Religious Leaders Can Motivate Men To Cede Power And Reduce Violence

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Background

- Violence against women persists, in part, due to strong social norms
- Perceptions of norms around gender roles are strongly influenced by religious doctrine and the church, who have moral authority
- If the church were to shift messaging, behavior may change
- Individual religious leaders can and have historically acted as “norm entrepreneurs”
- Couples counseling or pre-marital courses may be an entry point
Becoming One (B1)

A 12 session counseling program designed to bring couples closer and prevent intimate partner violence against women. The program is delivered by faith leaders, who learn through videos and guide couples through engaging illustrated workbooks that teach communication skills, emotional regulation, shared control over finances and, sexual consent and pleasure.
Our Focus

Consistent engagement of men

Aspirational relationships and immediately rewarding behaviors

Easy to adopt by the church
Why will men cede power?

Becoming One couples reported higher levels of trust, openness and appreciation for their partner and significantly lower levels of depression. We think that by increasing the value that couples derive from their relationship, men were motivated to cede power without backlash.

**Relationship Improvements**

- Increased trust
- Increased enjoyment of each other’s company
- Less frequent arguments
- Healthier methods for dealing with arguments
- Lower levels of depression
- More frequent quality time together

**Motivate Men to Shift Power**

Men were willing to cede control over finances and sex
Context

● Districts:
  ○ Kamwenge (pop = 414,454)
  ○ Kagadi (pop = 430,200)
  ○ Kakumiro (pop = 473,400)

● 51% reported any violence in last 12 months

● 80% attend religious services on a weekly basis

● 86% rate religion as being “very important” to them

● Many couples attend pre-marital counseling courses
**Design**

- Pair-matched, randomized trial of 1,680 heterosexual couples

Steps:

- 140 faith leaders recruited 8–14 couples each
- Within recruitment groups, couples were formed into pairs with similar baseline violence levels
- Within each pair, 1 couple was randomly assigned to begin B1 immediately and the other was wait-listed for 1 year
Attrition & Attendance

Attrition

- Response rate during 6 month and 12 month follow ups was 97.8%
- No evidence treatment affected response rate ($P = 0.621$); or that non-respondents were different than respondents ($P = 0.345$).

Attendance

- “Adherence” definitions (pre-specified).
  - **Treatment group**: 83% attended **at least 50% of sessions**.
  - **Control group**: 99% attended **no sessions in 2018-2019**.
- Women’s attendance (78%) was slightly higher than men’s (75%)
Primary Findings - ITT

Four pre-specified outcomes:

↓ Violence reduced*

↑ Increased control & decision-making*

✗ No significant change in consent

↑ Improved communication & conflict resolution*

* Robust to multiple comparisons correction
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**Motivate Men to Shift Power**

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Power shifted from men to women

- Index of women’s control and decision-making improved by ~0.2 SDs (24 items)
  - Driven by increased involvement of women in decision-making around men’s finances
- Shifts in power were zero-sum: men experienced a loss while women experienced a gain.
- Reductions in income hiding (both), more joint financial planning.
Violence reduced

- Prevalence of violence reduced by 5 percentage points (12%) at 12 mo
  - Driven by reductions in sexual violence (~4 pp), most prevalent form at baseline
- In addition, frequency, severity and breadth of acts all reduced
- Evidence for cessation of sexual violence as well as prevention of new cases of physical violence
- Spillover effects – reduced disciplinary violence against children
Some leaders were better than others*

Leaders who were more _progressive_ at baseline and who _implemented the program the best_ achieved:

- **5x** larger reductions in violence (−21.7 pp versus −4.4 pp)
- **6x** larger improvements in control & decision-making, consent, and relationship quality
- Significant shifts in behavioral game with real stakes

*Come to our session on Wednesday to learn more!*
Measurement innovations

Social desirability bias / experimenter demand

- Placebo tests
  - Included questions to elicit whether respondents were providing answers that reflect well on program
  - Little evidence for bias; robust to correction

- Solomon design
  - Randomly assigned, with 70% probability, women to receive baseline violence questions
  - Violence reports increased by 6 percentage points among those who received questions
  - Effect was the same across treatment groups, suggesting baseline didn’t sensitize participants to the “correct” responses
Implications

- A couples counseling course embedded within the church can reduce violence
- Benefits-based programming and faith leader engage men without backlash
- However, heterogeneity in impacts across faith leaders suggests identifying the right facilitators or improving training
- Similar “change from within” strategy could work in other contexts, but to work must be credible
Next Steps

- Partnering with the Church of Uganda to scale up program and integrate Becoming One into standard services
- Charging couples to attend sessions.
- Testing content that directly addresses violence through “respect sessions”
- Experimenting with Faith Leader selection criteria within the Church
Learn more

● In Press:

● Website:
  ○ [https://airbel.rescue.org/projects/becoming-one/](https://airbel.rescue.org/projects/becoming-one/)
  ○ [https://prevention-collaborative.org/programme-examples/becoming-one](https://prevention-collaborative.org/programme-examples/becoming-one)
Acknowledgements

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● Our co-authors: Jeannie, Betsy, Lori, Jasper, Tvisha, and Rachel

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● International Rescue Committee: Shirin Ahmed, Justina Li, Shanley Knox and Shirley Rodriguez
Appendix
## Primary Findings - ITT

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<th>Control &amp; decision-making</th>
<th>Sexual consent</th>
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** Significant at FWER = 0.05; pp = percentage point, SD = control standard deviation
## Primary Findings - Attendees

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** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; pp = percentage point, SD = control standard deviation