EmpaTeach: Preventing Violence Against Children in Schools

SVRI, September 20, 2022
Nyarugusu Refugee Camp, Tanzania

~150,000 refugees from Burundi and DRC

Corporal punishment in Nyarugusu is rampant:

- **81%** of students report *lifetime* experience of physical violence from school staff
- **56%** of students report occurrence in the *past week*

Despite stringent rules and regulations prohibiting this behaviour

- Teachers believe physical punishment helps prepare students for the future.

“[Harsh discipline] helps children change and become better students because they are afraid of doing it [misbehaving] again.”

– Congolese teacher
Our Learning Journey

Phase 0: 2016
- Wide review of behavioral science literature
- Formative research to understand types of violence and prioritization meetings with local staff
- Co-creation workshop with teachers + community leaders + staff

Phase I: 2017
- Program development, building on learning
- Content prototyping + “nimble RCT” to test messages generating intention to change

Phase II: 2018
- Program/content development, integrating learning to date
- Sessions to prototype new content + iterate
- Feasibility/acceptability pilot, monitor early implementation and data collection systems
EmpaTeach: Intervention Overview
EmpaTeach: Delivery

Headmaster introduces the program to teachers

Teachers meet in groups and are encouraged to find a supporter

Delivery model:
- Groups meet 12 times over 10 weeks
- Peer led
- Homework assignments
- 8-10 teachers per group

SMS reminders
EmpaTeach: Content

Concrete positive discipline strategies to address misbehaviors

Videos demonstrating positive discipline techniques

Empathy building and planning exercises

Scenario-based games

Role play activities and tailored stories
No evidence that EmpaTeach reduced physical or emotional violence from teachers.
Study Design

27 Primary and Secondary Schools

Cluster Randomised Controlled Trial

Mixed methods process evaluation

Participatory dissemination and feedback

14 treatment + 13 control schools
3 rounds of data collection:
  • baseline
  • midline (2 months follow-up)
  • endline (10 months follow-up)

Aim: assess implementation, uptake and mechanisms of action

Data:
  • Interviews and FGDs
  • Surveys
  • Classroom observations
  • Intervention records (e.g. attendance sheets and homework)

Student outcomes:
  • Past-week physical violence from teachers
  • Past-week emotional violence from teachers
  • Depression symptoms
  • School attendance

27 Primary and Secondary Schools
Trial Results

- No evidence of effect on teacher violence outcomes
- No evidence of effect on student depressive symptoms and school attendance
Understanding what didn’t work

Teachers attended EmpaTeach weekly sessions but did not engage with homework practice...

...Teachers in EmpaTeach schools were better at providing emotional support to students and at using alternative discipline.

However

- their use of positive strategies was not associated to their use of violence
- no improvements in self-efficacy, empathy, growth mindset and perceived social support
What we know about EmpaTeach

- Despite implementation challenges content was well received and relevant for teachers
- Norms condoning corporal punishment persisted
- No replacement effect
- No improvement in teacher outcomes on the pathway to impulsive use of violence
What works to prevent teacher violence?

- Whole school approach
- Mentoring, coaching, social support from trained facilitators
- Addressing norms more explicitly (?)
- Involvement of community and caregivers (?)
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Thank you!
Additional slides
EmpaTeach: Intervention Overview

PROGRAM STRATEGY
Weekly group sessions applying CBT-inspired, story-based learning, and implementation intentions (planning) activities, complemented by take-home assignments & SMS reminders.

1. Growth Mindset, Values Affirmation, + Encouragement
2. Positive Discipline (Redirection)
3. Positive Discipline (Reflection)
4. Positive Discipline (Consequences)
5. Co-creating Rules + Classroom Management Review Game
6. Identity Triggers + Intro to CBT Concepts
7. CBT Concepts - Cont’d
8. Self-Regulation (De-escalation)
9. Planning Reactions
10. Planning Reactions - Cont’d
11. Healthy Mind + Review Game
12. Self-Persuasion + Values Affirmation

WEEKS 1-2
WEEKS 3-6
WEEKS 7-10
Nimble RCT: Testing effective messages to shift attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business as Usual</th>
<th>Behavioral-informed modules</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rules and rights</td>
<td>Empathy building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Routine</td>
<td>Clinical evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Exercise</td>
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<td>IRC’s Code of Conduct</td>
<td>Reflect on own experiences of violence and connect to children’s</td>
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<td>UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child</td>
<td>Learn about impact of violence on children</td>
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<td>Learn about teachers elsewhere effectively changing their discipline strategies</td>
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<td>Contrast with self-image and values as teachers</td>
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THE REACTION CYCLE

1. What thoughts did Ambrose have?
   ______________________
   ______________________

2. What emotions did Ambrose feel?
   ______________________
   ______________________

3. What physical signs did Ambrose experience?
   ______________________
   ______________________

4. What actions did Ambrose take?
   ______________________
   ______________________