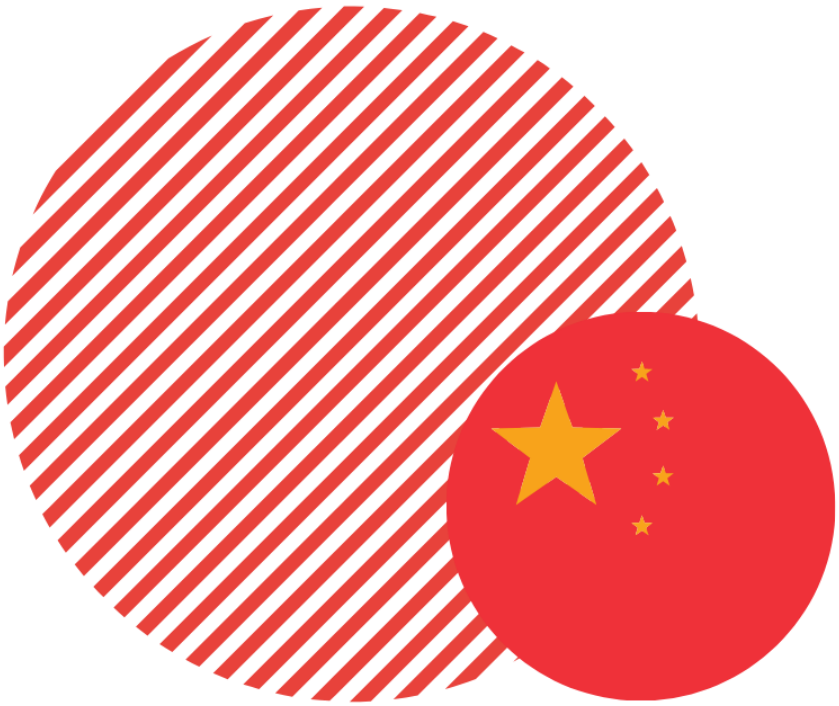
Data for Children Collaborative WITH UNICEF

China

YOUNG PEOPLE ADVISORS

INSPIRE Case Study



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OVERVIEW

In 2020, the Data for Children Collaborative with UNICEF (DCC) generously funded the End Violence Lab to coordinate a series of regional systematic reviews on INSPIRE strategies to end violence against children called: *Accelerating What Works to End Violence Against Children: A multi-country study.* As part of the post award process the DCC asked the End Violence Lab to read and respond to their Youth Engagement Workbook. It asked a provocative question: How will you meaningful engage young people?

We were INSPIRED!

In response, the EV Lab proposed a series of youth-centred activities to complement the review project supporting a growing trend to deliver meaningful research initiatives *with* children and young people. Notably, systematic reviews are too often completed with little or no inputs from the end-users to ensure that findings make sense. We addressed this working with a male/female team of young people from Brazil, China, Cote d'Ivoire, Colombia and Uganda. We subsequently launched the Young People Advisors (YPA) programme, a co-designed approach to discuss violence prevention, to map our progress addressing such a technically complex topic and to generate case studies with young people from all 5 countries.

PUBLICATION REVIEWED

Miller, E., Jones, K.A., Ripper, L. Paglisotti, T., Mulbah, P., & Abebe, K.Z. (2020). An Athletic Coach-Delivered Middle School Gender Violence Prevention Program: A Cluster Randomized Clinical Trial. *JAMA pediatrics,* 174(3), 241-249. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.5217.

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INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

In recent years, researchers are generating increasing evidence around adolescent abusive relationships and sexual violence[1] [2]. Adolescent relationship abuse (ARA), referring to physical and sexual violence and psychological assault in adolescent romantic relationships, and sexual violence (SV), including sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, are common throughout adolescence[3]. Some violence may become more frequent as adolescents get older. This takes a serious toll on both the physical and psychological development of the young people who endure it. Scholars have also found that adolescent abusive relationships and sexual violence are prevalent among youth who participate in athletics. In an anonymous survey of 1055 Canadian athletes between the ages of 14 and 17, researchers found that 39.9% of athletes reported having experienced physical violence (PV), and 28.2% of athletes reported having experienced SV.[4] Therefore, there is a need for public policy makers, researchers and practitioners alike to explore the reasons behind these phenomena as well as to develop and implement some intervention strategies to prevent ARA and SV.

Research by scholars into the causes of the ARA and SV phenomena has found that, firstly, stereotypical gender norms and gender reinforcement are among the key causes of ARA and SV. In schools, there is a clear overlap between ARA, sexual violence and school bullying (Miller, 2020). Sexual harassment is very common in middle and high schools. Among boys

[1] Hartill, M. (2013). Concealment of Child Sexual Abuse in Sports. Quest (National Association for Kinesiology in Higher Education), 65(2), 241–254.

[2] Jeckell, A. S., Copenhaver, E. A., & Diamond, A. B. (2018). The Spectrum of Hazing and Peer Sexual Abuse in Sports: A Current Perspective. Sports Health, 10(6), 558–564. https://doi.org/10.1177/1941738118797322

[3] Miller, E., Jones, K., Ripper, L., Paglisotti, T., Mulbah, P. & Abebe,K. (2020), An athletic coach–delivered middle School gender violence prevention program: A cluster randomized clinical trial. JAMA Pediatr, 174(3), 241-249.

[4] Parent, S., & Vaillancourt-Morel, M. P. (2020). Magnitude and Risk Factors for Interpersonal Violence Experienced by Canadian Teenagers in the Sport Context. Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 0193723520973571

in particular, a common form of sexual harassment is homophobic teasing, stemming from harmful gender norms and prejudice (Miller, 2020). This suggests that many adolescents do not develop a correct and equal sense of gender, which is often related to how negative gender norms are reinforced in a particular society. This behaviour is known as 'gender reinforcement'. During adolescence, there is increased pressure on children to assume culturally approved gender roles so that they behave more in-line with stereotypical gender norms. When gender reinforcement is at play, boys who display femininity or girls who display masculinity tend to be vulnerable to sexual violence.[5]

ARA and SV reported among adolescents needs to be prevented among secondary school-aged adolescents. It is at this stage of young people's development where 'gender reinforcement' around harmful, as well as positive, gender norms is formed. Secondly, within schools, perpetrators of ARA and SV are mostly male. At the adolescent level, boys exhibit higher levels of sexual harassment, and among all boys, those male athletes with higher levels of physical fitness have been found more likely to be perpetrators (Miller, 2020)[6]. In the last decade or so, cases of violence against women perpetrated by male student-athletes have occurred. These incidents have prompted the government to properly investigate and sanction the perpetrators of sexual assault. It has also prompted many public policy makers to think about how to intervene with boys, especially young male athletes (McCray, 2015).[7]

[5] Priess, H. A., Lindberg, S. M., & Hyde, J. S. (2009). Adolescent gender-role identity and mental health: gender intensification revisited. Child development, 80(5), 1531–1544. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2009.01349.x

[6] Miller, E., Jones, K., Ripper, L., Paglisotti, T., Mulbah, P. & Abebe,K. (2020), An athletic coach–delivered middle School gender violence prevention program: A cluster randomized clinical trial. JAMA Pediatr, 174(3), 241-249.

[7] McCray, K. L. (2015). Intercollegiate Athletes and Sexual Violence: A Review of Literature and Recommendations for Future Study. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 16(4), 438–443. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838014537907

Coaching Boys into Men (CBIM) is a programme for high school male athletes and their athletic coaches developed by Futures Without Violence, a national nonprofit violence prevention organisation. As an ARA/SV prevention programme, it trains athletic coaches to talk with their male athletes about (1) building respectful relationship behaviours, (2) promoting greater gender equity in attitudes, and (3) developing skills for positive bystander interventions when harmful behaviour is seen between peers. Collecting data from 1,798 athletes in 16 high schools in the United States, Miller et al (2012) found that the CBIM programme was effective in intervening in physical, sexual and psychological aggression in adolescent relationships.[8] As a result, CBIM is considered an effective strategy for reducing abusive relationships among young adolescents.

As a school-based intervention programme, the CBIM intervention fills gaps from other intervention programmess in that it employs an adult (coach)—not the teacher in the classroom or parents —to deliver the intervention. In addition, it uniquely challenges stereotypical gender norms and seeks to create improve adolescent relationships by creating positive bystander behaviours (Miller, 2020).[9]

[8] Miller, E., Tancredi, D. J., McCauley, H. L., Decker, M. R., Virata, M. C. D., Anderson, H. A., ... & Silverman, J. G. (2012). 'Coaching boys into men': A cluster-randomized controlled trial of a dating violence prevention program. Journal of Adolescent Health, 51(5), 431-438.

[9] Miller, E., Jones, K., Ripper, L., Paglisotti, T., Mulbah, P. & Abebe,K. (2020), An athletic coach–delivered middle School gender violence prevention program: A cluster randomized clinical trial. JAMA Pediatr, 174(3), 241-249.

METHODS

The intervention considered for this case study was a randomised clinical trial of a CBIM intervention in western Pennsylvania, USA. Researchers recruited 973 coaches and student-athletes from 43 public and private institutions. Participants in the programme were ethnically diverse. 52 schools were interested in participating, and were randomised to the study arms. Eventually, 9 schools withdrew, and 2 schools were removed due to lack of parental consent, leaving 41 participating schools. In total, 119 sports teams participated in the study. The most common participating sports teams were basketball (28.8%; n = 280) and soccer (21.5%; n = 209).

The participating schools were diverse, including schools in different districts such as urban, suburban, and rural. Socioeconomic status was also diverse, with most of the schools being public and only 3 schools being private. Most (879; 90.3%) participants were born in the United States. Participants' self-reported ethnicities were 54.5% white (n = 530), 29.0% black (n = 282), 1.4% Hispanic (n = 14), 2.1% Asian (n = 20), 5.8% multiracial (n = 56), and 4.1% other racial group (n = 40).

Implementation of the intervention was carried out through several steps. First, in the intervention schools, prevention advocates from local rape crisis centres and domestic violence agencies introduced the programme to the athletic coaches through a 60-minute training session. The advocate provided regular assistance to coaches with implementation-related challenges (e.g., lack of time) through bi-weekly check-ins. Coaches used programme training cards developed as part of the intervention for a 15-minute coach-led discussion each week for 12 weeks. Coaches talked with their athletes about (1) disrespectful or harmful and respectful behaviours among peers (including

homophobic teasing) and in relationships, (2) attitudes that glorify myths of male sexual assault and promote greater gender equality, and (3) active bystander interventions when athletes witness aggressive male behaviour towards girls by their peers. Secondly, coaches completed surveys and interviews at the end of the season to assess the extent to which the program had been completed. Fidelity to the intervention was assessed through intermittent observations of programme implementation by the researchers. In addition, the control group of schools did not receive any training or programming and conducted coaching as usual.

To evaluate whether the CBIM programme was useful in preventing ARA and SV, several surveys were completed. Participants were surveyed when the programme started and at the end of the season (this is when students and coaches in the intervention group have received the CBIM programme) and then again one year after the programme ends. The expected primary outcome was positive bystander behaviour. The secondary outcome included recognition of abuse, gender-equitable attitudes, to intervene with peers, and dating abuse—or a positive change in bystander behaviour. The exploratory outcome explored homophobic teasing, sexual harassment, and cyber sexual abuse and sexting.

RESULTS

The CBIM programme appears to be effective in increasing positive bystander behaviours, recognition of abusive behaviours and reducing relationship abuse perpetration (among those who dated) with younger male athletes attending private or public middle schools in urban, suburban, and rural districts. Compared with the result of the baseline survey, athletes in schools receiving CBIM reported more positive bystander behaviours and greater recognition of abusive behaviours than control groups in end-of-the-season and one year follow up surveys. However, attitudes around gender and intentions to intervene did not differ between the two study arms, evidenced by no changes around sexual harassment, cyber sexual abuse perpetration, or homophobic teasing.

When comparing the behaviours of CBIM schools with control schools in the one year follow up survey, two things are worth noting. Firstly, among those who had dated, athletes in teams receiving the CBIM programme were less likely to report recent ARA/SV behaviours. In addition, there appeared to be some increases in equitable gender attitudes. Participants tried not only to avoid negative behaviours, but they also tried to avoid incorrect gender attitudes as well. Athletes who participated in the CBIM programme clearly learned about equitable gender attitudes and, as a result, earned higher scores on questions regarding gender equality in the survey.

Compared with other similar programmes, this programme is more targeted (aimed at coaches *and* athletes), more operable (the intervention occurs outside of the class), and the results are more consolidated (the result of the survey which are conducted one year later is positive).

REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study are encouraging. The CBIM programme can bring positive change to athletes' behaviours and attitudes about gender violence prevention—as observed at the end of the intervention. As measured through the follow-up survey a year later, the effect of these behaviour changes appears to be long lasting.

To begin with, we believe this is a novel prevention programme for male athletes and from a coaching perspective. Typically, coaches represent authority to athletes on the field and in practice. However, unlike teachers and parents, coaches often have a closer relationship with students. When playing sports games, coaches are likely to bond together with athletes. The experience of training and playing games helps build up a common goal and vision between coaches and athletes. The nature of this relationship between athletes and coaches makes the CBIM intervention particularly effective in preventing ARA and SV. On the one hand, athletes may be more inclined to trust and listen to a sports coach, as opposed to a teacher or parent. Furthermore, if violence happens during PE lessons or sports team training, coaches trained under the intervention are familiar with violent behaviours and can respond more immediately. Considering the coach-athlete relationship, we think that the CBIM programme is promising. We do, however, have some reflections.

While the programme has great potential, we see several potential issues that could be explored further, especially when working in different contexts, outside of the United States. From the perspective of young people from China, we feel that this programme would need a great deal of adaptation if it were to be applied in China. Considering cultural differences, the intervention might look very different, especially because the bulk of the intervention is around delivering messages that would need to be culturally modified. In China, coaches

are infrequently seen in Chinese middle schools. Instead, PE (Physical Education) teachers take the place of coaches in most schools (from primary to high schools). Even though some private schools have sports teams and coaches, these coaches play a less important role. Given the focus of CBIM is SV/ARA prevention; it is worth noting that involving coaches is not enough for preventing SV/ARA. We believe other preventative efforts are needed in order to address the problem, for example engaging with teachers, parents and other school staff.

In terms of the way the intervention was delivered in the United States we have some observations and recommendations. Firstly, the issue of workload for coaches participating in the intervention is important. As described by Miller (2020)[10], '[c]oaches struggled with completing the programme as intended'. Teachers and parents may think that it is coaches' responsibility to prevent violence. However, coaches may have different opinions because taking part in the CBIM programme may cost them extra time and energy. If coaches lack motivation to participate in the programme, the programme cannot operate smoothly. This programme might not work in all schools. Likewise, if the programme were to be adapted to the Chinese educational environment, where PE teachers would be the 'coaches', then participation in the programme would need to be linked to awards such as bonuses, promotions or a less demanding workload in other area.

We also remark that some schools and participants had to withdraw because of the lack of parental consent. We understand that consent is important in research. However, in the study, parental consent limits student participation, i.e. students who forget to bring a consent form and those who do not have a current parent are not eligible to participate.

[10] Miller, E., Jones, K., Ripper, L., Paglisotti, T., Mulbah, P. & Abebe,K. (2020), An athletic coach–delivered middle School gender violence prevention program: A cluster randomized clinical trial. JAMA Pediatr, 174(3), 241-249.

This is not conducive to universal access for prevention and is a lose-lose situation for schools and students. Parents may not be aware of the importance of such programmes and think their children do not need participate in the study. In addition, parents might opt their children out of the study due to the sensitive nature of the topic (particularly in a Chinese context). To increase the consent rate, an information session can be delivered to inform parents regarding the programme content and format.

Both consent and assent should be obtained prior to the study beginning. That is, work with children or adults not capable of giving consent requires the consent of the parent or legal guardian and the assent of the subject. An adaptation that might be considered, if all criteria of consent and assent are met, would be that parents submit their consent forms orally or through the internet. Providing multiple ways of submitting consent forms not only brings convenience to parents but also decreases the risk of children forgetting to bring consent forms back. Additionally, for those who do not have a parent/caregiver, teachers should be given the right to sign in the consent form where appropriate to do so.

In terms of delivery of the intervention, 'talking' (coaches talking to athletes) may not be the best prevention measure. Conversations between adults and young people are not always equitable. Young people can feel the pressure of adult authority. Adolescents typically rebel against authority, and if talking is the principal way of communication in this programme, adolescents could lose interest and feel bored.

For a recommendation, the intervention might be delivered in a more accessible manner to young people through, for example, self-published videos or games—appealing to a form of media that young people tend to like. In addition, to attract athletes' attention, sports games designed to incorporate prevention messages can be included in this

programme. For example, participants can be divided into two groups and compete against each other.

Finally, we believe, at times, more scrutiny is needed: we cannot guarantee that all coaches are trustworthy people. What if the coach of a sports team is also included in abuse and violence? Whom can athletes contact when this situation occurs? These issues were not considered in the original programme. We would suggest background checks prior to the study and referral services once abuse/violence happens during the study. In the Chinese context, this would be particularly challenging since a comprehensive child protection system has not yet been established.

In closing, the research appears to be supported by educational institutions but for true impact, local and national governments must also be supportive. Sharing the success and challenges of this programme with governmental organisations and international organizations alike could be important. This would include inputs from the coaches and athletes themselves.

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