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An intervention for boys aimed at the prevention of violence against women – Qualitative outcome

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Abstract

Programmes designed to empower women in an attempt to eradicate violence against them address only one side of the coin. To promote respectful gender relationships, it is also necessary to change the destructive perceptions of masculinity commonly found among men and boys. The 12-session Hero Empathy Programme was implemented for Grade 5 boys at 10 primary schools in low-resourced communities in South Africa (age range: 10–13 years; black = 100%). The aim was to expose all the Grade 5 boys in those schools to alternative perspectives on masculinity and respectful gender relationships. Before the intervention, focus group discussions were held with the boys to gain an understanding of their conceptualisations and experiences in their communities. Focus group discussions held after the intervention explored changes in the boys' gender perspectives and behaviour. After the intervention, boys questioned gender stereotypes, respected girls more, showed less violence towards girls and accepted a positive perspective of masculinity, which is to be strong and to provide for and protect the family. The intervention showed promise with regard to its ability to promote respectful gender relationships from a young age. To enhance sustainability and have an effect on the social norms of communities, the intervention should be widely implemented.