

Together for Change:

Documenting the fight to end violence against women and girls in the Pacific, the Caribbean and Central Asia



Spotlight
Initiative

An initiative of the United Nations funded by the European Union



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Introduction

The Spotlight Initiative is the world's largest targeted effort to end all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG).¹ With €500 million in seed funding from the European Union (EU), the Spotlight Initiative was launched in 2016: first in Africa and Latin America in 2017, then in the Caribbean, Central Asia and the Pacific in 2020. Along with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is a key partner in 11 countries across Africa and Latin America, and 13 programmes in the Caribbean, Central Asia and the Pacific.

Spotlight Initiative interventions focus on six programmatic pillars, as depicted in Box 1.

As a continuation of the 2021 UNICEF publication 'Stories of hope, courage and change from Latin America and Africa',² this publication showcases and documents positive examples of UNICEF programming, progress to date and future results under the Spotlight Initiative in the Caribbean, Central Asia and the Pacific.

'Stories of hope, courage and change' presented examples of programmatic interventions that changed social and gender norms which prop up all forms of violence, and that improved access to and quality of essential services for victims of violence. This publication provides examples of programmes that are changing laws and policies at local and national levels, in addition to programmes that are changing harmful social and gender norms underpinning all forms of violence and are improving access to and quality of services for survivors of violence.

At the heart of these narratives, across all five regions, lies the importance of a collaborative approach with diverse partners. Through Spotlight, local civil society, non-governmental organizations and government agencies are working together to eliminate VAWG. The report emphasizes the different, interconnected roles of these stakeholders in violence prevention and response, highlighting lessons learned in partnerships. Stories in this report show the importance of including women and men, boys and girls in an innovative, whole-community approach. Allowing youth, and adolescent girls in particular, to drive activities that matter to them and will make a change in their community is a driver of success.

¹ Due to a contested definition of terminology, 'violence against women and girls' (VAWG) will be used throughout this publication to refer to all forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls.

² United Nations Children's Fund, 'Stories of hope, courage and change from Latin America and Africa', UNICEF, New York, 2021, accessed 2 June 2023.

Box 1

The Spotlight Initiative's Theory of Change

ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS LIVE A LIFE FREE OF VIOLENCE

All women and girls, particularly those most marginalized, in target countries live a life free from VAWG and harmful practices through prevention strategies and strengthened multisectoral responses.



LAWS AND POLICIES

- Laws on violence (including prevention and addressing impunity) and discriminatory laws
- Advocacy
- Technical assistance
- Capacity building



INSTITUTIONS

- Inform decision makers
- Action plans + development planning
- Capacity building of ministries
- Financing (including gender responsive budgeting)
- Local governments



PREVENTION

- Community-based prevention strategies
- Mobilisation of women, girls, men and boys at community level
- Formal/informal education
- Integrated programming with men and boys (and women and girls)



SERVICES

- Global standards
- Capacity building of service providers
- Coordination
- Improved availability and accessibility



DATA

- Enhanced capacity of national statistics office
- Data analysed used for monitoring
- Data presented in a consistent way to decision makers
- Data disseminated



WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

- Support to partnerships and networking
- Support to knowledge sharing and joint advocacy
- Support to core and institutional capacity development



Due to traditional and patriarchal societal norms, just 45 per cent of secondary students in Tajikistan are girls. Support from parents and teachers, such as Marjona helping her daughter do homework, can make all the difference. Photo credit: Ruziev Manuchehr/2022*

Building tolerance: Ending violence through positive upbringing in Tajikistan

In Tajikistan, over 600 teachers were trained in handling cases of VAWG, including how to appropriately address complaints by children concerning violence. Hundreds of complaints have been submitted to and addressed by participating schools since the module 'Ways and methods of positive upbringing without violence and discrimination' was developed.

VAWG is commonly accepted in Tajikistan. There are widespread norms that justify violence and contribute to low rates of reporting. In 2017, 24 per cent of women aged 15–49 reported experiencing physical violence. Violence often comes at the hands of husbands, mothers-in-law or other family members. Only 1 in 10 women seek help after suffering domestic abuse, meaning that more girls and women could be impacted than we know.³ Embarrassment, fear of retribution, economic dependency and societal norms such as power imbalances between men and women, concern for family privacy and victim blaming are all reasons cited by women who hesitate to report abuse.⁴

Girls who marry at early ages are at higher risk of domestic abuse, so it is important to address drivers of VAWG at early ages and in safe environments, such as schools. Even though students in Tajikistan feel teachers are one of their main sources of support, just 53 per cent of students in UNICEF-targeted schools felt they could go to their teachers with their problems. Therefore, UNICEF, alongside partners in government and civil society, developed a programme to address negative societal norms towards girls and create a safe school environment.

Girls who marry at early ages are at higher risk of domestic abuse, so it is important to address drivers of VAWG

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Although I was a teacher myself, I often paid more attention to boys than to girls. Like most of the villagers, I thought it wasn't that important for a girl to study. After participating in this training, my opinion completely changed. Now I know what the roles and responsibilities of men and women are and what gender equality is.

Ismail Subkhonkulov, teacher in Yovon District

at early ages and in safe environments, such as schools. Even though students in Tajikistan feel teachers are one of their main sources of support, just 53 per cent of students in UNICEF-targeted schools felt they could go to their teachers with their problems. Therefore, UNICEF, alongside partners in government and civil society, developed a programme to address negative societal norms towards girls and create a safe school environment.

To address negative social norms, a training module on 'Ways and methods of positive upbringing without violence and discrimination' was developed by the Republican University for Retraining and Improving Qualifications for Education in collaboration with Qurbonzoda Khonali, former Head of the National In-Service Teacher Training Institute (NITTI), and Egamberdiev Sino, Head of the Learning Department at the NITTI. The training module was

³ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Situation Analysis of Children's and Young Women's Rights in Tajikistan' (draft), UNICEF, New York, October 2019; Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan, 'Tajikistan DHS 2017', Republic of Tajikistan, Dushanbe, 2018.

⁴ Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan, 'Tajikistan DHS 2017', Republic of Tajikistan, Dushanbe, 2018.



*Roughly half of students in Tajikistan have experienced some form of violence, so it is important to provide students with knowledge on who to go to for help when needed.
Photo credit: Ruziev Manuchehr/2022*

rolled out with 600 teachers in 35 schools and communities across 13 regions in Tajikistan. It consists of five pilot training sessions with a group of experts and teachers. Participants discussed 12 topics using active teaching methods such as group work, two-person discussions, role-playing, working in group circles, creating Venn diagrams and writing diaries.

Participants were trained in positive parenting, non-violent methods of discipline and building trust with students through enhanced communication, thereby leading to a safe environment for preventing and responding to gender-based violence.

Once the pilot training proved the efficacy of the module, it was submitted to the Republican Educational and Methodological Center of the Ministry of Education and Science for

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The key to success [of the programme] was involving both girls and boys in challenging gender stereotypes prevalent in the community.

Khudoydodova Khursheda, school mentor

approval. The module is now a required component for all teachers through the Institute of Professional Development and Retraining of Education Workers.

During the development and implementation of the pilot programme, issues such as negative attitudes towards girls, treating girls as a burden, and restricting girls’

rights under the pretext of protecting them were addressed. Teachers who participated in the pilot programme will themselves train educators in 250 additional schools, benefiting 18,000 more individuals. Further, 30 additional instructors will attend the Republican University of Retraining and Improving Qualifications for Education with the aim of reaching an additional 600 teachers in 13 districts in the coming years.

Feedback from the students has been positive overall. One student from a school in Dushanbe reports, “Recently, I noticed that the teacher of our class [...] began to treat us differently and politely communicated with us and listened to our opinions. She tried to help each student and find an approach to each problem. I didn’t understand this, and I wondered why something had changed in the teacher’s attitude towards our students. I asked my teacher what happened. Our class became different: Some of my classmates used to make a lot of noise and behaved inappropriately, and now they have begun to behave well during classes and outside. She replied that she had recently participated in training on ‘Ways and methods of positive upbringing without violence and discrimination’, after which she reconsidered her views. She now uses positive parenting methods in her class with success. Now I want to go to school every day because I know that my respected teacher will support me and help me in any situation. I have begun to trust my teacher more. We [feel] closer to our teacher and try not to upset her. Even my classmates, in my opinion, have become kinder.”

Participating schools also established complaint response and referral mechanisms to ensure safer reporting environments for victims of domestic

abuse and/or VAWG. Before January 2020, schools in Tajikistan did not have a single method for reviewing complaints. Each school handled complaints as best they could through teacher, principal and parental review. Through this new system, complaints are addressed according to procedural guidelines. Some are referred to local police departments, district education departments, local authorities, community and village leaders, or district child rights departments. Key authorities alongside school administrations and teachers, religious and community leaders, parents and civil society organizations have implemented these mechanisms to help prevent and respond to VAWG in and around schools, while transforming the discriminatory gender norms and power dynamics that underpin VAWG.



Students from participating schools played an active role in informing adults in their communities about different types of violence and how to prevent them. Photo credit: Good Neighbours Tajikistan/Olimjon Ahliddinov and Yusufjon Sadulloev



Societal norms in Guyana govern the role of women and men in society and can contribute to an unsafe environment for women and girls. Photo credit: UNICEFGuyanaSuriname/FRobinson

Research for change: Informing legislative reform to tackle domestic violence in Guyana

Research and analysis conducted by UNICEF, in partnership with state and non-state actors, highlighted necessary changes to the current legislation on domestic violence and contributed to the drafting of a new Family Violence Bill. The Bill began review and debate by Guyana's National Parliament in 2022, which continued into 2023, alongside proposed amendments on sexual offences.

The Bill addresses weaknesses in the Domestic Violence Act of 1996 and introduces innovative new provisions by extending protections to cohabitating couples who are not legally married, as well as to same-sex couples in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning and intersex (LGBTQI+) community.

In Guyana, one in five women have experienced non-partner sexual abuse in their lifetime,⁵ a trend fuelled by harmful social norms governing the role of women and men in society. Beliefs that include men’s entitlement to a woman’s body⁶ and a widespread male culture of ‘machismo’⁷ contribute to an

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Importantly, the government recognizes it [domestic violence] as a serious problem, and we continue to remain committed to stamping it out in every form and fashion that exists in our society.

Attorney General Mohabir Anil Nandlall

⁵ UN Women, ‘Guyana Women’s Health and Life Experiences Survey Report’, UN Women, New York, 2019.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ United States Agency for International Development, ‘Guyana Rapid Assessment’, USAID, Washington, DC, 2017, p. 2.

The new Family Violence Bill seeks to improve the lives of girls and women in Guyana. Photo credit: UNICEF/UNI168840/Milton



unsafe environment for women. Indeed, 13 per cent of women in Guyana report experiencing such abuse before the age of 18. Young Guyanese women over the age of 15 face a higher risk of attempted rape, unwanted sexual touching and sexual harassment than any other age group.⁸

Enacted in 1996, the Domestic Violence Act is a primary tool in the fight to prevent and respond to VAWG in Guyana, along with the Sexual Offences Act of 2010. Although VAWG is an ever-evolving problem, the Domestic Violence Act has never been fully updated as a means of addressing the range of prevention and response measures for the protection of families (such as extending beyond intimate partners who are victims/survivors of violence). Neither does it complement the reforms accelerated by other complementary legislation, such as the Sexual Offences Act of 2010, which is gender-neutral and introduced new offences. While the country has experienced – and is still experiencing – high levels of violence,⁹ evidence shows a gradual willingness to ‘break the silence’ and report VAWG.

Consultations guiding UNICEF’s work on the Spotlight Initiative in Guyana highlighted a need to update the Domestic Violence Act of 1996. However, evidence was lacking on **how** the Act should be updated, what the issues in the current legislation were, where the gaps were, and how it interacted with other Guyanese legislation.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ As evidenced by survey data (such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey) and administrative reports between 1996 and 2022.

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There must be facilities in place for victims or survivors to report and give their evidence and to be assured of an environment that does not create injustice when they seek justice.

Guyana Justice Yonetta Cummings-Edwards

In partnership with the Government of Guyana, UNICEF launched a legal research initiative, which revealed significant shortfalls in reporting, investigation and the effectiveness of orders, and a lack of effective survivor support services, among others.

To address these shortfalls, over 40 proposed changes were discussed between UNICEF and the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. The changes suggested the use of more robust and comprehensive definitions of economic, emotional and psychological violence, updated penalties for breaches of protection orders, and the creation of perpetrator intervention programmes and counselling as remedies under the law.

In response, the Government of Guyana adopted an entirely new Family Violence Bill addressing key weaknesses in the prior Domestic Violence Act, for example affording protection to unmarried, cohabiting couples as well as to same-sex couples. The Bill also signifies a policy shift away from stereotypes and cultural bias against the LGBTQI+ community.



*Specialized hearing rooms help improve support structures, keeping safe people who have reported abuse.
Photo credit: UNICEFGuyanaSuriname/FRobinson*

Outside the new Family Violence Bill, the research conducted by UNICEF helped to increase collaboration with the national judiciary on services such as specialized hearing rooms for survivors of domestic violence, to limit re-traumatization. The hearing rooms contribute to the quick and confidential hearing of cases. They also address a barrier to reporting VAWG – inadequate support structures that do not ensure the safety of victims who have reported abuse. At their inception, around 800 people benefited from the hearing rooms, increasing to about 2,000 at the end of 2022. UNICEF in Guyana, under the Spotlight Initiative, continues to support broad stakeholder consultations, advocate for the new Family Violence Bill with other government stakeholders and promote the Bill with local civil society organizations.



The lifestyle game Spring in Bishkek was developed to inform young people about positive gender stereotypes, their rights under the law, and how to act in situations of violence. Photo credit: Open Line Public Foundation

Empowering girls through gaming: Educating youth on bride kidnapping through interactive gameplay in Kyrgyzstan

In Kyrgyzstan, *Spring in Bishkek*, a lifestyle game, empowers young people with practical and legal information concerning the practice of *Ala-Kachuu* (bride kidnapping) in an interesting and engaging manner. The game has been downloaded over 160,000 times, received five-star ratings and led to increased awareness among players on how to behave or react to real-life bride kidnappings.

Ala-Kachuu (bride kidnapping) is a practice dating back centuries in Kyrgyzstan. Although illegal and punishable by 10 years in prison, it remains a significant threat to young girls and women in the country. Victims are generally from rural areas and have typically not completed any higher education.

Between 2013 and 2018, 895 registered reports of bride kidnapping were filed, but criminal investigations were not pursued in most cases (81 per cent). Cases can often be thrown out due to a lack of evidence or testimonials from victims. Cases of bride kidnapping are under-reported due to pressure from families to remain quiet out of fear of shame. Awareness about their rights as women, the illegality of the bride-kidnapping tradition and the existence of effective reporting channels also contribute to low reporting levels.¹⁰

To fight the underlying causes of bride kidnapping, UNICEF Kyrgyzstan partnered with a local organization, Open Line Public Foundation, to create the innovative app *Spring in Bishkek*. Their objectives were to educate girls

10 KABAR, 'МВД планирует ужесточить наказание за «кыз ала качуу». «Женихам» грозит 10 лет тюрьмы и 200 тыс. сомов штрафа', 6 July 2018, <<https://kabar.kg/news/mvd-planiruet-uzhestochit-nakazanie-za-kyz-ala-kachuu-zhenikham-grozit-10-let-tiurmy-i-200-tys-somov-shtrafa/>>.

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Players can get to know their fears, and they can understand that they are not alone and that fear can be fought.

Munara Beknazarova, Open Line Director and author of *Spring in Bishkek*



Central to the design of *Spring in Bishkek* were the thoughts and opinions of adolescent girls in Kyrgyzstan, who are the target audience for the app. Focus group discussions and app testing by girls in the picture helped to keep their needs and wants in focus. Photo credit: Open Line Public Foundation/Sagynbek Ulanbekov and Samat Durusbekov/2019

and young women on their rights and the laws governing forced marriage, inform them about the resources available when facing forced marriage, and increase the confidence of young women and girls experiencing forced marriage. Girls were included in every step of the design and development process, contributing to the app's success. They shared their favourite game genres and stories that capture their attention and provided first-hand experiences of bride kidnapping. The game reflects local scenery and locations that girls thought important, music they most enjoy, but most importantly, scenarios they themselves have lived through. Girls also tested the game to ensure it would resonate with its target audience.

Spring in Bishkek quickly became a success, reaching 70,000 downloads within a month, and 161,000 by the end of the year. It has received five-star ratings on the Google Play Store and enthusiastic reviews from players all over the world. The game's author, Open Line Director Munara Beknazarova, even received a letter from a girl who had used knowledge gained from the app to save her sister from a forced marriage. To date, six girls have used the app to report a kidnapping, one even outside Kyrgyzstan.

As the game continues to increase in popularity, plans for some additions and changes are under way. In the works are new sounds and music, and a way for players to make donations to organizations working to prevent bride kidnappings and VAWG – a request from the players. Girls in Kyrgyzstan have also taken it on themselves to spread the word, holding presentations in their schools to introduce classmates and friends to the game. Now, Open Line Public Foundation and UNICEF are looking at how similar innovative games

can be adapted to reach youth on other issues and in other contexts. Most recently, the follow-up game to *Spring in Bishkek* (called *The Mystery of Sary-Kol*) was shortlisted in the international Game for Change competition under the category 'Best Civics Game'.

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A very interesting game with useful tips for life. Many thanks to the developers, because I learned a lot through the game. Now I will know my rights and what to do in certain cases. Thanks again for such a game.

Actual game review from the Google Play Store

Spring in Bishkek is not just for girls, as boys equally play and are engaged in learning about how to prevent and report bride kidnapping. Photo credit: Open Line Public Foundation/Sagynbek Ulanbekov and Samat Durusbekov/2022





Adolescents within the Spotlight Initiative's target communities come together for a screening of the UNICEF-supported film series *Unlocking Love*. Photo credit: UNICEF Timor-Leste/Bourdalonja Benevides/2022

Unlocking Love: Influencing youth behaviours through film in Timor-Leste

The UNICEF-supported film series *Domin Nakloke* (*Unlocking Love*) seeks to change unhealthy behaviours among adolescents in fun and engaging ways. Exploring issues of domestic violence, sexual assault, gender equality and healthy relationships, by combining online and offline approaches, the series has engaged around 4,000 change-makers in the development process and reached around 138,885 people through Facebook and YouTube with just two episodes.

Women and girls in Timor-Leste are disproportionately affected by poverty, have limited access to essential services and are disempowered by high fertility rates. This increases their risk of and exposure to domestic violence and abuse. In 2016, over half of women who had been in a relationship had experienced physical and/or sexual abuse.¹¹ Around 19 per cent of girls marry before age 18, putting them at even greater risk. Almost half of girls aged 14–19 who are married experience physical or sexual violence by their partners.¹²

Used to a culture of silence, women and young girls are afraid to come forward to report and discuss their experiences due to fear of retaliation or being judged by their community. In 2016, 74 per cent of women surveyed said they felt husbands were justified in hitting their wives, and 80 per cent of those who reported experiencing violence never sought help.¹³ In just one of the municipalities where UNICEF is implementing the Spotlight Initiative, 88 per cent of women reported never seeking help or telling someone after experiencing abuse at the hands of their partner.¹⁴

To address these harmful opinions and practices, UNICEF in Timor-Leste partnered with the local non-profit organization Ba Futuru to develop a film series for young people. Collaboratively working with the Ministry of Social

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We rarely talk about violence that happens in our own community, even though the evidence has shown that it is really common. It is even rarer to talk about violence that affects persons with disabilities. We need to continue talking about violence, so we can find solutions together.

Training participant

Solidarity and Inclusion and three other local non-profits, six episodes of the flagship programme *Domin Nakloke* were developed. The episodes focus on topics of sexual harassment, consent, teen pregnancy, respectful relationships, positive parenting and encouraging community members to take part in preventing violence in domestic settings.

Alongside the production of four additional segments, change-makers (youth and representatives from local civil society and grass-roots groups) and officials from the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion took part in a five-day training course. Participants were trained to facilitate community film screenings and discussions. They were also provided with foundational knowledge on preventing violence against women, girls and children, anger management, conflict resolution and positive parenting.

¹¹ The Asia Foundation, ‘Understanding Violence against Women and Children in Timor-Leste: Findings from the Nabilan Baseline Study – Main Report’, The Asia Foundation, Dili, 2016.

¹² General Directorate of Statistics, Ministry of Health and ICF, ‘Timor-Leste Demographic and Health Survey 2016’, GDS, Ministry of Health and ICF, Dili, Timor-Leste, and Rockville, Maryland, USA, 2018.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 275 and 299.

¹⁴ Ibid.



Youth change-makers in Timor-Leste participate in training to facilitate the Spotlight activities and engage their peers in conversation. Photo credit: UNICEF Timor-Leste/2023/Fmaia

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Often, I saw my friends [women] suffer violence, and I think this is a family problem [domestic issue, not to be meddled with]. Today I know how to help them when they face violence because I know where to get assistance, and I also know some of the protective officers in our municipality. I thank my children who have come too, to our place to share information about preventing violence against us women and children. I hope by these activities the number of violence against women and girls will be lower.

Training participant

Recent community film screenings of the final two segments were organized in 190 locations across the country, reaching people not only in person but on Facebook and YouTube. Men – in particular, husbands and community elders – expressed enthusiasm for the

screenings and actively participated in discussions.

The film series received positive reviews from viewers. Overall, 95 per cent of viewers interviewed after watching the first three episodes found the material

relevant to their lives, and 97 per cent of viewers reported that the series made them think about how to have better relationships, without violence. The project also actively engaged members of the LGBTQI+ community and those with disabilities, who provided positive feedback on the event too. One screening participant identifying with the LGBTQI+ community said, “These activities are very special for me and others because I noticed after the screening some of my friends slowly changed their minds. They are not calling me Mamar¹⁵ anymore. They call me by my name, and I think a few of them have started to respect me.”

For the second phase of the project, UNICEF and local partner Ba Futuru

are holding theatre workshops in rural areas of Timor-Leste, enabling communities to create their own theatrical events. Local youth receive basic theatrical training, connecting them to the country’s strong culture of oral storytelling. Stories are customized to the individual characteristics and needs of each community. Results have demonstrated the power of the series to increase knowledge and shift attitudes around healthy relationships. With drama as an accessible and engaging way to spread messages and promote positive norms, and an integral part of Timor-Leste’s culture, the project hopes to reach even more people with messages about behaviour change.

¹⁵ A negative term used to describe someone who displays feminine traits.

Students from year 10-11 watch the theatrical performances, part of the second phase of Spotlight in Timor-Leste. Photo credit: UNICEF Timor-Leste/2023/Fmaia





Through P4CD, parents discuss positive parenting strategies that can reduce violence in the home and allow their children to grow up happy and healthy. Photo credit: UNICEF PNG/Christina Simons/2019

Positive parenting: Reducing violence in the home for a better future in Papua New Guinea

In Papua New Guinea, UNICEF engaged around 50,000 parents and local partners to break the cycle of family violence by reducing children's exposure to violence, and supporting and empowering parents through a new programme, Parenting for Child Development (P4CD).

Family violence is an experience all too common for children in Papua New Guinea. In 2019, 27 per cent of parents or caregivers used physical violence as a punishment or disciplining measure. Over 50 per cent called their child ‘lazy’ or ‘stupid’ or used other demoralizing phrases, and 66 per cent regularly shouted or screamed at their child. Women also experience high levels of violence: 63 per cent of women married or living with a partner have experienced some form of violence since the age of 15. The highest levels of violence occur against women who are divorced, separated or widowed (70 per cent).

Intimate partner violence and violence against children have common causes, patterns and consequences, including societal tolerance for violence. Often intimate partner violence and violence against children can happen at the same time, but they are too often treated as separate issues. Because of this, the UNICEF Spotlight Initiative team highlighted family violence as a focus area in Papua New Guinea, and a pathway for eliminating VAWG in the country.

A community-based programme, P4CD was developed jointly by UNICEF and the Menzies School of Health Research Centre for Child Development and Education. P4CD was designed in partnership with civil and faith-based organizations to incentivize community ownership of the programme. Targeting the most rural areas of the country, it is based on research conducted with the communities themselves focusing on what they need most. Community dialogues contributed to a shared understanding that reducing children’s experiences of violence will benefit their health and development, and potentially break the cycle of family violence.

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The most important lesson was how to manage my emotions. Sometimes I get angry with my children. I sometimes yell at them, but now I can control myself. I tell my wife I have to leave the room; I go for a walk... and then I cool down.

Training participant

With the support of the governments of Australia and Papua New Guinea, a pilot project was launched in the Western Highlands and Madang in Papua New Guinea. Mothers and fathers of children aged 3–10 years old (including teenage and foster parents) participated in six workshops, learning about child development from birth to early childhood. The sessions helped them develop an understanding of children’s behaviour, learn positive parenting strategies and develop an awareness of emotions and strategies for emotional self-control. Parents then applied this knowledge and skills to problem-solve effectively and communicate better with their families.

P4CD has since expanded and formed new partnerships with faith-based and civil society organizations. Partnerships with the country’s community networks of churches are seen as a critical part of the programme’s sustainability. In Papua New Guinea, churches can mobilize high levels of moral commitment and retain participation. Therefore, P4CD is delivered by members of each target



Addressing societal norms that can lead to intimate partner violence can also work to reduce violence against children. Photo credit: UNICEF PNG/Christina Simons/2019

community who volunteer their time to promote the programme and run workshops for groups of parents. They are guided and supported by team leaders (also from the community) who oversee data collection, the successful completion of activities, and parents' responses to the activities. Each of the six workshops focuses on a topic that helps parents understand phases of children's development from 0 to 9 years, and adopt positive practices to handle each phase of their life.

The post-activity study, conducted three months after the final session, found that 76 per cent of those who participated confirmed that they do not hit their child with a belt or a hard object. Most participants also reported not engaging in neglectful activities (such as giving their child silent

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After the workshop, we encourage the man and women to allow both sides to be heard, which promotes respect between them... We also address the unequal treatment of the boys and girls. If you buy shoes for the boys, you should buy shoes for the girls. Men are now taking on the role as caregiver – it is the work of both parents and not just the women.

Implementing partner

treatment). Fathers exposed to the programme experienced a key turning point by gaining a newfound sense of responsibility and are spending more time with their children. The majority (81 per cent) of fathers confirmed playing games with their children, spending more time with them and teaching them positive behaviours.

The P4CD programme has also contributed to a reduction in intimate partner violence and has strengthened communication skills. Evaluations showed that 56 per cent of participants reported that their spouse does not use violence towards them anymore. Further, parents who participated in the programme reported experiencing less violence by their spouse, and increased confidence in their ability to care for their children, along with significant

increases in family well-being overall. Most women (66 per cent) and men (71 per cent) confirmed that after participating in P4CD training, they now talk things through when they disagree with their partner.

UNICEF Papua New Guinea continues to use the P4CD programme to educate parents on healthy parenting techniques and reducing violent discipline within the home, and as a tool to prevent domestic violence. Working to institutionalize the programme, UNICEF aims to roll it out nationwide and further encourage parents to have healthy relationships with their children and to be advocates in the prevention of violence against women and children.

Skills learned in P4CD training led to a reduction in intimate partner violence among participants. Photo credit: UNICEF PNG/Chambers/2023





Through the Spotlight Initiative, religious leaders spoke with men in several districts of Afghanistan on the importance of positive masculinities, among other topics. Photo credit: HRDA/Toryalai Rehan/2022

Transforming harmful beliefs and norms: Religious leaders addressing gender ideologies in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, UNICEF partners mobilized 500 religious leaders to address pro-violence norms and dynamics negatively impacting families.

In Afghanistan, social norms have a significant influence on the role of women and girls in daily life and how they should be treated. Traditions dictate that once girls reach puberty, they should leave school and get married. For girls and young women, violence is commonplace, with 80 per cent of women and 72 per cent of men believing that a husband is justified in beating his wife for burning food, arguing, going out without informing her husband, neglecting her children or refusing to have sex. Child marriages are common due to poverty and traditional customs.

Religious leaders have traditionally maintained considerable influence over social and moral values in Afghan communities. Because of this, UNICEF worked with trusted local partners to establish training for religious leaders across four provinces, so that they might influence change that will prevent VAWG.

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I learned a lot from this workshop, and I will try my best to start with my own family and teach them how they should take care of their women and children.

Haki Abdul Jabber, Kandahar training participant

The training aimed to build knowledge and skills on child protection and the prevention of VAWG. Religious leaders, therefore, received an introduction to VAWG, how VAWG is viewed by the law and by Islam, and methods for reporting VAWG. Through a mixture of practical activities, theory, group work and case studies, the groups discussed family morals, dangers of early child marriage, and the importance of a harmonious home.

Men from Kandahar Province in Afghanistan participate in positive masculinity training from local religious leaders. Photo credit: HRDA/Toryalai Rehan/2022



Programme leaders hoped that participation in the training would encourage religious leaders to train other religious leaders in areas of Afghanistan that are less receptive to work by non-governmental organizations. Going beyond expectations, the religious leaders incorporated the messages into their local Friday sermons. Maolave Shair Mohammad, a training participant from Daman, said, “We will spread the messages on forced marriage and children’s and women’s rights in our *masjids* to all of our followers.” Many of those who participated in the UNICEF training are now interested in refresher sessions that go into more detail on certain topics.

The training also contributed to an increase in the number of women and girls attending safe spaces, set up throughout Spotlight Initiative communities in Afghanistan by UNICEF and local partners. These spaces provide girls and women with a comfortable and safe place to meet

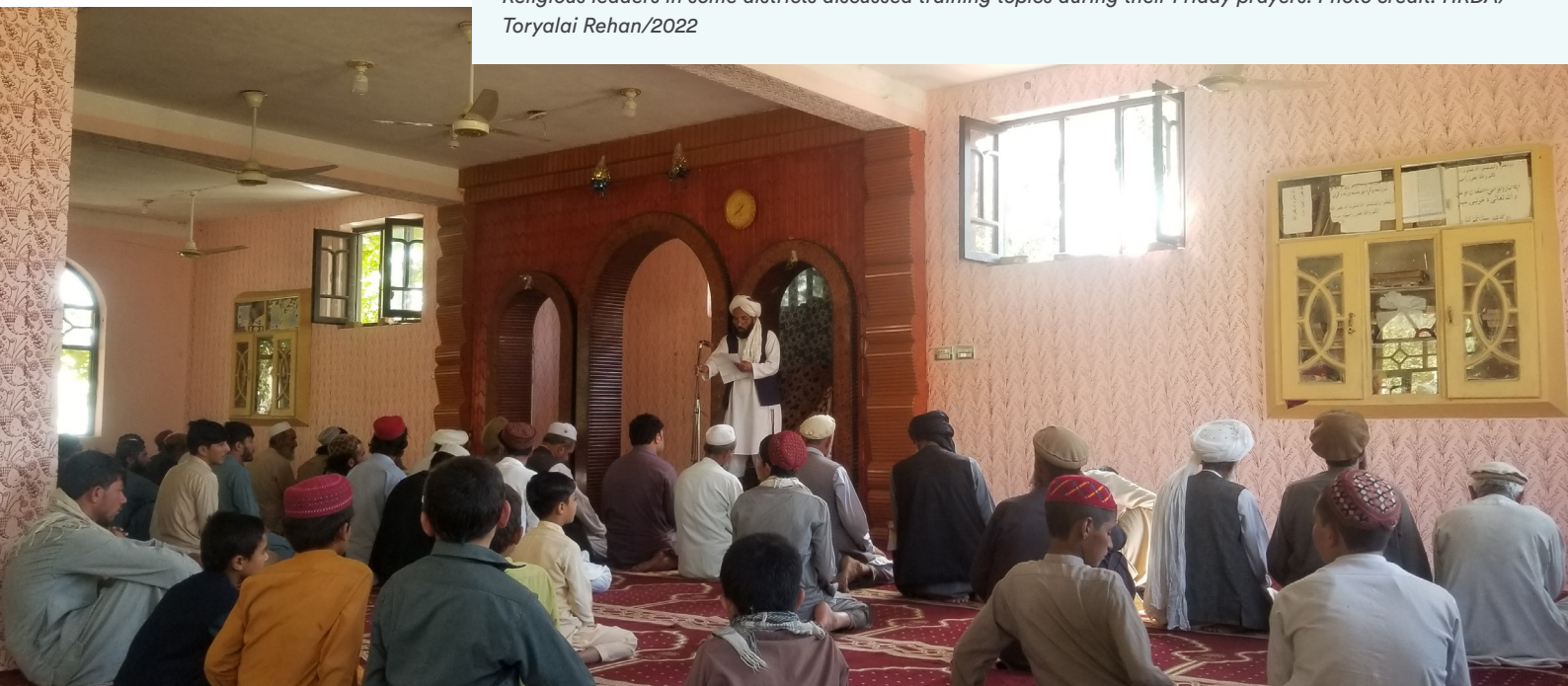
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I can observe changes in the family; they have now opted for reasoning and mutual respect rather than violence. They are very careful and do not want the rights of women and children at home to be based on falsehoods.

Haji Abdul Jabber, Kandahar training participant

outside their homes. At the time of publication, Spotlight Initiative safe spaces are no longer able to operate due to the ban on female aid workers. UNICEF, however, continues to reach girls and women through important health-related activities, and some safe spaces are still operating outside Spotlight Initiative districts.

Religious leaders in some districts discussed training topics during their Friday prayers. Photo credit: HRDA/Toryalai Rehan/2022



UNICEF and the Spotlight Initiative: 2023 and beyond

This report has captured some of the many interventions, promising practices and budding results emerging from UNICEF Spotlight Initiative programmes in the Pacific, the Caribbean and Central Asia. Although many other promising interventions are under way, this report has not been able to cover all of them due to limited space.

In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNICEF supported a national study of social norms that perpetuate violence against children and recommended comprehensive education programmes aimed at reducing violence against children by changing social norms. UNICEF is engaged in changing social norms in **Grenada** at the community level through the National Parenting Programme. In the **Pacific Region** (Solomon Islands, Fiji and the Marshall Islands), UNICEF participated in a faith-based initiative to develop a toolkit for ending violence against children.

As set out in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, addressing VAWG is key to UNICEF’s work to help children globally. Through the Spotlight Initiative, UNICEF countries continue to promote gender equality and end violence to transform the lives of millions of women and girls through sustainable programmes and change.



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