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WhatWorks  
TO PREVENT VIOLENCE  
A Global Programme to Prevent  
Violence Against Women and Girls

# Creating a world free from violence

## The Stepping Stones and Creating Futures Intervention Trial September 2015

Violence against women and girls can be prevented. New studies have shown that carefully designed interventions, which focus on transforming gender norms and work at multiple levels, can significantly reduce women's experience of violence within one to two years. These interventions show great promise for our goal of creating a world free from violence as envisaged in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Yet despite the success of these interventions to reduce violence against women and girls, there are ongoing challenges to find ways to translate them into programmes that are easily scalable, affordable to roll-out and resonate with young people living in urban informal settlements, where young people experience great hardship, poverty, violence and vulnerability.

The Stepping Stones and Creating Futures intervention has found a way to overcome these challenges. Through transforming gender norms and strengthening livelihoods, the intervention is designed to reduce the structural drivers of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and HIV-risk behaviour amongst young people living in urban informal settlements.

Following promising pilot results in 2013, it is now undergoing a cluster Randomised Control Trial (RCT) evaluation. This evaluation is led by HEARD, Project Empower and the South African Medical Research Council and is supported by *What Works To Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls? A Global Programme*, funded by the

UK Department for International Development.

The RCT of Stepping Stones and Creating Futures will generate critical policy and programmatic relevant knowledge on how we can intervene in challenging contexts to reduce violence against women and strengthen the livelihoods of the most marginalised young people in South Africa.

All around the world the population is rapidly urbanising. Sub-Saharan Africa is no exception where the urban population is expected to double in the next two decades (UN Habitat, 2015). In Africa, 61.7% of urban dwellers live in informal settlements and, in terms of numbers, this is expected to have increased from 400 million to 1.2 billion by 2050 (UN Habitat, 2015), resulting in multiple health, employment, sanitation and educational challenges.

Young people in urban informal settlements experience high rates of IPV, rape, HIV, unemployment and poor mental health (Thomas, Vearey, & Mahlangu, 2011). In pilot work by the team in urban informal settlements in South Africa, 45% of men interviewed reported perpetrating IPV in the past year and 32% reported perpetrating non-partner sexual violence in the past year; while 40% of women reported experiencing IPV in the past year.

# STEPPING STONES

## Creating

## Futures

## Stepping Stones and Creating Futures

Stepping Stones and Creating Futures responds to these challenges by combining interventions designed to reduce poverty and gender inequality, which are structural drivers of IPV and HIV-risk behaviour amongst young people living in urban informal settlements.

Stepping Stones South African 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Jewkes, Nduna, & Jama-Shai, 2010) - adapted from Stepping Stones (Welbourn, 1995) - is a behavioural intervention that combines HIV prevention with the pursuit of greater gender equity through participatory activities and critical reflection. A two year evaluation in the Eastern Cape, South Africa showed it was effective in reducing HSV2 incidence by 33% in men and women, and reduced a number of reported risk behaviours in men, with a lower proportion of men reporting perpetration of intimate partner violence across two years of follow-up, as well as less transactional sex and problem drinking at 12 months as well as improved mental health for men (Jewkes et al., 2008).

Creating Futures is a structural intervention that was jointly created by the three partner organisations (Misselhorn, Jama-Shai, Mushinga, Washington, & Mbatha, 2012). It seeks to encourage reflection and action among young people on their livelihoods through participatory activities, which will strengthen young people's livelihoods and economic power. The combined intervention, of Stepping Stones and Creating Futures, is 21 sessions of three hours, delivered by peer facilitators, trained and supported by Project Empower (Misselhorn, Mushinga, Jama-Shai, & Washington, 2014).

## Pilot study

In 2012 the team undertook a pilot study of Stepping Stones and Creating Futures with 232 young males and females (average age 21), in informal settlements in Durban, South Africa. The primary aims of the pilot were to assess potential effect, with a view to refining the model for a future impact assessment. The full reports of this pilot work are published elsewhere (Gibbs, Jewkes, Mbatha, Washington, & Willan, 2014; Gibbs, Jewkes, Sikweyiya, & Willan, 2014; Gibbs, Sikweyiya, & Jewkes, 2014; Jewkes et al., 2014).

### Case Study: Wiseman,<sup>1</sup> male, 26 years old

In 2012 we first interviewed Wiseman, he made his living running a small 'tuck shop' at the side of the road. The business was not very successful and Wiseman felt the stress of not earning well: "you feel undermined when you don't have money, there is nothing that you say that can be taken seriously because you have nothing ... not having money lowers your dignity." He also described beating his girlfriend as he thought she had cheated on him.

After attending Stepping Stones and Creating Futures, Wiseman described how he started to take his business seriously: "I kind of 'woke-up' because I didn't care about what time I opened or closed but then I 'woke-up'...and took it seriously."

Wiseman also described how participating in the intervention improved his relationship with his girlfriend, with increased communication. In addition, he described how he had stopped being violent:

*Interviewer: Have you ever hit your girlfriend?*

*Wiseman: No, but before I once did*

*Interviewer: So what made you stop hitting her?*

*Wiseman: Project Empower (laughing)*

*Interviewer: So what do you do now?*

*Wiseman: We discuss things together*

*Interviewer: And if that doesn't help?*

*Wiseman: If it's too much I leave her and rather see her some other time later*

One year later, we returned to the young people who were involved in the pilot study and found very promising results. Women and men increased their earnings. For women monthly earnings increased from R140 (US\$14) at baseline to R484 (US\$49) (a 345% increase ( $p < 0.0001$ )) at 12 months and for men from R359 (US\$36) at baseline to R1015 (US\$104) (a 283% increase ( $p < 0.0001$ )) at 12 months. In addition, fewer men ( $p = 0.039$ ) and women ( $p = 0.005$ ) reported that they had stolen in the last month due to a lack of food or money.

Women reported that they experienced less IPV in the preceding three months. Specifically their experience of sexual IPV in the past three months decreased from 9.8% to 3.6% ( $p = 0.033$ ) and physical and/or sexual violence from 30.3% to 18.9% ( $p = 0.037$ ).

While men's perpetration of IPV did not decline significantly there was a downwards trend in perpetrating physical IPV from 16.5% at baseline to 12.5% at one year. In addition, women's and

<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms



men's gender attitudes became more equitable over this time, and men reduced their controlling behaviours towards women.

#### **Case study: Nompu, female, 21 years old**

Nompu and her partner both joined Stepping Stones and Creating Futures. When they joined neither of them had a job and survived doing occasional work and support from her boyfriend's sister. For Nompu the intervention encouraged her to set small, realistic goals for herself to achieve:

*Interviewer: When you were there you had to set goals for yourselves. Can you tell me which ones you set and whether you are fulfilling them or not?*

*Nompu: My short-term goals were to invest money and I have done that. I took R100 and went to Standard Bank and they have an investment programme. I invested and then I am looking for a job.*

One year after joining the intervention Nompu had managed to secure herself a job at a restaurant. She was using this money to fund her education so she could complete her school leaving certificate and also continued saving money at the bank and in a savings group. Nompu also described her relationship with her partner as improving:

*Nompu: My relationship is much better now.*

*Interviewer: How?*

*Nompu: We no longer fight.*

*Interviewer: You also used to hit him?*

*Nompu: We no longer fight a lot. Many things changed. I think the cause of that was that we were both stressed as we were unemployed and we were always together.*

*Interviewer: You were always on each others throats.*

*Nompu: Yes*

Men also reported that they became happier, showing a significant reduction in symptoms of depression. Women and men also reported that their life circumstances improved.

The pilot study revealed that Stepping Stones and Creating Futures showed great promise for reducing IPV experienced by women, increasing young people's access to livelihoods and economic security and improving their lives in the challenging and harsh circumstances of urban informal settlements.

## **Stepping Stones and Creating Futures Randomised Control Trial**

In November 2015 the project team are launching a full-scale cluster Randomised Control Trial (RCT) of Stepping Stones and Creating Futures in

urban informal settlements in eThekweni, South Africa. The main objective of the study is to assess whether Stepping Stones and Creating Futures can reduce men's perpetration of IPV and women's experience of IPV. Other objectives are to assess whether it increases young people's monthly earnings and improves their life satisfaction.

The study is designed to enable researchers to control for factors outside of the control of the intervention – such as changes more widely in the economy – elements that may impact on everyone's lives. As such, in research and policy, it is seen as the 'gold standard' for understanding whether or not interventions are effective.

The study will work with 32 different groups (known as clusters) in informal settlements which have been randomly assigned to either receive the intervention immediately, or in two years time. In each cluster 20 women and 20 men between the ages of 18 and 30 will be enrolled into the study (a total of 1280 young people). We will conduct baseline interviews with questionnaires at the start of the study.

Once baseline data has been collected young people (n=640) in the intervention arm will receive the Stepping Stones and Creating Futures intervention over approximately three months (two sessions a week). The study team will then follow all participants and interview them again after one year and then again at two years. The control arm will then receive the intervention once the two year follow-up has been completed.

In addition, there will be an integrated cost-effectiveness evaluation, to analyse the cost of delivery of the intervention and a process evaluation to understand how young people respond to the intervention and negotiate their challenges in life. These components will allow the team to understand how the intervention can best be scaled-up into the future.

The results of the study will be released mid-2018 providing further evidence on the potential to reduce violence against women and improve young people's livelihoods in challenging circumstances.



## Project Team

The Stepping Stones and Creating Futures intervention trial is a collaborative project of HEARD, Project Empower and the South African Medical Research Council.

The research is led by Dr Andrew Gibbs (HEARD). The other team members are: Prof Rachel Jewkes, Dr Yandisa Sikweyiya, Nwabisa Jama-Shai, Samantha Willan and Dr Esnat Chirwa of the South African Medical Research Council) and Laura Washington (Project Empower). The costing component of the study is supported by Michael Strauss (HEARD) and led by Prof Charlotte Watts and Giulia Ferrari at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM).

The implementation of Stepping Stones and Creating Futures is led by Laura Washington and Project Empower; an NGO with 15 years experience of working in urban informal settlements around gender, violence and HIV.

Further information about the project is available at: [www.heard.org.za](http://www.heard.org.za) or [www.whatworks.co.za](http://www.whatworks.co.za)

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