



Working with the whole family to prevent violence against Women and Girls in Tajikistan



Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is widespread in Tajikistan, with significant impacts on women, their families and wider society. Using an approach tailored to the Tajik context, our intervention Zindagii Shoista (ZS) – ‘Living with Dignity’ - combined social and economic interventions to halve the violence experienced by young married women from both their husbands and in laws. The mental health and economic security of participating families also significantly improved.

This brief demonstrates that prevention of VAWG is possible in Tajikistan and provides a successful scaleable model on which to base further interventions.

Background

National level data shows that half of all women in Tajikistan have experienced violence from their husbands and in-laws. Baseline research conducted to inform the ZS- ‘Living with Dignity’ intervention in 2016 revealed around 60% of women had experienced sexual, physical and emotional violence in the 12 months before the interview. Additionally, it discovered a high level of depression and suicidality among women and men.

The group most affected by various forms of gender-based violence in our research was young women aged 18-24, each of whom reported having experienced violence in the past 12 months. Young daughters-in-law are particularly vulnerable both to intimate partner violence (IPV) and violence from in-laws.

The Issue

‘Zindagii Shoista’ (translated “Living with Dignity”) is the first rigorously evaluated intervention to prevent violence against women in Tajikistan and the broader Central Asia region. It is innovative in addressing the overlapping problems of poverty, patriarchy and violence against women through a family focus.

The intervention has been shown to be effective in preventing domestic and intimate partner violence, but also in improving mental and physical wellbeing, livelihoods and food security.

KEY MESSAGES

- 1.) VAWG in Tajikistan is pervasive – driven by multiple factors including patriarchal social norms, poverty, and alcohol abuse.
- 2.) Despite this, violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Tajikistan is preventable – by combining social norm change and economic empowerment, Zindagii Shoista has led to reductions in violence of around 50%..
- 3.) The proven effectiveness of the Zindagii Shoista family centred model makes it appropriate for scale up within Tajikistan and its neighbouring states with strong extended families into which young women marry.
- 4.) Evidence of what works is the starting point - addressing VAWG requires collaboration amongst practitioners, researchers, government representatives and donors.
- 5.) The success of this model in the poor, rural Tajik context suggests that to prevent VAWG, we must tackle patriarchy – and poverty.



Woman participating in income generation activity
Photo: Aziz Sattori

Intervention

Global evidence shows that interventions that combine gender empowerment and economic empowerment can be very effective in preventing violence against women. In response to the high levels of violence found in their baseline research, International Alert and its partners Cesvi, ATO, Farodis and Women of the Orient, worked with the South Africa Medical Research Council to develop a comprehensive approach to preventing VAWG tailored to address the realities in Tajikistan where young women marry into strong extended families and face violence at the hands of their husbands and in-laws.

To develop an integrated behaviour change and economic empowerment approach with a family-level focus, we adapted the South African version of Alice Wellbourn’s ‘Stepping Stones’ intervention – a gender transformative behaviour change programme. We combined this with an innovative livelihoods intervention ‘Creating Futures’, which we adapted to the local situation based on the findings of our formative research.

Rather than working with single sex groups or couples, we adapted the approach to target whole families. Social empowerment sessions encourage reflection on values and attitudes towards gender and relationships within the family, build knowledge on health issues and communication skills and raise awareness of VAWG. They are a tool to promote better communication within families, address harmful gender norms and power dynamics and reduce violence.

Following these sessions, economic empowerment activities build understanding of women’s contribution to household economics, strengthened financial management in households through better understanding of budgeting and use of loans, and strengthen household economies by assisting access to paid work, developing business skills, and promoting income generating activities such as cattle breeding and beekeeping

How?



Social empowerment sessions are designed to build knowledge and skills and change attitudes over the course of the 10 weeks, including 7 sessions in separate gender and age groups and 3 meetings of all the peer groups.

Following this, ten 3-hour sessions on economic empowerment are conducted over another 10 weeks. These are divided into two parts: 4 sessions on gender, work and livelihood strengthening, followed by 6 sessions on income-generating activities.

Where?

Zindagii Shoista was implemented in four rural villages in Tajikistan of which two were in the northern district of Penjikent and two in the southern district of Jomi.



Who?

The intervention was implemented with 80 target families with around 270 members, including 60% younger and older women and 40% younger and older men. The research was conducted over 18 months with three interviews per person.

What?



Our research measured the following outcomes:

- Prevalence of, and attitudes toward, VAWG
- Experiences of violence and perpetration
- Gender attitudes and family dynamics, including relations between couples and in-laws
- Physical and mental health

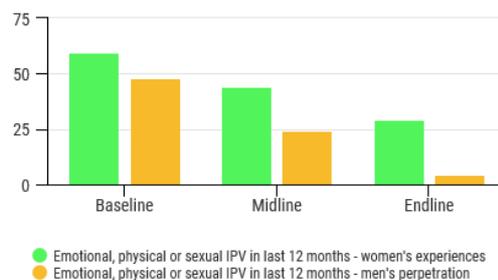
- Economic conditions of target families

Findings



An approach focused on family, that combined social and economic interventions, proved to be effective in reducing domestic and intimate partner violence in rural Tajikistan. Women’s

Reduction of IPV perpetration and experience



experience of violence in the last 12 months reduced from 64% to 33%, and men’s perpetration from 48% to 5%.

The findings also suggest a significant decrease in depression which nearly halved in women and more than halved in men among both women and men. Furthermore, suicidality was very much reduced. In addition, women and men’s gender attitudes became more equitable, and perceived social norms on gender and violence in the community improved.

“I wish this program was running back during the times when I used to live with my mother in law, maybe I and my husband would have not divorced”

Woman participant, 33 years old

The findings of the evaluation point to positive changes in the economic situation of the target families. Significant increases were seen in past month earnings and savings, and overall savings, both for men and women. Women’s earnings increased 4 fold and there was a 10 fold increase in the proportion of women with any savings. In addition food insecurity decreased for both women and men. Specifically, the proportion of women severely food insecure reduced from 56% to 19% and of men from 33% to zero.



Conclusion

VAWG remains a widespread and critical concern in Tajikistan with long-term damaging consequences for individuals and wider Tajik society. However the results of Zindagii Shoista provide reasons for optimism, and have laid the groundwork for scaling

up VAWG prevention efforts in Tajikistan and the broader Central Asia region.

Implications

The findings support global evidence that gender transformative social change interventions, combined with economic empowerment interventions, can have a significant impact on reducing VAWG, in addition to positive impacts on emotional wellbeing, family dynamics, and economic security.

Scaling up prevention efforts requires investment, and collaboration between government, donors and civil society. The evidence provided by this evaluation of Zindagii Shoista gives confidence that with investment of resources and work in partnership we can sign prevent VAWG and related social problems in Tajikistan.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we recommend a rolling out of the intervention further in the districts of this research and to other areas of Tajikistan, and other Central Asian countries.

Further research to continue to build knowledge of the intervention and its effects in the context of roll out would also be invaluable.

Programme team

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