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# Understanding adolescent perspectives on violence to inform prevention interventions: Voices from an informal settlement of Nairobi

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## The larger study

- Cluster-randomized controlled trial
- Middle school students (~4,000 girls and 1,000 boys)
- Delivered in groups in a classroom environment.
- Parallel boys and girls curriculums.
- 12 hours:
  - › 6 weekly sessions
  - › 2 hours per session
- Group-based, roleplaying and situational practice.
- Rigorous selection process for the trainers.

## The setting: Nairobi informal settlements



# The Partnerships: External evaluation model



NO MEANS NO  
WORLDWIDE

What does this look like?



# The Intervention



# Our approach to qualitative analysis

- Thematic qualitative analysis conducted by a group of three.
- Each group member reads five transcripts at a time, jotting down main themes and relevant quotes; every five interviews, the group comes together to compile a list of supra- and sub-themes, which are then used to code the following transcripts.
- This is repeated until all of the transcripts have been read through once, and then repeated until data saturation has been achieved.
- **Data saturation:** no new ideas emerge—meaning you have a complete and robust understanding of the group being studied.

# Qualitative data analysis

Demographics	n=31	Girls n= 20	Boys n= 11
Average age		11.9	11.7
Average # siblings		1.6	1.8
% living in Dandora Phase II		44.4	36.4
% having lived in current residence for <3 years		55.6	72.7
% having moved from urban area		73.3	72.7



# Perceptions of risk and violence

- Girls and boys believe girls are at risk of many types of violence, but especially sexual violence.

“Some boys are bad as they like stealing, beating children and forcing girls to have sex” (girl)

“Girls are lied to; they are bought for foodstuff and are taken to places where they sleep with these men” (girl)

“girls face rape when sent to the shops at night and some as they come from school.” (boy)

“boys start fight in class and beat girls and if the girls report to the teacher, the boys come back and beat them.” (girl)

# Coping mechanisms

- Girls have existing ways of improving their safety, mostly via safety in numbers.

“I never walk **alone at night**, [...] and if I have to go out I always walk with my **elder brother.**” ”  
(girl)

“From school and to school we walk a **group** of girls...to avoid strangers who can easily **abduct** and **rape us.**” (girl)

“I would **scream, run away**, look for **stones to hit** the person or run to an adult woman” (girl)

- Both sexes perceive somewhat set gender roles and relations

“**Boys and girls here don’t get along** easily due to the assumption in the community if they are fond of each other they are automatically in a relationship .” ” (girl)

# Personal experiences of violence

- Girls have existing ways of improving their safety, mostly via safety in numbers.

“I never walk **alone at night**, [...] and if I have to go out I always walk with my **elder brother.**” ”  
(girl)

“From school and to school we walk a **group** of girls...to avoid strangers who can easily **abduct** and **rape us.**” (girl)

“I would **scream, run away**, look for **stones to hit** the person or run to an adult woman” (girl)

# Disclosure

- When violence happens, girls are mixed on who they would tell, or if they would disclose at all. Mothers and teachers are key confidants.

“The first person I would go to is definitely my **mother**. I would also go to a **trusted teacher** and **friends**” (girl)

“(Regarding a near-rape experience): When I got home, **I told my mother about it**. She comforted me but **warned me not to go to neighbors houses or near boys**” (girl)

“**We never report** [when boys touch our private parts at school] because we shall be **punished** by our **teacher** and I am very **scared of telling my parent.**” (girl)



# Role of built/physical environment

“Sometime boys take girls to the **field** and do **bad things** to them.”  
(girl)

“Violence in school is usually in the classes **when there’s no teacher** and in the **playgrounds** when we are playing.”  
(girl)

“It (violence) is likely to occur in the **toilets** because it’s **away from the teachers and prefect.**” (girl)

# Ideas for improvements

- Built environment changes are primarily identified

We need **more lighting**,  
**increased police presence** and  
**punishment** for boys who  
misbehave

“For the school to be safer, they should employ  
**more watchmen** and also make **electric fences** such  
that no intruder can pass over

“People should pray for  
one another and **the police**  
**should be serious** with  
their work because people  
say that when the boys are  
rioting the **police are just**  
**watching** and it is not  
good.”



# Discussion

- How can these findings improve:
  - Our research?
    - Boyfriend questions..what else added/changed?
  - The intervention?
    - ???
- 10-14 years olds
- Built environment obvious?



## Family dynamics

- Although most of the participants live in two-parent households, many have absent fathers due to employment demands.
- **Perceptions of safety and violence**
- **Defining the terms**
  - When safety is left undefined by the researchers, public health concerns such as water and sanitation are frequently referenced.
  - In defining safety and violence, the participants rely on abstract concepts of morality influenced by principles of discipline meted out by their parents and their teachers.
  - The participants often defined in detail what constitutes a “bad” boy or girl from concrete examples in their communities to complement these abstractions.

# Discussion

## Experiencing violence

- The boys often differentiated their own violent tendencies from the violence perpetrated by individuals fitting this category of “bad” boy.
- The girls also failed to make this connection between the violent penchants of the boys in their age group and their potential to become the violent attackers that they fear in their communities.
- Most of the participants claim to feel safe in their communities and at home despite their personal experiences with violence as well as witnessing violence in both of these settings.
- Both male and female participants mentioned the danger of sexual violence faced by girls in the community, whereas mention of the same dangers facing boys was less common.
- The participants only expressed fears associated with the danger of sexual violence perpetrated by strangers—there was no mention of sexual violence enacted by close family members.

# Discussion

## Coping with violence

- The participants often spoke of their fear of dangerous situations by personifying locations to the point where the “tall grass” became synonymous to sexual assault for the girls and the “playground” synonymous to physical fights for the boys.
- Both the boys and the girls made a clear distinction between violence deemed acceptable in the community such as mob justice from violence punishable by law such as rape.

## Mitigating violence

- Many of the participants were wary that scaling up the security infrastructure in their communities would yield minimal change without first restructuring the existing system.



Thank you to:

DFID

SA-MRC

SPECTRUM

Stanford Population Health

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

Stanford Gender Based Violence Prevention Collaborative

Most photos courtesy of Nichole Sobecki

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