem and masculinity are at stake, would be interested in the struggle for gender justice and gender equality But what would interest them is getting access to income-generating activities that would enable them to provide for their families. (Silberschmidt 2012, 99)

While these two claims are central to recent research and theorisation around masculinities and transforming gender norms, few studies explore the application of these claims. In South Africa, Dworkin et al. (2013) suggested that the One Man Can intervention starts to produce new forms of masculinity. Similarly, Torres et al. (2013) in Latin America, pointed to how interventions enable a new language of masculinity to emerge.

This study seeks to fill this gap through a longitudinal cohort qualitative study of men involved in a gender-transformative and livelihood-strengthening intervention. Data were collected at three time points with the same men, enabling an understanding of the differential impacts of the intervention on men and their lives and the fluidity of masculinities. In addition, dyadic interviews with men's main female partners were conducted to triangulate experiences.

Context and methods

In South Africa, 23% of households live in informal settlements (HDA 2011). Research was conducted in two urban informal settlements in eThekweni District, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Little Japan was an older, larger settlement, with a mixture of formal government housing and shacks. Located alongside a highway, with a shopping centre and large township 10 minutes public taxi ride away, the city centre was a further 15 minutes'

drive. The second settlement, Mbazwana, was significantly poorer. On a steep hillside and only recently settled, all houses were shacks. It was disconnected from employment opportunities, with Durban 45 minutes and two taxi rides away.

Data shows that informal settlements are overwhelmingly spaces of violence and HIV-risk (Thomas, Vearey, and Mahlangu 2011). In South Africa, HIV-prevalence in informal settlements is twice that of formal communities (Shisana et al. 2009). Qualitative research with young people in informal settlements has traced how changing global economic and gender regimes have shaped women's and men's particular vulnerabilities and experiences of IPV and HIV-risk (Hunter 2005, 2010; Gores-Green 2009). Broadly, these arguments – building on Connell's (2005) theorising of masculinity – suggest that in contexts of poverty and youth unemployment, 'traditional' paths for gaining masculine respect, primarily based on economic provision in relationships, are foreclosed and, as a result, many young men construct a youth masculinity, which seeks power through readily accessible strategies, primarily control and dominance over women and other men, and an over-emphasised performance of heterosexuality (Hunter 2005; Gores-Green 2009; Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014).

The stepping stones and creating futures interventions

Stepping Stones and Creating Futures are participatory interventions that seek to reduce IPV and HIV-risk among young people in urban informal settlements by building gender equality and livelihoods. Both interventions draw on Freire's (1973) work, which argues that through critical dialogue and reflection, people can start to imagine and act on alternative ways of being.

Stepping Stones is a behavioural intervention combining HIV-prevention with the pursuit of greater gender equality. Globally it has shown promise, most notably a randomised controlled trial (RCT) in rural South Africa showing a 33% reduction in herpes simplex type 2 incidence among women and men, and a lower proportion of men reporting perpetration of IPV after two-years and less transactional sex and problem drinking at 12 months (Jewkes et al. 2008). Sessions include communication, assertiveness, reducing gender violence, sex and love. Creating Futures aims to strengthen young people's economic wellbeing through encouraging reflection and skills building (Misselhorn et al. 2014). Topics include securing and keeping jobs, writing CVs and budgeting and saving. Combined, the interventions consist of 21 sessions, three hours each. Sessions are single sex, with 20 people per group, delivered by a trained peer facilitator.

In 2012, we undertook a pilot of Stepping Stones and Creating Futures in South Africa. We recruited 110 men and 122 women, all out-of-school (average age 21.7 years), into the intervention.

Data

Data comes from a longitudinal cohort study using qualitative in-depth interviews (IDIs) with men and their main female partners. Before the intervention, we randomly selected 20 men, of whom 19 agreed to participate, and we undertook IDIs. We sought IDIs with the same men 6 months and 12 months later. An additional two men, identified through convenience sampling, were included post-intervention to replace those we could not locate and interview. The IDIs were conducted by a trained male research assistant.

Baseline interviews focused on the men's lives, how they made a living and their relationships with family, friends and partners, including violence. Six-month interviews reviewed these topics and focused on the experience of the intervention, whether they put their learning into action and whether or not this was successful. At 12 months, interviews focused on the same topics.

We undertook IDIs with men's main female partners at baseline and 12 months. Access to interview these women was first requested from male partners. We then independently contacted the women and sought their informed consent as autonomous individuals. Many men remained reluctant to allow us to speak to their partners, even after initially agreeing and providing telephone numbers. We chose not to conduct interviews if there was concern about the woman's safety. The IDIs with women included a focus on their livelihood, relationship to their partner and whether they saw any change. A trained female research assistant conducted these interviews (see Table 1).

Ethical approval was given by the South African Medical Research Council (EC003-175 2/2012) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (HSS/0789/011 and HSS/1273/011D). Written informed consent was obtained from participants. No payment was given for participating in the intervention. However, at each IDI a small meal was bought by the research assistant and shared to build rapport. Transport costs were reimbursed. Participant and community names have been changed.

Data analysis

Data analysis was undertaken in two ways. First, a thematic analysis focused on the main domains of change that the intervention sought to impact on, specifically livelihoods and gender relationships, was conducted on all 'post-intervention' data to enable thick descriptions of outcomes – essentially a broad overview of the range of outcomes described (Flick 2002). These are interwoven into the case-studies to provide a broad perspective on the multiplicity of men's descriptions.

As we are concerned with processes of change and how men make sense of their lives, we used Lewis' (2007) framework for analysing longitudinal qualitative data. Each participant's corpus of data – including interviews with female partners – was read in its entirety. Case-study summaries were written for each participant, describing their life at each point, focused on livelihoods, relationships and masculinity and how they interplayed, with a particular emphasis on points of change, continuity or regression. We purposively selected divergent case-studies to explore the changing dynamics of men's lives, relationships with partners and the impact of their involvement in the intervention (Shirani and Henwood 2011) enabling them to come 'into-dialogue' with one another (Lewis 2007).

Findings: contrasting trajectories of masculinity

Through four case-studies, we explore the processes and sustainability of change resulting from the intervention as well as providing greater detail of outcomes.

Vuyo

At baseline, Vuyo was living in his partner of four year's (Jabu) single room house; research from South Africa shows that, generally, women live in men's homes out of economic necessity (Hunter 2010). Yet, this was different for Vuyo as, although he did

Table 1. Data collected for study.

Participant	Demographic information at baseline	Man			Female partner		
		Baseline	6 months	12 months	Baseline	12 months	12 months
1 Bheka	Aged 27. Temporary formal work. Two regular, long-term partners.	X	X	X	Nombuso		
2 Dumisani	Aged 21. Irregular work. Regular partner.	X	X	X			
3 Gwedi	Aged 23. Sells marijuana and supported by family. Two regular partners, one long-term, one more casual.	X	X	X			Dedela
4 Bulelani	Aged 20. Sells food and cigarettes at side of road. Long-term partner, occasional casual partners.	X	X	X			Veliswa
5 Goodman	Aged 22. No job, supported by mother. Long-term partner, many casual partners.	X	X	X			Nombini
6 Vusi	Aged 21. No job, supported by mother and uncle. One regular partner.	X	X	X			
7 Mthobisi	Aged 20. No job, supported by sister. Lives with regular partner.	X	X	X			Nompu
8 Mboniswa	Aged 21. No job, supported by mother. One long-term partner.	X	X	X			Zinzi
9 Khulekani	Aged 25. Short-term construction work. Regular partner, on-and-off relationship.	X	X	X			Nonhlanla
10 Vuyo	Aged 22. Supported by girlfriend and occasional work. Long-term partner and occasional casual partners.	X	X	X			Jabu
11 Mandla	Aged 22. Works part-time at a restaurant. Has two regular partners, one in area and one in rural area.	X	X	X			Nosipho
12 Wiseman	Aged 26. Sells food and sweets by roadside. One regular partner and occasional casual relationships.	X	X	X			Nomusa
13 Mondli	Aged 25. Occasionally provides music at parties. One regular partner.	X	X	X			Thembeke
14 Thabo	Aged 23. Temporary piece-work. One long-term partner, plus one shorter-term, but regular, partner.	X	X	X			Gugu
15 Lindani	Aged 24. Temporary construction work. Long-term partner, plus shorter-term relationships with women and casual partners.	X	X	X			
16 Abelo	Aged 21. Occasionally works as a taxi assistant. Main partner and casual partners.	X	X	X			
17 Thokozeni	Aged 19. No job, supported by mother. One long-term partner.	X	X	X			Zodwa
18 Sandile	Aged 21. Temporary work in factories. One long-term partner.	X	X	X			
19 Bongani	Aged 24. Occasional attempts to start small business. Regular partner and casual partners.	X	X	X			
20 Nhlanhla	Aged 22. No job, supported by family. Regular partner and occasional casual partners.	X	X	X			
21 Siphamandla	Aged 21. Temporary piece-work. Regular partner and casual partners.	X	X	X			

occasional photography work, he was financially dependent on Jabu. As with many young people in urban informal settlements, men's collapsing economic position, in contrast to women's strengthening one, led to a relationship with high levels of mistrust (see also Hunter 2010). Vuyo often refused to talk to Jabu about his life, partly as a way to resist her control, but also potentially expressing insecurity and fears that this might make him appear 'unmanly':

Yah I can say the difficulty I faced is it was hard to let my partner know that I was attending this type of intervention, to me that was hard because everything that I was planning I had to involve her too, even though I ended up telling her but to me it was hard. (Vuyo, 6-month IDI)

Vuyo's and Jabu's relationship was characterised by high levels of violence, and Vuyo often sought other sexual partners. Dominant youth masculinities in these settings emphasised the conspicuous demonstration of violence against female partners and other men, as well as aggressive forms of heterosexuality – all ways young men sought as pathways to achieve respect when other forms linked to economic provision were closed (Gores-Green 2009; Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014).

At 6 months, Vuyo and Jabu reported that his attendance at the intervention had improved their relationship. Vuyo suggested that this was because sessions gave him space to discuss the problems he faced:

So the thing is what got me involved in this project is that I heard from another guy in my area that there is something happening. So I wanted to go too, because I had a problem with my girlfriend because we were always fighting. When I got there it was exactly what I was expecting and I decided to stay and attend the sessions hoping I would be alright and I saw that all the things I had problems with were solved. (Vuyo, 6-month IDI)

Importantly, communication in Vuyo and Jabu's relationship improved – a key aim of Stepping Stones and a potential pathway for reducing violence in relationships (Hatcher et al. 2014). Vuyo framed this as being able to listen to alternative views:

Vuyo: I can say it's where we were told to treat people close to us well, be it a parent or a girlfriend that actually helps me.

Interviewer: How?

Vuyo: I was able to listen to my partner because I never used to listen to her. Like when she wanted me to do something I would end up wanting things to go my way, but now I can listen to her . . . I was able to be on good terms with her now. There is nothing we complain about, no there is none. (6-month IDI)

Improving communication with primary partners was a recurring theme in other men's interviews. Often, men contrasted their new-found willingness to talk and listen with what they had been like before the intervention. When Mthobisi was asked what he had learnt from the intervention, he described this:

Mthobisi: The communication part. It was important to talk to your woman so that everything can go well. I never used to talk, if there was something that pissed me off I would get angry and walk away, but now I can talk about it and then all goes well.

Interviewer: What encouraged you to change your behaviour?

Mthobisi: I just told myself that I should put my pride aside. (6-month IDI)

Jabu was impressed by the changes she saw while Vuyo attended the intervention. The initial interview with Jabu was a few weeks after the intervention had begun. She identified how he had changed, that their relationship was improving and that Vuyo was less interested in other women. Simultaneously, Vuyo also attempted to build his photography business. However, while Vuyo said this had improved marginally, he still remained dependent on Jabu.

Participatory interventions create safe social spaces outside of everyday realities, enabling people to try out new ways of being and to support those attempting to change (Campbell 2003). For Vuyo, the support offered by the 21 sessions was critical to his attempts to change, but he was unable to sustain the change once the intervention finished. Jabu suggested a central reason was that Vuyo still spent time with the same friends:

Jabu: What can I say? He tried to improve while attending, but he didn't change his friends. He went back to his old ways.

Interviewer: What kind of friends does he have?

Jabu: They are not good friends.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Jabu: They me made him smoke. He wasn't a smoker; he loved church.

Interviewer: What does he smoke?

Jabu: He ended up smoking dagga [marijuana]; maybe there are other drugs he smokes that I'm unaware of. His way of thinking has turned into something I don't know. He's very aggressive. (12-month IDI)

While violence had always been a part of Jabu's and Vuyo's relationship, it seemed to escalate, culminating in Vuyo threatening Jabu with a knife:

I distanced myself from him when he started to change his behaviour. He started carrying knives; if he's in a fight he will pull a knife. I moved away because I feared for my life. (Jabu, 12-month IDI)

Despite some changes, Vuyo described limited change in his relationship with Jabu, which was also reflected in many men's interviews where they described continuing patterns of gender inequitable behaviours, pointing to the difficulty of behaviour change:

Interviewer: Do you have casual partners you have sex with since the intervention or you have changed?

Nhlanhla: It's difficult for a man to refrain from those kinds of activities. I'm still a ladies man. (12-month IDI)

For Vuyo, the intervention provided him with a safe social space to step outside of his everyday constraints and attempt to construct a new relationship with his partner, as well as expand his livelihood. Yet he was unable to sustain these without the support of the intervention and without disengaging from his peers, and by 12 months had shifted back into practices more associated with a dominant youth masculinity (Hunter 2010; Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014).

Gwedi

At baseline, Gwedi had two sources of income: his family, who provided food and clothes, and selling marijuana. Similar to Vuyo, Gwedi drew on a youth masculinity constructed out of the 'vulnerability' he felt in not being able to provide in relationships, as was 'expected of men'. He described the problems this disjuncture caused:

It does a lot, you know we have kids and the baby's mother calls asking for soap, asking for pampers [diapers], whilst you don't have money that is a problem Or you have a new girlfriend and then you need to call that person and you don't have '*fokol*' [nothing], or that girlfriend is visiting you and you don't have money for the drinks or buy her something when she has visited you, and you find that you don't have cash. (Gwedi, baseline IDI)

One way Gwedi described seeking respect was through having multiple-sexual partners. Gwedi was proud of this, describing himself as 'a bit of a player' (baseline, IDI). Gwedi had a long-term partner of four years (Dedela), with whom he had a child. In addition, he had a second partner who he described as seeing 'just for sex'. Gwedi used

violence against both partners to correct what he perceived as them ‘disrespecting’ him, for example when one refused to have sex, he hit her:

Interviewer: If you wanted to have sex with her and she said no, what would happen?

Gwedi: Well ... [laughing] well ... That has happened before.

Interviewer: What happened?

Gwedi: I had to lay a hand on her [hit her] because of what she did. She came to my house at night drunk, and I wanted to have sex with her, and she denied me sex ... so I beat her up for making a fool of me. (baseline IDI)

Gwedi’s attendance at the intervention was mixed since while attending he also undertook temporary work. Despite this, Gwedi described attending as a positive experience: ‘It felt good to go because I had to participate since I was part of the group and work together as a group’ (6-month IDI).

In follow-up interviews, Gwedi described how he had stopped selling marijuana and continued to search for permanent work. While the intervention encouraged men to seek work, high levels of unemployment meant temporary, unsatisfying work was often all that was available:

Interviewer: How is the success of the way you get money or live on?

Gwedi: What can I say? It’s not much of a success. I just put together because, I don’t have anywhere else where I work. I work if a job opportunity arises.

Interviewer: What difficulties do you come across?

Gwedi: The problems I face are I don’t work every day ... That is a difficulty I face. Even if I get money, it’s only for three days. That’s how it is, my brother. (Gwedi, 12-month IDI)

Many men reported, like Gwedi, that despite seeking work, often it was simply not available:

Khulekani: What has not changed is that I have not found a job ...

Interviewer: Why have you not found a job?

Khulekani: Like yesterday I sent my CV and I still am sending CVs but I have not had any responses ... (6-month IDI)

At the same time as Gwedi moved into legal, albeit temporary, employment, his relationship with Dedela improved. Dedela and Gwedi reported less violence in their relationship, partly linked to improved communication:

Interviewer: Have you hit your girlfriend since you attended the intervention?

Gwedi: No, I last hit her before attending.

Interviewer: What made you to change?

Gwedi: I realised that it was not helping. You can be physical but not stop her from what she wants to do. You hit her now, but you don’t know what she does when she’s not around you.

Interviewer: How do you control your emotions if she gets to you?

Gwedi: I speak with her about what I don’t like and suggest the right way to do it (12-month IDI)

Dedela also reported changes in her relationship with Gwedi. She tied this to Gwedi changing his friends and spending less time drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana, pointing to the clustered nature of risk behaviours (Hatcher et al. 2014):

Dedela: I don’t know exactly when he started changing. I heard about his attendance, after he had already started. He has distanced himself from lot of things.

Interviewer: Can you name few of his previous behaviours?

Dedela: He had many female partners, but not now and he’s no longer a heavy drinker of alcohol, he has also decreased his marijuana intake. He reduced it to one smoke a day. I told him to stop completely, because I don’t like it. He said it’s not easy to quit. (12-month IDI)

Gwedi and Dedela described how they spent more time together, yet, while showing a new relationship forming, Gwedi also used it to control Dedela, something he had

previously also done: ‘I always want to know where she is and, if she’s not in her house, I want to know where she is’ (12-month IDI). Many men, like Gwedi, continued to describe needing to know where their partner was at all times, again illustrating that change is difficult. Yet simultaneously, Gwedi also started thinking differently about male power:

When I listened to what they were saying at the intervention. I realised that it was informative. A man should respect himself and others, not think that his powers entitles him to do otherwise. (Gwedi, 12-month IDI)

Gwedi’s attempts to change, to become a more engaged partner, secure work and reduce drinking, drugs and multiple-partners, were not easy. The dense networks supporting him before the intervention held back his change. Gwedi described how as he stepped away from these networks, his peers became jealous of him and one stabbed him:

Interviewer: Have you talked about this programme with your friends?

Gwedi: Yes I told them about it.

Interviewer: How are they responding to your change?

Gwedi: They are jealous because they can see that I am not hanging out with them anymore, I am now hustling on my own. In the past few months I have been injured – I was stabbed by one of them, because of the jealousy. Because they see my new lifestyle, they wish I was still hustling with them doing wrong things. (Gwedi, 6-month IDI)

For Gwedi, the impact of the intervention was mixed. While his income did not necessarily improve, he reoriented himself towards seeking work, distancing himself from peers and also started to negotiate a new relationship with his partner that was less violent and more supportive.

Thabo

The case-study of Thabo shows a young man slowly establishing himself economically and, in so doing, being able to play a larger and more supportive role with his partner and their child. At baseline, Thabo described taking piece jobs, ranging from cleaning yards to working in a fish factory. Financially, his grandmother supported him, contrasting with young men’s expectations of financial independence. Similar to others, Thabo described his use of violence against his partner as an attempt to ‘discipline’ her, in essence asserting his power over her in the absence of economic power and his inability to control her, shown by her perceived infidelity:

Thabo: Yes I’ve hit my girlfriend, my current one.

Interviewer: What caused you to hit your girlfriend?

Thabo: I found a message from a guy that was asking her out at that time

Interviewer: So you gave her a beating?

Thabo: [laughing] The thing is when she finds messages on my phone, she sends her sisters to shout at me telling me that I am cheating on her and all that. So when I found that message I beat her up. (baseline IDI)

Thabo described how he benefitted from the intervention. From *Stepping Stones*, he emphasised how he ‘learned’ to exit potentially confrontational situations: ‘I walk away, because I know I have a very short temper’ (12-month IDI). More widely, he learnt to express his emotions, contrary to the silent and unexpressive masculinities of many men (Seidler 2005):

Now we ask each other about what we both love. And she tells me how she loves me and I tell her how much I love her. (Thabo, 12-month IDI)

Thabo continued, describing how this was not simply a new form of caring relationship emerging, but was linked to his improving economic position, enabling him to

demonstrate his love through providing in his relationship. Hunter (2010) argues that love in modern South Africa is a combination of romantic love and material provision. As Thabo managed to secure a formal shop job with regular pay, he could start to provide the material aspects required for love:

Thabo: Well I do try to give her gifts. I bring her something nice that will bring a smile in her face.

Interviewer: So you bring her gifts?

Thabo: Yes the thing is she does not like chocolate. Let's say I bring her a card or and some cakes, wrap them nicely and also bring her some chips and ice cream wrapped nicely it sits well with her, because when she opens it she starts to smile ... (12-month IDI)

More widely, increasing earnings meant that Thabo felt more confident and self-assured. He was able to buy things for his child and himself and was not dependent on his grandmother:

Interviewer: How successful is the way you make a living?

Thabo: [excited] It is very successful because now I am able to buy myself my own things and for my baby. I don't ask for it.

Interviewer: So you're not bothering your grandmother anymore?

Thabo: [laughs proudly] No I don't. (12-month IDI)

Thabo's relationship improved because of the interaction between his attempts to change his identity and relationship with his partner, alongside his improving material reality that enabled him to practically demonstrate this. He started to reject aspects of the dominant youth masculinity and move towards a more 'traditional' masculinity founded more on economic provision (Hunter 2010).

Mondli

As with Thabo, Mondli's case study points towards the interlinked nature of changing gender norms and improving economic wellbeing. The safe space the intervention created enabled Mondli to talk about his problems with others who faced similar issues:

It was the first time I have ever attended workshops about things that were relevant to me ... as a person the less you talk about it the more it eats you within. When I ended up talking about things that were bothering me, I then felt better because it was something big to me which I could not tell just anybody, but I told people and I was okay after that. (Mondi, 6-month IDI)

Over the year, Mondli's work and financial situation improved. At baseline, work involved occasionally providing music at parties. The intervention inspired Mondli to look for work. Initially it was temporary work with courier companies, but by 12 months he had secured himself a relatively permanent position at an electricity company.

An ongoing concern about building men's livelihoods is that they will spend extra income on alcohol and sex (Gibbs et al. 2012). Rather, Mondli, after hearing how other men in his group saved small amounts, opened a Post Office Savings Account with his partner, and saved money there for their child's future. Others similarly described how they began saving money following participation in the intervention:

Bulelani: I have been saving money since last year, since the project started. I saved some money so I can be able to sell things like fried chips, cold drinks, so I can make a living for now.

Interviewer: So how successful is the way you make a living?

Bulelani: Ever since I started doing this business I have seen a lot of progress. I see if I carry on there is a lot of things that can start unfolding and all the things I want will happen. (12-month IDI)

Mondli, as with Thabo, also emphasised additional money he earned was primarily spent on his partner and child, born just after the start of the intervention:

Interviewer: What do you spend your extra income on?

Mondli: I spend it a lot on the baby.

Interviewer: On the baby?

Mondli: Yes and on the baby's mother.

Interviewer: What do you spend it on?

Mondli: Clothes, food, and on the baby's mother it's the cosmetics, clothes, for doing her hair and all that. (12-month IDI)

The impact of Mondli's increased income, particularly his choice of spending it on his partner and child, paralleled other improvements in their relationship; at root, Mondli's decision to financially provide for his child and partner made him a more desirable partner. In one sense, he started to replace one form of masculinity and power over women, which prioritised strategies of violence and emphasised heterosexuality, with another in which power was secured by economic provision.

Mondli also became an engaged father with his young child out of choice, rather than necessity. Choosing to actively father has been suggested as a pathway into gender equitable relationships (Morrell and Jewkes 2011). Throughout the interview, Thembeke mentioned how Mondli was an engaged father:

Interviewer: What does he say about being a father?

Thembeke: I can tell he's happy. He rushed the birth of the child. He wanted to take care of her ...

Interviewer: How often does he [Mondli] see the baby?

Thembeke: A day doesn't go by without him visiting the baby. He sometimes stays with her if he doesn't have anywhere to go. (12-month IDI)

Mondli became committed to securing his position and future in his relationship with Thembeke and his child, most clearly signified through him saving up and paying 'damages' for conceiving a baby with Thembeke when not married. This was a symbolically important move as it secured his ability to give the baby his name and be recognised as the father by her family. Immediately after the intervention, Mondli said this was what he wanted to do: 'I want by next year to pay for the baby damages' (6-month IDI). Six months later, with improved employment and saving, he paid his partner's parents the 'damages' he owed: 'I am able to buy bigger things and I am able to make plans and I have been able to pay for impregnating my girlfriend' (12-month IDI). Through this economic transaction, he staked a social claim over the child, as well as making a social claim about their future (Hunter 2010). For Mondli, the shift seen was not simply about an improved relationship with his partner and greater financial resources, it was also a social transition whereby Mondli started to position himself within a different masculinity, moving from a dominant youth masculinity, and starting to draw on aspects of a 'traditional' masculinity.

Discussion: the pathways and limits of gender transformation?

This study traced the impact on young men's lives through participating in Stepping Stones and Creating Futures. Central to process of change, as the case studies highlight, was that the intervention created safe social spaces for dialogue and critical thinking. This enabled men to come together to discuss challenges they faced, which was otherwise unlikely given the ways in which the dominant youth masculinity in this setting emphasised toughness and emotional control (Seidler 2005; Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014) and is central to theorisation on behaviour change in masculinities research

(Campbell 2003; Barker, Ricardo, and Nascimento 2007; Dworkin et al. 2013). For those men inclined to change, this may have been important in demonstrating acceptance of, and validation of, alternative masculinities by other men who were also part of the intervention. Whether it was the content of the intervention that was critical for supporting change or simply the process of providing safe social spaces for men to come together and talk about their lives is unclear. Unravelling these complexities requires further research and theorisation around participatory interventions.

A key outcome of some men's engagement in the intervention was increasing participation in the formal and informal economy. Many saw improved incomes, which, combined with new strategies around saving and budgeting, led some to build economic capital. The case-studies suggested that while some found new forms of work, many continued in low-paying 'demeaning' work, suggesting they may have become more willing to accept such work given how it could be a 'springboard' to wider life objectives.

Other important outcomes described were shifts in gender norms and relationships. A central aim of the intervention was to reduce IPV, and the case-studies suggest this may have happened, alongside improved communication and avoiding conflict. More widely, there emerged some more 'progressive' outcomes, such as critical thinking about power in relationships – a critical precursor to change (Campbell 2003) – and engaged fathering, behaviours that are fundamentally important in challenging dominant narratives of masculinity (Morrell and Jewkes 2011). Yet, at the same time, many men continued to exert subtle forms of control over their partners, particularly through needing to know where their partners were, and some men continued to seek multiple-sexual partners and described how they continued to use violence against partners.

We suggested there were two claims made about interventions working with men and masculinities. First they introduce radical new forms of gender equitable masculinity. The case-studies suggest that this did not happen. Rather, a subtle shift was seen, with men moving away from more 'harmful' aspects of a youth masculinity, which prioritise violence and emphasised heterosexuality (Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014), towards drawing on a form of masculinity in which male power is buttressed by economic provision and sustaining stable 'households', broadly appropriating aspects of a 'traditional' masculinity (Hunter 2010). Similar to Jewkes, Wood and Duvury's (2010) analysis of Stepping Stones, these forms of masculine practice were less violent and more concerned about reducing risk, but not radical new forms of gender equitable masculinity. Instead, they drew on aspects of masculinity already existing within the wider social context. While certainly less violent, these masculinities also supported a subtle pattern of patriarchal power, in which overt violence and control was replaced by control through economic provision and social hegemony (Connell 2005).

However, the intervention also engendered aspects of more gender equitable masculinities, suggesting that this was not simply the replacement of one form of patriarchal power with another. While not overstating these pockets of radical change, some men's emphasis on engaged fathering, expressing emotions and critical thinking about power in relationships certainly challenged dominant ideas about masculinity, going beyond both the youth and 'traditional' masculinities. These pockets may, in time, produce potential for more radical gender change to emerge.

The second claim was that building men's economic livelihoods, while working on gender equality, is critical for success of such interventions. In its starkest form, this assertion is rather undermined by the first Stepping Stones RCT in rural South Africa, which showed a reduction in school-going men's violence without an economic intervention (Jewkes et al. 2008). Perhaps a different question is whether it appears that

intervening on socioeconomic circumstances assists these changes. We found at an instrumental level, our older men (where 80% were aged 18–24) – compared to the Stepping Stones RCT where 80% of men were aged 15–19 – did participate, and appreciated the intervention focusing on strengthening their livelihoods, a key priority for them. Beyond encouraging engagement, men’s improving livelihoods appeared to afford them the opportunity to materially demonstrate social changes – shifts in identity – they were seeking to enact. Men’s attempts to move from a youth masculinity towards aspects of a ‘traditional’ masculine identity were supported when they could materially demonstrate this shift, through being able to provide in relationships, paying ‘damages’ for pregnancies outside of marriage and becoming independent through work.

Yet not all men sought to enact such changes, nor could all men who attempted to change sustain them. The case-studies point to the challenging social environments young men live in. High levels of poverty, widespread unemployment, peer networks that focus on alcohol and drug use and widespread patriarchal norms all contribute to some men not changing. Furthermore, many were highly invested in dominant youth masculinity and simply may not have wished to change. Brief interventions such as Stepping Stones and Creating Futures remain critical for those it does impact on. However, the embedded nature of violence and HIV-risk behaviours rooted in patriarchal social norms and economic marginalisation continues to require broader restructuring of economic and gender power (Connell 2005; Greig 2009).

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Résumé

Il a été démontré qu’il est important d’impliquer les hommes dans les efforts de réduction des taux de violence entre partenaires intimes et du risque lié au VIH. Deux affirmations dominent ces travaux.

Premièrement, les interventions « reconstruisent » les masculinités ; et les nouvelles formations de la masculinité s'opposent aux formations déjà existantes, sont plus saines pour les hommes et moins nocives pour les femmes. Deuxièmement, pour porter ses fruits, ce travail doit se concentrer sur l'exclusion des hommes de l'économie. En nous basant sur une étude de cohorte qualitative et longitudinale sur des jeunes hommes ayant participé à une intervention visant à faire évoluer les inégalités de genre et les conditions d'existence, et sur des entretiens dyadiques avec leurs principales partenaires féminines, nous explorons ces affirmations. Les données suggèrent que les hommes ont constaté des améliorations des conditions d'existence et des relations. Cependant, des contextes sociaux difficiles, parmi lesquels un taux élevé de chômage, les réseaux de pairs et la masculinité dominante des jeunes ont limité ces améliorations. Plutôt qu'une reconstruction de la masculinité, un changement plus subtil a été constaté avec les hommes qui s'éloignaient des aspects « nocifs » de la masculinité dominante des jeunes pour rejoindre une forme de masculinité selon laquelle le pouvoir masculin est consolidé par des dispositions économiques et la tentative de créer et de subvenir aux besoins des « foyers ». Travailler avec les hommes sur leurs conditions d'existence de façon instrumentale a facilité la participation à l'intervention. Au-delà de cette facilitation, l'amélioration des conditions d'existence des hommes a offert à ces derniers une opportunité de démontrer les changements sociaux de manière objective – les changements de la masculinité qu'ils cherchaient à adopter.

Resumen

Está demostrado que es importante trabajar con hombres para disminuir la violencia de pareja y el riesgo de VIH. Este trabajo gira en torno a dos afirmaciones. En primer lugar, la afirmación de que los programas “reconstruyen” las masculinidades; estas nuevas formaciones de masculinidad existen en contradicción con las ya existentes y son más saludables para los hombres y menos dañinas para las mujeres. En segundo lugar, la afirmación de que para que sea eficaz es necesario que en este trabajo se tenga en cuenta la exclusión de los hombres de la economía. Analizamos estas afirmaciones a partir de un estudio cualitativo de cohorte longitudinal de hombres jóvenes que participaron en un programa orientado a la transformación de los géneros y el fortalecimiento de los medios de vida, y mediante entrevistas diádicas con las principales parejas femeninas de los hombres. Los datos indican que los hombres notaron mejoras en sus medios de vida y relaciones. Sin embargo, debido a contextos sociales difíciles, incluyendo altas tasas de desempleo, redes de compañeros y una masculinidad joven dominante, los cambios eran limitados. Más que reconstruir la masculinidad, se observó un cambio más sutil en el que los hombres se alejan de los aspectos “dañinos” de la masculinidad joven dominante y adoptan una forma de masculinidad donde el poder de los hombres está respaldado por una prestación económica y el esfuerzo por formar y sostener “hogares”. En el programa trabajar con los hombres en torno a sus medios de vida a nivel instrumental fomentaba la participación. Además de servir de estímulo, al mejorar sus medios de vida se brindaba a los hombres la oportunidad de demostrar sustancialmente los cambios sociales, y por tanto cambios en la masculinidad, que deseaban poner en práctica.