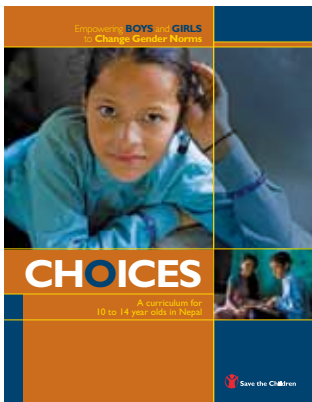




Transforming Gender Norms among Very Young Adolescents: An Innovative Intervention and Evaluation in Nepal



CHOICES Curriculum developed by Save the Children

Created specifically for boys and girls aged 10 - 14 years old, the CHOICES curriculum engaged adolescents in fun, developmentally appropriate dialogues about their notions of respect, communication, fairness and their dreams for the future. The goal of the curriculum is to empower youth and adolescents, through systematic thought reasoning and behavior change, to challenge the accepted social gender norms in their community.

"The child is father to the man." This proverb tells us that what we learn and do as children greatly influences our adult lives. This includes the cultural and gender norms we internalize and the behaviors we observe and adopt. Research on adolescent development validates this traditional wisdom, finding that the pre-teen and early teen years are especially important for the formation of norms and the adoption of behaviors that persist into adulthood. These early behaviors and norms significantly affect adults' educational attainment, occupations and health, including reproductive health.

Can gender bias be changed? More specifically, can participation in eight 2-hour sessions over a 3-month period lead to a shift in gender norms among very young adolescents (VYAs), girls and boys at the critical ages of 10 to 14 years old? It was this question that Save the Children and Georgetown University's Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH) addressed through CHOICES, a curriculum-based pilot program of creative, participatory activities and innovative evaluation techniques. Implemented over a three-month period in Nepal, CHOICES achieved its aims. The evaluation of the program demonstrated that even relatively brief interventions can empower VYAs to challenge the gender norms of their society and make changes in their own lives in the direction of gender equity.

Intervention

Save the Children is a trusted presence in Nepal, having long worked in its poor districts; among other services, it sponsors clubs for disadvantaged children. Save the Children decided to pilot its CHOICES curriculum at child clubs in Siraha district in the Terai region, which has a high prevalence of practices that perpetuate gender inequity such as early marriage, early child-bearing and dowry. Formative research showed persistent gaps between boys and girls in the

division of household chores, access to education, freedom to play and overall autonomy. CHOICES participatory activities were therefore designed to enable VYAs to recognize and reflect on these gender inequities, explore their feelings about gender bias, practice gender-equitable behavior and engage in discussions about gender norms in all-boy, all-girl and mixed groups. The trained facilitators were child club graduates ages 18-24. Table 1 describes the activities.

Evaluation

IRH has proven experience developing and using innovative qualitative evaluation techniques with VYAs to assess both gender and fertility awareness. For this reason Save the Children asked IRH to monitor and evaluate the CHOICES program. IRH worked closely with Save the Children to clarify the objectives of the curriculum, identify measurable indicators of gender equity and develop the evaluation research design, methods and tools. IRH also worked with Save the Children to develop monitoring tools to determine how the curriculum was implemented in each site. A total of 603 youth—almost equally divided between girls

and boys—participated in the evaluation, about 300 from 12 child clubs in the experimental area and 300 from 12 child clubs in the control area.

To gather quantitative data on gender-related changes that could be attributed to the intervention, evaluators conducted structured interviews with all participants at baseline and endline. Since interview questions used with adults are not always effective with VYAs, IRH designed the structured interview to elicit information through age-appropriate participatory activities. These included pile sorts, responses to an advice column and time-task distribution with paired siblings to measure gender inequity in practice. See Table 2 for data collection methods.

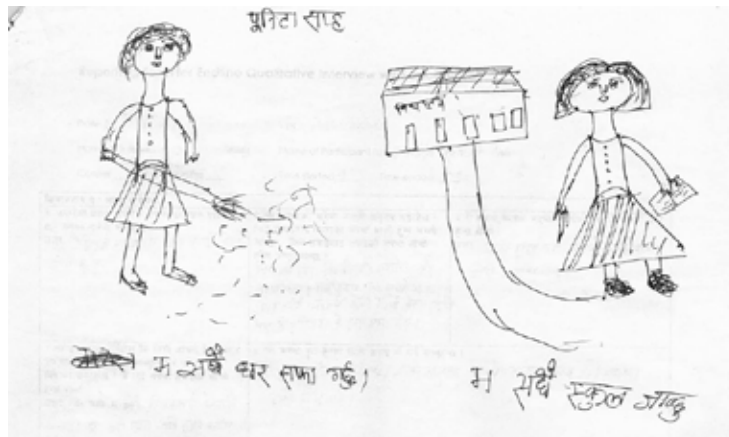
Qualitative information was collected at endline among a sub-sample of experimental and control group participants equally divided between boys and girls: 36 children participated in in-depth interviews, and 24 children participated in Photovoice. The in-depth interviews involved a projective technique using photos to explore boys' and girls' hopes and dreams, a two-part photo elicitation activity to measure gender roles and attitudes, projective drawing to assess individual change, and questions

Table 1: Activities in the CHOICES Curriculum

Activity Name	What happens?	Objective
Blue vs. Green	Participants are arbitrarily assigned a color and told one is better than the other. Discuss feelings.	Understand gender inequity.
Journey of Respect	Participants discuss how one gains respect and characteristics of men and women they respect.	Learn that gender equity begins with small actions that can earn respect. Boys can be respected even if they treat girls as equals.
Invisible Wall	Participants are read 4 scenarios in which social norms prevent boys from helping girls achieve their hopes and dreams, identify the barriers and discuss.	Understand how social norms restrict boys from treating girls as equals.
Showing you care--loudly!	Through guided visioning participants discover how to better understand each other's emotions and how to show appreciation of others for their positive behaviors.	Recognize the importance of expressing emotions and making others feel good.
Fuel of Dreams	Participants discover through guided discussions the role each plays in encouraging others not to give up on their dreams.	Recognize that everyone deserves to achieve their life's hopes and dreams. Boys can help girls achieve these dreams.
The Color of Hope	Participants discover the role each plays in inspiring hope in others through guided discussions, first with girls and boys separately, then together as a group.	Understand how boys can inspire hope in girls.
Asking for Advice	Participants read fictional letters from peers about challenges they face due to restrictive gender roles and then offer advice.	Empower children to share their voices and opinions, practice problem-solving, explore values.
A Single Step	Participants celebrate and state changes they have already made in their lives and homes to create gender equality.	Inspire and empower children to make changes in behavior.
The Bond of Protection	Participants pledge a bond of protection for each other and express appreciation for the protection they are provided by siblings.	Understand how the Rakchhya Bandhan festival can be used as a platform to inspire gender equity.



Girls discuss the photos they took portraying what life is like for boys and girls in their community. This technique is called Photovoice.



Participant's drawing of life before and after taking part in CHOICES.

on participants' opinions of CHOICES. Photovoice provided participants with cameras to photograph life through their eyes, and measured participants' awareness of gender inequality based on their photos. In addition, after the completion of CHOICES, six focus group discussions (FGD) with 54 parents (28 experimental, 26 control) explored whether children had discussed gender topics at home or had incorporated any gender-related changes into their routines.

Results

The results clearly show that CHOICES was effective in contributing to more gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors among boys and girls. Differences between baseline and endline measures in the experimental group were statistically significant in scales measuring gender norms and behavior. For example, significantly fewer CHOICES participants felt it was acceptable for a man to beat his wife if she disagrees with him, and significantly more participants felt that daughters should have the same chance to go to school or work outside the home as sons. The smaller sample of paired siblings showed a clear trend among boy participants to adopt more gender-equitable behaviors.

The qualitative results reinforce those findings, showing that most children in the experimental group recognized that gender inequity was normal but felt that it is unfair and should be changed. They believed that CHOICES, or similar programs, can help promote more gender-equitable norms. More boys in the experimental group said they were making small changes in their own behavior—help-

ing their sisters and mothers with household chores, advocating for their sisters' education and against early marriage and encouraging family members, friends and neighbors to do the same. More girls in the experimental group also stated that their brothers and other boys in their communities were making small changes toward gender equality. Photovoice results show young people in the experimental group tended to take more images of gender-equitable actions, while the control group photographed more traditional gender roles. In FGDs, parents in the experimental area reported that their sons had started to help their daughters with schoolwork and chores, and their households were more peaceful and harmonious as a result. Parents from the experimental group specifically mentioned CHOICES by name and suggested expanding the program.



Photo taken by Photovoice participant

"From the day we have taken CHOICES classes our brothers have started helping us and we help them too. We will teach the same to our friends in our village..." – Girl participant

Table 2 - Tools and Techniques to Collect Information

	Variables Measured	Tools and Techniques	Description
Quantitative			
Structured Interviews with Children	Gender Attitudes	Card game/pile sort	Sort statements into agree/disagree piles
	Gender Roles	Photo pile sort	Sort pictures of chores and behaviors into piles for male, female, or both.
	Gender Inequality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arun's dilemma Time/task distribution between siblings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read a story describing an adolescent's problem and ask respondent to offer advice. A weekly calendar developed to compare frequency of chores between boys and girls.
Qualitative			
In-Depth Interviews with Children	Hopes and Dreams	Projective photo elicitation (doors to the future)	A visualization exercise using a picture deck of local doors to elicit hopes and dreams
	Gender Roles and Attitudes	Photo elicitation (two parts)	Explore what chores could be shared between sexes by using a picture deck of boys and girls doing different chores.
	Assessment of Individual Change	Journey of change projective drawings	Respondent draws pictures of life before and after the intervention, highlighting values and lifestyle changes.
	Choices Evaluation	Open-ended questions	Explore what participants liked and dislike about the intervention: which of the 8 sessions resonated with them the most and why.
Photovoice with Children	Gender Inequality	Photovoice	Respondents, provided with disposable cameras, take photos to answer "What is life like for boys and girls in your community?" The printed photographs are used for individual storytelling.
Parent Focus Group	Hopes and Dreams	Projective photo elicitation	Visualization to elicit the hopes and dreams parents have for their children using a picture deck of local doors
	Changing Gender Norms	Photo elicitation	Using a picture deck of boys and girls doing different chores, parents explore how gender norms have changed over the generations and potential for more equitable distribution of chores for sons and daughters.
	Maturation/Changes in Children	Open-ended questions	Explore whether parents noticed any changes in their children as a result of CHOICES and their feelings about these changes.

Conclusion

The results of this evaluation show that the CHOICES curriculum was effective in creating a shift towards more gender-equitable norms among young girls and boys. Building on the success of the CHOICES curriculum, Save the Children is now developing complementary approaches for engaging parents, teachers and community leaders. While fostering more gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors among VYAs is a critical component of promoting more equitable gender norms, sustained behavior change will not occur without engaging parents and the community to create a supportive environment for gender-equitable norms.

For more information, key statistics and references see the full report, "Utilizing Participatory Data Collection Methods to Evaluate Programs for Very Young Adolescents: An Evaluation of Save the Children's Choices Curriculum in Nepal" at www.irh.org. To request a copy of the curriculum contact Save the Children at bkerner@savethechildren.org.

The Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University contributes to a range of health initiatives and is dedicated to helping women and men make informed choices about family planning and providing them with simple and effective natural options. For more information about the Institute, please see www.irh.org.

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