

## Lessons Learned from an Intergenerational Model that Engages Fathers and Sons to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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### Abstract

This study describes the impact of an intergenerational program, piloted by SEED Foundation with the support of Equimundo, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) from 2021-2023, which engages men and boys as supporters of gender equality, shifts harmful beliefs about women, helps to reduce intergenerational violence, and fosters healthy relationships within the home. The program engaged members of the host community, internally displaced persons, and Syrian refugees across Erbil, Sulaimani, and Duhok. SEED Foundation led the implementation of the pilot program in 2022-2023 with a total of 215 participants (96 fathers and 119 sons).

Drawing from quantitative and qualitative results from the intervention's evaluation, both the father and son program participants reported statistically significant increases in levels of knowledge regarding types of violence, attitude shifts that reject normalized justifications of violence, and an increase of behaviors related to emotional regulation. Results from fathers show more self-efficacy and self-reported behaviors of positive parenting and attitudes that welcome shared decision-making in the home. The evaluation with program participants and their wives/mothers highlights the unquantifiable impact of the program in strengthening family

relationships and preparing fathers and sons to embody non-violent and caring notions of masculinity.

This intergenerational program is a pertinent example of new directions for social work and exemplifies an approach wherein social workers can address violence within families and meaningfully engage men and boys alongside interventions that work directly with women and girls, to address social issues from a variety of different perspectives.

**Key Words:** Violence against women, intergenerational approach, non-violence, healthy relationships, GBV

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## **Conflict of Interest**

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

## **Introduction**

Violence against women and children is a pervasive issue around the world, and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is no exception. Gender based violence (GBV) is a complex issue with various causes and contributing factors, and governmental entities and non-governmental organizations have employed a myriad of approaches to prevent, mitigate, and support those affected by violence. While many programmatic interventions have focused on the direct survivors of gender based violence, typically women and girls, SEED Foundation (SEED) and Equimundo developed and implemented a new program to prevent and reduce gender-based violence in the KRI by engaging men and boys as supporters of gender equality and by transforming harmful norms through awareness raising, facilitating critical reflections about the consequences of these norms, and strengthening communication skills to improve interpersonal relationships. This article will outline the approach and impact of this intervention as a mechanism to reduce violence against

women and girls in the KRI and the potential uses for this type of intervention within the social work profession.

### **Contextual Background**

Iraq ranks among the countries with the highest prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in the world – with the most recent WHO data highlighting a prevalence of 26% of lifetime intimate partner violence among ever-married/partnered women aged 15–49 in Iraq (United Nations Iraq, 2022). However, some estimates increased during the COVID-19 pandemic to a reported 45% of Iraqi women having suffered some form of violence from their partner in the past 12 months (Georgetown Institute for Women Peace and Security & The Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2021). High levels of IPV and other forms of GBV are linked to high levels of gender inequality – exacerbated by social norms, the destructive impacts of prolonged conflict, and subsequent exposure to violence.

Gender norms are the accepted and expected characteristics, behaviors, and roles for people based on their gender in each community. These norms are determined by culture, not biology. Therefore, as cultures change and shift, so do gender norms. Generally, people conform to social norms because they want to fit in with their community and avoid disapproval, punishment, and isolation. Gender norms influence many aspects of life, including attitudes and behaviors related to health, safety, and relationships (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020).

Women and men's roles in Kurdistan's society have been shaped by various influences and norms including religion and culture. The dominant social role for men in Iraq emphasizes men's role as protectors and breadwinners – strong physically and financially – while women are characterized as caregivers and responsible for the majority of domestic work. When men perceive that they are unable to fulfill their role, they may resort to demonstrating their power through aggression and

violence (Vilardo & Bittar, 2018). In many conflict and post-conflict settings, this is a common trauma response that underpins the need for control and power over others, especially women and girls.

Iraq's history of conflict shapes gender dynamics, including the ways that both genders have experienced conflict differently, and how conflict itself affects movement toward or away from gender equality. Conflict-related disruption to law and social order has increased women and girls' vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence and reduced access to protection mechanisms. Unresolved trauma and the normalization of societal violence, caused by the multi-decade conflict and cycles of mass displacement, have deeply affected men's identities and shaped cultural norms and behavior around violence (Slegh et al., 2021). Conflicts in Iraq have led militaries and armed groups to capitalize on the norm of men as protectors to incite men to fight and have led to a disproportionate number of men killed during conflicts as fighters or civilians compared to women who have more often been raped, enslaved, or displaced.

In addition to IPV, there are other insidious forms of violence embedded in the culture justified by cultural norms. 'Honor' based violence, which is linked to the expectation that men are responsible for protecting their family and its reputation, can manifest as physical, emotional, or socioeconomic violence towards women and girls as punishment for breaking traditional gender expectations. Acts of violence are increasingly occurring on online platforms, which poses an additional threat. For example, technology-facilitated GBV (TFGBV), which has also become widespread, is used to sexually exploit, harass, and abuse individuals, including using threats, stalking, coercion, and blackmail for sex or money via mobile phone, email, or social media. Although this can happen to men or women, there is a higher incidence of men and boys perpetrating TFGBV against women and girls.

## Formative Research

To inform the development of the curricula content and approach, SEED and Equimundo conducted formative qualitative research to explore attitudes, values, and interest in the approach with host community members, Iraqi internally displaced persons (IDPs), and Syrian refugees in the KRI. Overall, the findings of this formative research demonstrated that men and boys in the KRI hold traditional, patriarchal attitudes about the distinct roles of men and women in society. This leads to power imbalances and inequitable gender norms at the household and community levels that have widespread consequences for the health, safety, and personal autonomy of women and children (SEED Foundation & Equimundo, 2022).

In general, the findings suggested that women, men, and children's roles in the family and community are clearly influenced by the protracted conflict, economic conditions, and traditions. Women and girls acknowledged the existence and impact of unhealthy patriarchal norms much more than men and boys did. The concept of male privilege is conceptually understood by most men, but not easily acknowledged by men who mostly do not live a life of privilege (i.e., ethnic minority, low socioeconomic class, rural, etc.). Many of the research participants have lived through conflict, especially the IDPs and refugees, whose children have lived most of their lives in displacement. Their lived experience has included prolonged exposure to or perpetration of violence, severe restriction of movement, instability of housing and employment, and discrimination. The toll of these conditions deeply impacts mental and physical health and interpersonal relationships, including power dynamics and roles and responsibilities within the home. As a result, the intervention considered the intersectionality of oppression that men, women, and children alike suffer in this context.

The research findings highlighted that parenting is highly gendered, with mothers and fathers

showing substantial affection for girls over boys, while restricting girls' mobility and career aspirations as they grow older. Fathers love their daughters and want what's best for them, but defining what is "best" is subject to what they perceive to be possible in a gender-unequal context. Fathers love their sons but generally lack the capacity to spend much time with them, as these men often work long hours to make ends meet. These factors are further influenced by a patriarchal system within the family structure, in which the man of the family often has the final say in household decisions.

The findings showed that both mothers and fathers considered discipline and restrictive behavior as a necessary part of children's upbringing. However, fathers were more likely to use harsh physical punishment than mothers, which often led to mothers' hiding their children's mistakes from the patriarch. Parents tended not to acknowledge this use of physical violence for discipline. The findings also demonstrated that the parenting techniques used, and the strength of family relationships are often based on the children's gender and age. When boys and girls are younger, differences in treatment and their relationships with parents are not as pronounced as they are beginning with puberty. Teenage girls develop a closer relationship marked by kinship and companionship with their mothers, while teenage boys start gaining independence due to their relative freedom of movement and social interaction. Men start spending less time with their children of both sexes, although boys have more opportunities to socialize with their fathers than girls do.

Finally, the formative research supports other literature that in the KRI, high levels of IPV and other forms of GBV are linked to ingrained beliefs around justification of violence, low awareness of what constitutes GBV, and women's disempowerment to make decisions and control resources (Promundo & UN Women, 2017). These detrimental elements of gender inequity are exacerbated

by social norms and the destructive impacts of prolonged conflict and exposure to violence (Dietrich et al., 2021).

### Overview of the Program

After conducting formative research, Equimundo and SEED jointly developed two curricula that have been adapted for the KRI context. This program engages with both fathers and their adolescent sons (ages 14-19) to reduce intergenerational violence and foster healthy, caring, and supportive relationships within the family. Although complementary methodologies, these are separate curricula intended to target fathers with adolescent sons aged 14-19, and the sons themselves, with one joint session between the fathers and sons. Through a 10-session group education model (see Figure 1) with 12-15 participants per group led by a pair of SEED's trained facilitators, this program centers an engaging and participatory methodology to encourage more equitable attitudes and behaviors around gender equality and violence in a sustainable manner.

*Figure 1: Course Topics*

	Fathers' Group	Sons' Group
1	Welcome and Introductions	Welcome and Act Like a Man
2	Understanding Roles in Our Society	My Father's Legacy
3	Anger and Emotions	Understanding Power in Society
4	Identifying Violence	Understanding Violence
5	Power and Family	Violence, Anger, and Emotions
6	Resolving Conflict	Healthy Relationships
7	Reducing Honor Violence	Challenging Violence in the Community
8	Communicating with My Family (sons and fathers together)	
9	Positive Parenting	Where am I going?
10	Moving Forward Together	

The program is a participatory small group education intervention that employs critical thinking and reflection. Fostering meaningful discussions, mixed in with didactic activities and fun games, the participants are immersed in an experiential learning process that delves into complex topics. In each of the 60-90 minute sessions within the curricula, there are a few activities related to that particular topic that use diverse modalities to convey equitable and healthy messages, teach life skills, and reflect on one's beliefs. Equimundo and SEED designed the program to engage men and boys by using fictional storytelling, personal introspection, and small group work and discussion.

These curricula have been largely adapted from Equimundo's Program H and Program P, designed for young men and fathers respectively. Program H was developed to engage youth in critical reflections on gender and help them build the skills necessary to act in more empowered and equitable ways. These programs have been adapted around the world to sensitize young men to some of the harmful ways they are socialized and to take on more gender-equitable attitudes. The original Program H methodology has been adapted in more than 35 countries around the world and quasi-experimental evaluations of Program H have found that the program positively shifted young men's gender attitudes, decreased their self-reported use of violence, and increased couples' communication (Doyle & Kato-Wallace, 2021).

Program P supports men at all stages of their fatherhood to be more caring, involved, and healthy figures in their children's and families' lives. Over the years, various adaptations of Program P have targeted expecting or new fathers with a focus on maternal, newborn and child health, while other iterations have focused on early childhood development. Findings from multiple adaptations

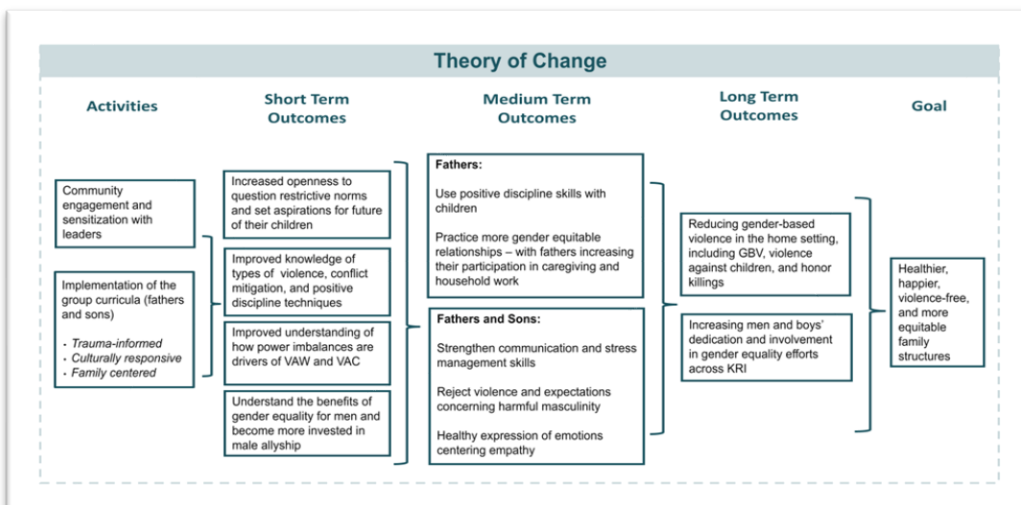
in different settings show that it has contributed to positive shifts in men's and women's gender-related attitudes and behaviors, particularly on caregiving, maternal, newborn, and child health, joint couple decision-making, shared domestic responsibilities, and violence perpetrated by men (Alemann et al., 2023).

### **Intended Outcomes and Hypotheses**

The program adopts an approach to violence prevention and gender equality which focuses on the contextual drivers of violence while building a foundation of more equitable norms. Through shifting individual attitudes and behaviors associated with the likelihood of perpetrating or experiencing GBV, the program aims to support families to have healthier, happier, violence-free, and more gender equitable family structures.

As illustrated in the Theory of Change (Figure 2), by focusing on key knowledge and attitudes related to power, roles and responsibilities, violence, and positive discipline, the program works to make incremental shifts towards more equitable attitudes and eventually behaviors. The intervention primarily addresses attitudes that legitimize 'honor' killings and other forms of violence, subjugate women in the home and other private spaces, and uphold the inherent power and authority of men. Intended behavioral shifts include increased communication within the family, shared decision-making, using positive parenting techniques, as well as other non-violent conflict resolution strategies.

*Figure 2: Theory of Change*



Based on the evidence of the programs' impact and efficacy in other contexts, the authors hypothesize that the programs will also achieve similar outcomes in the KRI. Specifically, the authors hypothesize that participants will 1. strengthen their relationships within the family unit as demonstrated by improved communication with wives and children, 2. increase their power sharing in the home through shared decision sharing, 3. increase their knowledge about the types of violence, 4. increase their use of non-violent conflict resolution skills, 5. increase their use of positive coping mechanisms, and 6. increase their knowledge of and use of positive parenting techniques.

## Methodology

### Participants

SEED led the implementation of the pilot program in 2022-2023 with a total of 215 participants (96 fathers and 119 sons) in the KRI. While most groups included fathers and sons from the same family according to the intergenerational design, in a few contexts, standalone groups were delivered to a group of only fathers or only sons to broaden the reach of the program and to accommodate the needs of program participants. This program was implemented with multiple

socio-demographic groups, including host community, IDPs, and the Syrian refugee population across Erbil, Sulaimani, and Duhok governorates. The men and boys who participated in the program were from a variety of different linguistic, ethnic, religious, geographic, and professional backgrounds; which allowed implementers to see the potential benefit of the program across different groups. Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the 215 participants who completed the program.

*Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

	Number	%
<b>Family Member</b>		
<b>Fathers</b>	96	44.6%
<b>Sons</b>	119	55.4%
<b>Age</b>		
<b>19 years or younger</b>	100	46.5%
<b>20 – 35</b>	31	14.4%
<b>36 – 50</b>	51	23.8%
<b>51 – 65</b>	28	13%
<b>66 years or older</b>	5	2.3%
<b>Migration Status &amp; Location</b>		
<b>Duhok   Refugee  Camp Setting</b>	99	46%
<b>Erbil   IDP   Camp Setting</b>	84	39%
<b>Sulaimani   Host</b>	32	15%

**Community | Non-Camp Setting**

Additionally, as shown in Table 2, only 13.65% of the registered program participants attended less than 5 of the 10 sessions. This attrition rate is considerably low for a multi-week intervention with highly mobile populations.

*Table 2: Retention Across Groups*

	Registered	Completed the program	Dropout (or attended less than 5 sessions)
Fathers	103	96	7
Sons	146	119	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>34</b>

**Measures**

A mixed-methods approach was utilized to evaluate the impact of the intervention. This included a quantitative pre- and immediate post-survey, qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted by an independent monitoring and evaluation team staff member, and qualitative in-depth interviews.

Participants were asked to complete a quantitative pre- and post-test survey with closed-ended questions to measure any changes demonstrated from the beginning of their participation in the program and at the end. These tools, with slightly different questions for fathers and sons, specifically examined measures that reflected on participants' knowledge, attitudes, and self-reported behaviors about the topics covered in the curriculum – particularly violence and conflict resolution, household decision-making and interpersonal power, and positive parenting. The measure was adapted from the GEM scale which has been used to measure the impact of similar types of programs and was contextualized to the context of the participants in the KRI by staff [sjh@univsul.edu.iq](mailto:sjh@univsul.edu.iq)

from SEED and Equimundo (A Singh et al., 2013). A statistical analysis of the survey data was conducted.

A random selection of participants joined a focus group discussion, with open-ended questions about their experience in the program. Other participants volunteered to participate in in-depth interviews where they reflected more on their own personal journey during the course. Finally, a sample of women who were mothers, wives, or sisters of the men and boys who attended the groups, participated in focus group discussions to provide their input about the impact of the program on their male family members. The addition of the FGD involving the wives/mothers of the participants is important both for triangulating impact data, as well as ensuring the program's accountability to the needs of women and girls in the communities.

*Table 3: Participants included in the Evaluation*

	Fathers	Sons	Wives/Mothers	Total
<b>Number of Pre- / Post-Tests</b>	83	103	N/A	<b>186</b>
<b>Number of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Participants</b>	25	51	22	<b>98</b>
<b>Number of Key Informant Interviews (KII)</b>	20	9	N/A	<b>29</b>

As shown in Table 3, the team analyzed pre-/post-tests from 186 of the 215 participants who completed the program. The pre and post test data was analyzed using a comparative analysis. Participants completed the pre-/post-test surveys in the language they felt the most comfortable (Kurdish Badini, Kurdish Sorani, or Arabic); and for low-literacy participants, the facilitators verbally administered the survey.

## Limitations

Although the quantitative results discussed in the following sections are promising, caution must be taken when drawing conclusions from a small sample size of participants. Other limitations in the qualitative data include the convenience selection of respondents, and potential desirability bias given that the FGDs and KIIs were administered by SEED staff. Additionally, the implementation team noticed challenges with the comprehension of some of the measures, especially the double negative questions, which was at times further compounded by some participants' limited access to education and/or limited literacy. Despite these limitations, the triangulation of the quantitative data with qualitative methods does strengthen the overall impact narrative.

## Results and Discussion

### Strengthened Relationships and Communication

The intergenerational program helped strengthen family relationships both between fathers and their children and between husbands and wives. Sons, fathers, and the women in their lives all reported a closer relationship between fathers and sons as a result of this program. One father said *“I hadn't really talked to my son much before, but after participating in this program, I reached out to him. Now, our relationship has grown stronger.”* One woman saw this as a major benefit from the program, saying, *“My husband and my son are very happy to participate in your program and their relationship has become stronger.”* This closer relationship positively impacts both the father and son, and the entire family dynamic. In the pre-/post-test data, sons reported the program has contributed to their parents more regularly asking for their opinions, as well as listening when they share their plans for the future. One father affirmed this finding by saying *“our communication and relationship with our children have changed after participation*

*in this program. We become open to their opinions and suggestions on some matters related to their education, collaboration, and their life.”*

Participants also reported that the program has strengthened the relationship between couples.

One father mentioned, *“this training enhanced my relationship with my wife and children.*

*Before participating, I was handling them in a harsh way but now I listen and am flexible with*

*them.”* This is also evidenced through the data in Graph 1, which shows a statistically significant

shift in the frequency of men talking to their partner about their worries ( $t = -3.308, p = .001$ ) and

their partners worries ( $t = 6.212, p < 0.001$ ). One wife mentioned that after the program *“[her]*

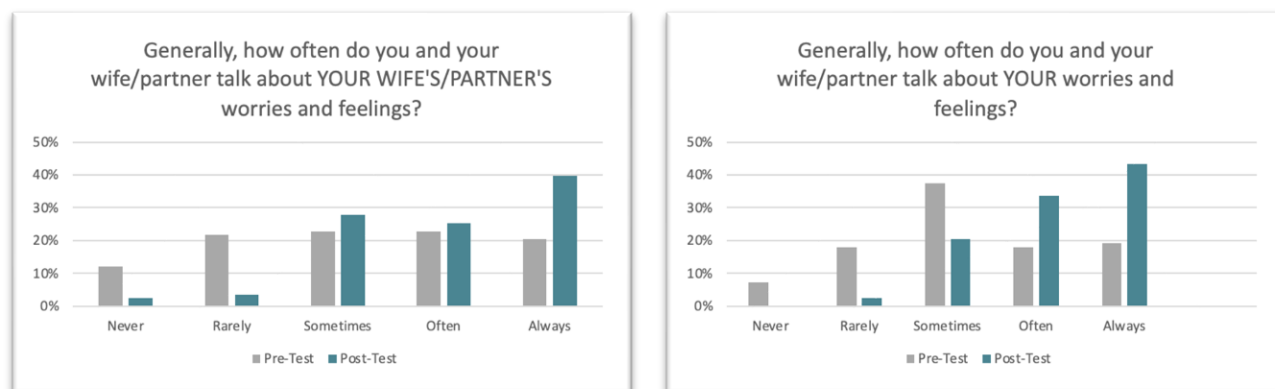
*husband [now] always communicates with me and takes my ideas and decisions for family*

*themes.”* When reflecting on any changes she has seen in her husband as a result of the program,

another woman adds that, *“Yes, a lot has changed. He always solves problems in a calm manner*

*and takes the time to calm down when angry.”*

*Graph 1: Couple Communication*



While reported satisfaction about the quality of the communication between partners was already strong at the pre-test with 90% of participants reporting they were satisfied or very satisfied with their communication, this increased to 100% at the post-test.

### Decision-Making and Household Power

Through critical reflections and various activities on privilege and power, the participants showed a considerable shift in their attitudes about their uncontested decision-making power. As shown in Graph 2 of the pre-/post-test data, both sons ( $t=7.619$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) and fathers ( $t=5.789$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) have demonstrated a statistically significant shift in attitudes away from patriarchal decision-making. Before the intervention, 60% of fathers and 73% of sons either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement “*A man should have the final word about decisions in his home*”; whereas after the intervention these percentages dropped to 19% and 33% respectively. One youth participant stated that “*being a man doesn't mean having power and using violence against family members and imposing on his wife and children.*” Another youth participant shared that, “*these sessions taught me that decisions should be shared between a man and his wife, not only taken by husbands. In addition, men should help and support their wives at home.*” Reflecting on his role as a man, one father remarked that, “*before the program, we believed that manhood is power and authority.*” However, after his participation, he realized the benefits of [sjh@univsul.edu.iq](mailto:sjh@univsul.edu.iq)

joint decision-making and the promise of sharing authority and decision-making in the household.

Graph 2: Decision-Making Attitudes



When asked who normally makes a variety of decisions in the home, the fathers' responses indicated changes in their behavior related to this attitudinal shift about shared decision-making in the household. One father in the focus group said, *"the program has changed our perspective toward decisions that should be made in a couple. Now, we share our decisions and ideas with each other, particularly those that are related to finances, children's education, and work."*

Another remarked that *"this program has changed me in all aspects such as a change in behavior with partners and organizing goals for the present and future. Shared decisions are always the best way to go forward."* These quotes are supported by the pre-/post-test data which shows a shift in household behavior related to decision-making. For the decisions below in Graph 3, fathers were asked before and after the program who normally makes the decision – themselves, their wife, or jointly.

Graph 3: Decision-Makers in your Household



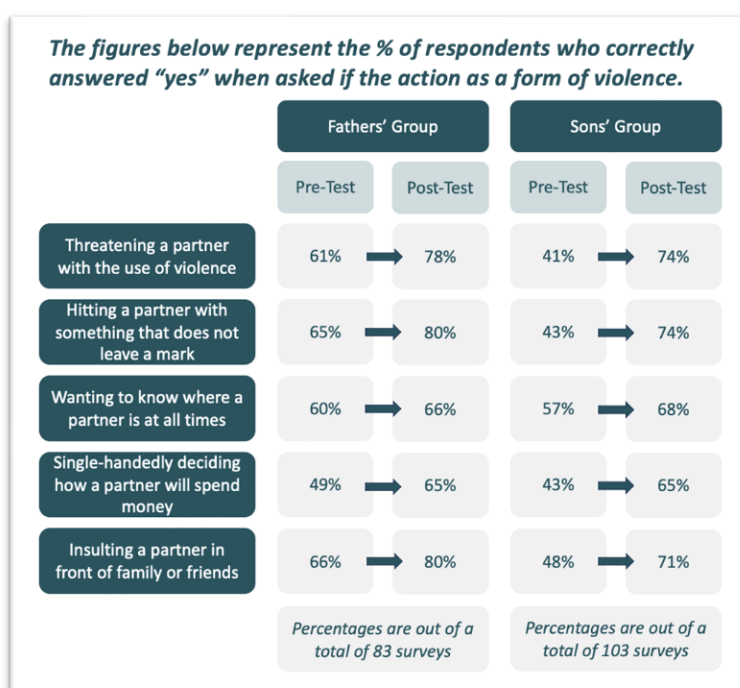
As shown in the graphs above, there were considerable statistically significant shifts in reported decisions made solely by fathers to decisions that were made jointly in the family. These trends were supported by many wives who participated in focus groups. For example, one wife in a focus group stated that “[my] husband has been showing great progress in becoming more open-minded and understanding. As a result, he has given me and our daughters the freedom to make plans and leave home whenever necessary. This new level of trust and flexibility has been a welcome change for our family.” Another stated that “my husband [now] always communicates with me and takes my ideas and decisions for family themes.”

### Knowledge and Attitudes about Violence

Measures related to knowledge and attitudes about the use of violence showed positive shifts among the father and son groups demonstrated by significant gains in participants being able to [sjh@univsul.edu.iq](mailto:sjh@univsul.edu.iq)

identify forms of violence and a decrease in attitudes that justify or contribute to violence. As shown in Figure 3, both fathers and sons were better able to identify forms of violence when asked whether the actions listed were considered violence. The survey measures intentionally assessed forms of violence that the formative research had highlighted as lesser known, including threatening, economic violence, and stalking. The results still show a lot of room for improvement, particularly with the sons' group, where even after the intervention, none of these knowledge measures were higher than 75%, revealing that many still did not identify the actions as violence. This finding indicates that the boys and young men participating in this pilot tended to be more regressive and less aware about topics related to violence.

Figure 3: Combined Fathers and Sons Identification of Types of Violence



The two beliefs measured in the pre-/post-test related to the acceptance of violence. The data shows a decrease in agreement to the following statement: *“Men should use violence to get*

*respect if necessary.*” The combined data from fathers ( $t=2.357$ ,  $p=0.021$ ) and sons ( $t=6.701$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) shows 35% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement in the pre-test, whereas in the post-test this opinion decreased to a quarter – with only 9% selecting agreed or strongly agreed. Generational differences in the responses highlight the need to work with boys and younger men on violence prevention programming. Sons were far more regressive in their responses during the pre-test, with 26% (27/103) *strongly agreeing* with the statement, compared to 13% of fathers. Yet, the intervention’s messaging convinced all but one of those 27 son respondents to switch their answers during the post-test.

When asked whether fathers and sons agreed with the statement “*There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten*”, 40% agreed or strongly agreed in pre-test, whereas only 13% did so in the post-test which also shows statistically significant shifts toward reduced acceptance of the use of violence. However, this data demonstrates deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs that enhance women’s and girls’ risk of experiencing GBV. Relatedly, one father said, “*there are still people in the camp using force against their partners. We believe that the use of power is not justified because other alternatives are available instead of force. Indeed, this program changed our minds to think about other ways to treat our partners.*”

### **Conflict Resolution Skills**

In addition to the positive shifts in knowledge and attitudes about violence, the program participants demonstrated a gain in their skills and self-efficacy to resolve conflict nonviolently. Linked to sessions related to emotional regulation, bystander intervention, and conflict resolution, the fathers and sons left with specific strategies and began practicing them in their lives. This was reflected in the women’s focus group when one wife said, “*prior to joining these sessions, my husband seemed to be constantly angry and distant from our family. This behavior*

*created an emotional rift between us, and it was challenging for both myself and our children. However, since attending the sessions, my husband has undergone a remarkable transformation. The sessions have provided him with valuable insights and tools to address and manage his anger. As a result, he has become a better person, both emotionally and mentally.”*

Empathy and communication were also mentioned during the FGDs as useful techniques to de-escalate conflict, with one son stating that *“I've learned a great deal about violence, particularly physical violence, and I've also gained a deeper understanding of the emotions experienced by individuals who endure violence.”* Lastly, youth reported a higher self-efficacy to actively intervene as a bystander to violent situations – this is reflected in an increase of boys reporting that they would use at least one of the active bystander options covered in the sessions (creating a distraction, asking a friend for help, confronting the person, or searching for the authorities) instead of *“doing nothing,”* from 43% in the pre-test to 70% in the post-test.

### **Use of Positive Coping Strategies**

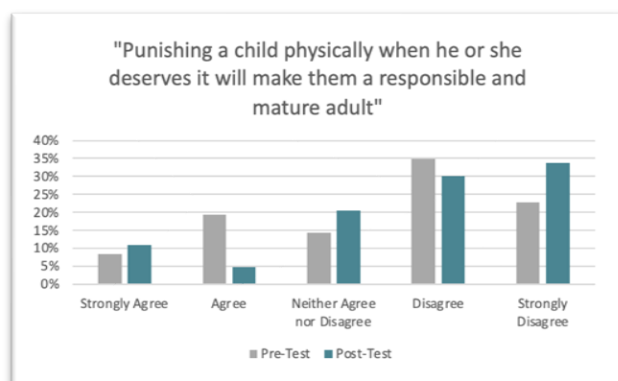
Examples of tools and coping strategies were integrated into each of the sessions as mindfulness activities and during the post-test, the majority of men and boys reported using the strategies; for example, 90% of fathers and 80% of sons reported that in the past two weeks, they had *“Counted to 10 before speaking or acting”* when they experienced anger or difficult emotions. Skills around emotional regulation were highlighted as other strategies that fathers and sons found useful throughout the sessions. One young man had mentioned during an FGD that *“I did not know about violence and now I don't use violence. Especially in school, I don't hit anyone now; even if someone hits me, I don't hit him back because the facilitator told me whenever I feel anger, take a deep breath to calm down and it's working for me.”* And a mother reported a ‘remarkable difference’ in her son’s ability to effectively cope, saying *“I wanted to share how*

*our son has been positively affected by the sessions. Being in his early teenage years, he often struggles with maintaining a sense of calmness and composure. However, since participating in these sessions, we have noticed a remarkable difference in his behavior. He appears to be more composed and is better equipped to handle challenging situations.”*

### **Positive Parenting**

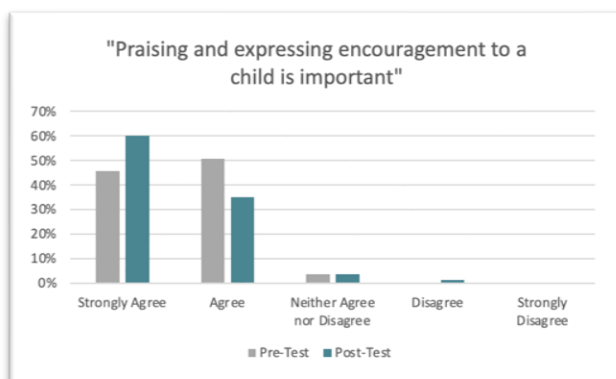
As this program has an explicit focus on fathering, the evaluation tools measured the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to positive parenting and non-violent discipline. Overall fathers demonstrated increased knowledge and use of positive parenting techniques as a result of the program. The pre-/post-test data showed a minor shift in attitudes related to positive discipline and praising children ( $t=2.581$ ,  $p=0.012$ ). Graph 4 shows the responses to the statement *“Punishing a child physically when he or she deserves it will make them a responsible and mature adult.”* Even though there is movement towards disagreement and a decrease in the justification of this belief, it would be beneficial to further explore the nuances of this norm and the beliefs of fathers, including which behaviors of children they would identify as justifying violence.

Graph 4: Justification of Violence Against Children



Relatedly, in the pre-test, fathers were asked to identify positive parenting techniques. More than 1 in 4 fathers identified “*Yelling at a child*” as one of these in the pre-test. After the intervention, 98% of the same respondents correctly said it was not a positive parenting technique ( $t=4.539$ ,  $p<0.000$ ). Pre-/post-test results show gains in father’s knowledge in identifying “*Praising a child’s good behavior*” (from 78% at pre-test to 89% at post-test;  $t=-1.583$ ,  $p=0.117$ ), and “*Leaving the room for a few minutes to cool down*” (from 70% at pre-test to 98% at post-test;  $t=5.297$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) as positive parenting techniques as well. In Graph 5, father respondents show a high degree of alignment that praising and expressing encouragement to a child is important ( $t=-1.583$ ,  $p=0.117$ ). As a pillar of positive parenting and reinforcement of good behavior, this is a hopeful indication that fathers acknowledge the power of supporting their children.

Graph 5: Attitudes Concerning Praising Children



This data shows a confluence of a general dearth of knowledge about non-violent alternatives to harmful punishment, coupled with beliefs that justify harm and encourage verbal and physical violence inflicted to children. Based on pre-/post-test data, the program had supported fathers with the skills to respond to their children's behavior without violence. Before the program, only 30% of fathers strongly agreed that they *"have the capacity, energy, and knowledge necessary to respond nonviolently"*. That level of agreement increased to 58% after the program ( $t=-3.160$ ,  $p=0.002$ ). Further supporting this finding, the vast majority (over 95%) of fathers had reported practicing at least four positive parenting techniques in the two weeks preceding the post-test. One father commented that *"I'm making an effort to be patient and listen to what my children want. After understanding their perspective, I do my best to meet their needs. This approach has led my children to not take action without my consent. I've learned all these techniques from this program."*

### Recommendations

This program has demonstrated the importance of engaging with men and boys in the promotion of gender equality. In order to broaden the reach of the program, embedding this

intergenerational program, or something similar, throughout a diverse set of institutions – schools, colleges and universities (especially social work programs), police and military, humanitarian response agencies, and other relevant government agencies providing family services and support, would be beneficial. Scaling up this intergenerational program or other similar programs will require strong support, alignment, partnership and capacity strengthening of such institutions.

This program has demonstrated the efficacy of intergenerational, family-based approaches, which social workers and other professionals can take an active role in carrying out or integrating into their existing work. While this program focused on fathers and sons, it is also beneficial to ensure that this approach is paired with complementary programming for the women and girls in the household and to find ways for women and girls themselves to be integrated within the program. Practitioners working with individuals and communities on social norm change are also encouraged to take a holistic approach, looking at all of the various needs and drivers of a particular issue that a community faces, avoiding only addressing one cause in isolation. In this study, when possible, men and boys were also provided with other services that they needed, including livelihood training which generally enhanced their participation in the program itself; the impact of these types of holistic approach could be explored further. Given some trends indicating a higher proportion of boys and young men who continued to hold more harmful norms and attitudes even after finishing the program, future work should intentionally focus on youth, particularly younger boys, in focused age-appropriate programming. This is especially relevant in conflict and post-conflict settings where boys are vulnerable to instability and possible recruitment into extremist groups. Engaging parents as role

models and creating an enabling environment for youth to be caring and non-violent is a key to success.

### Conclusion

The pilot study of this intergenerational program has demonstrated positive results in the KRI as in other contexts, and the research hypotheses have been realized. Through the changes demonstrated by the participants themselves and validated by their family members, this program has promoted healthier, more equitable, non-violent behavior and relationships. The shifts in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior that have occurred within these groups of men and boys demonstrates the possibility of shifting deeply rooted norms in a broader way across society. Eradicating gender-based violence requires a multi-faceted approach and it is imperative to address all of its contributing factors, including social and cultural norms.

The social work profession has an important role to play in responding to and preventing deeply rooted societal issues, such as gender-based violence. It is important for social workers to continue to address this issue from multiple angles through both prevention and response efforts at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Men and boys are a crucial part of creating a more just and prosperous society for all, a society in which men and women both have the opportunity to contribute and realize their full potential.

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