

Choices, Voices, Promises

Empowering Very Young Adolescents to form Pro-Social Gender Norms as a Route to Decrease Gender Based Violence and Increased Girls' Empowerment



Background

In order to improve gender equity among very young adolescents 10-14 years old, Save the Children developed an innovative gender transformative package with three distinct interventions across an ecological model. Evidence of the need to work across multiple levels of society inspired Save the Children to develop a package to move a community towards social and behavior change with regards to adolescent's gender equity. Our goals are to:

- (1) Improve boys' and girls' access to activities that challenge restrictive gender norms and

promote gender equity through the Choices curriculum; (2) Increase dialogue between parents and children that improves equity in the household through the Voices intervention; and (3) Shift norms within the community to create an environment where boys and girls are valued equally through the Promises intervention. When working across an ecological model, and the expectations, restrictions, and opportunities for very young adolescent boys and girls will be more likely to positively shift when these three interventions are used simultaneously in a community.

An Ecological Approach

An ecological approach recognizes that behaviors and norms are influenced by multiple individual and social factors. An ecological perspective helps to better understand the complex social system that sets norms between children, their families and their communities. This understanding has helped shape our three interventions: Choices, Voices, and Promises, to foster individual behavior change as well as broader social norm shifts, ultimately improving the lives of very young adolescents.



Georgetown University's Institute of Reproductive Health conducted an evaluation of the Choices curriculum. Qualitative and Quantitative findings included:

- Girls felt empowered to talk to their parents about continuing their studies and avoiding early marriage
- Brothers advocated with their parents for their sisters' education and delayed marriage
- Boys were able to recognize unfair gender norms
- Brothers helped their sisters with schoolwork and housework
- Children's perceptions of gender roles were altered and were more accepting of non-traditional gender roles
- Children were provided with skills to make gender equitable behavior more normative
- Participants felt more confident discussing feelings, promoting gender equality and were more optimistic about their futures.

Choices

Throughout the world, girls and women face discrimination on multiple levels by virtue of their sex. Many girls and women are unable to fully participate in school, family life and economic activities because of this and may be exposed to various forms of physical and psychological violence. Adolescence is frequently viewed as a window of opportunity to formulate positive attitudes and behaviors. Developing gender equitable norms during adolescence reduces the need to invest in the difficult task of changing behavior later in life. To address this situation, Save the Children developed the Choices curriculum in Nepal in 2009, the first of its kind to target very young adolescent boys and girls to help them discover alternative views of conventional gender roles and behaviors. The Choices curriculum in Nepal includes eight developmentally appropriate participatory activities designed to stimulate discussion and reflection among girls and boys exploring how:

- ✦ Gender inequity and power are related
- ✦ Gender equity begins with small actions that can earn respect
- ✦ Social norms restrict boys from treating girls as equals
- ✦ To express emotions and realize their hopes and dreams
- ✦ Girls can be empowered to achieve their dreams

Findings from an evaluation showed statistically significant differences in gender attitudes and behaviors between control and experimental groups after participation in Choices. This suggests that implementation of the Choices curriculum at a greater scale, along with complementary activities for parents and communities, has the potential to make meaningful contributions to more equitable gender norms. An adapted curriculum is being used in Bolivia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Malawi and Zambia.

Voices

Save the Children developed Voices, an approach engaging parents of very young adolescents, to challenge rigid and gendered expectations of their children, while fostering dialogue between parents and children about gender equity. The basis of the Voices intervention includes six short emotional videos with testimonials of community members who have recently adopted the targeted behaviors. Carefully facilitated group dialogues with parents occur after each video to tap into powerful emotional drivers of behaviors and lead people to make gender equality changes in their homes.



As a result of Voices, we would like parents to:

- 1) Evenly divide household tasks,
- 2) Keep their daughters in school,
- 3) Delay early marriage,
- 4) Ask boys and girls to share their hopes and dreams,
- 5) Provide equal quality and quantity food for boys and girls, and
- 6) Equally bring hope to girls and boys with small but significant actions.



The videos are shown using mini-LCD projectors with groups of parents whose children are going through the Choices curriculum. Each viewing can accommodate as many as 50 community members, who gather in the home of one of their neighbors. Following the video screening, parents participate in a facilitated discussion, reflecting on actions families can take to improve gender equity in their households.



Promises

Save the Children developed a final innovation, called Promises, to help shift community norms related to girls leaving school due to marriage and high rates of domestic violence. These norms were chosen because of their link with gender equity the potential impact they have on the lives of very young adolescents. It was hoped that by working on these two norms at the community level, a context would be created in which individual changes inspired through the Choices curriculum, and household changes inspired through Voices, would have a greater likelihood to be sustained. The Promises approach involves displaying a series of six large posters in the community designed with the six evidence-based influence principles. At each poster unveiling, a small group of identified community influencers engage in discussion about the poster and are asked to discuss the poster within their social network. Each poster is displayed for two weeks to catalyze dialogue and reflection at the community level.



A mixed-method process evaluation of Promises was conducted in Nepal using structured interviews and focus group discussions with children and parents. Husbands became more positive in their view of their daughters' ability to contribute to the community in the future and expressed increased understanding of the need for their daughters to be physically mature before marriage. Children self-reported an increase in optimism towards educational achievement and identified an increase in love and openness from both parents in discussing their hopes and

dreams. All respondents reported community changes — decreased alcohol consumption, increased use of loving words to solve conflicts and fewer disputes. The evaluation did not measure actual social and behavior changes, nor the synergistic effects of using Promises simultaneously with Choices and Voices. This will be the focus of a new study taking place in 2015.

Learn more. Contact ASRH@savechildren.org

Read the peer-reviewed article on the Choices evaluation: [Whose turn to do the dishes? Transforming gender attitudes and behaviors among very young adolescents in Nepal](#)

Read the NY Times feature: [In Egypt, Sowing Seeds of Gender Equality](#)