

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on couple relationships in Rwanda

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Bandebereho Intervention



Gender-transformative couples' intervention for parents of children under 5

15 session curriculum:

- Reflect on & question gender role and inequitable norms
- Equip parents with knowledge, skills
- Encourage couple communication
- Practice new behaviors in safe, supportive group environment

Piloted 2013-2015

COVID-19 Study: Objectives

- To understand how women and men with young children in Rwanda have experienced the pandemic and its response related to **care, connection and coping**
- To examine the longer-term impacts of the Bandebereho intervention during a period of extreme stress



Study Methodology in Brief

Brief phone survey conducted by sex-matched interviewers

Builds on the existing Bandebereho randomized controlled trial with 1,199 couples (575 treatment; 624 control)

- Eligibility: man enrolled in Bandebereho RCT and his current partner; restricted to those with phones in 2016
- Sample of 500 couples (250 treatment; 250 control group)
 - 500 men, 498 women surveyed

No direct questions about violence, but asked about **known risk factors for violence** – quarrelling, relationship quality, men's use of alcohol

Study Context

Surveys in August/September 2020 – approx. 4-5 months after the end of Rwanda's 'stay at home' period or confinement

Respondents were asked about their experiences:

- During the 'stay at home' period (21 March to 4 May);
- At the time of the survey

And to compared these to their lives before the pandemic



Results: Nearly all households were negatively impacted by the pandemic

Most respondents said their financial situation during the stay at home period was worse than before the pandemic

- 84% men and 76% women
- a minority – 13% men and 22% women – said their situation had improved

The pandemic increased stress and anxiety for many – with men more likely than women to report this at the time of the survey

General stress & anxiety 70% men, 63% women

Stress about basic needs 62% men, 49% women

Results: Alcohol consumption reduced for most men

Most men (86%) reported less alcohol consumption at the time of the survey, which their partners confirmed (87%).

- Bars closed at the time of the survey, which likely reduced consumption

Yet, nearly 5% of men said their alcohol intake had increased compared to before the pandemic.

Increased frequency of alcohol consumption was associated with 4x higher odds of increase in quarrelling with partner and 2x higher odds of reporting a worsened relationship.

Results: Despite challenges, the pandemic fostered connection for some

During the stay at home period:
More than half said the quality of their relationships **was better**
(53% of men and 59% of women)

Compared to before the pandemic:

About 1 in 2 men and women reported improved communication and reduced quarrelling

Nearly 3 in 4 men and women reported feeling less frustration with their partner and children at the time of survey



Results: Not everyone's relationships fared well at this time

But, risks were present for some couples whose relationships deteriorated during confinement

Those reporting their **relationships worsened**:

- During the stay at home period: 9% men, 19% of women
- At the time of the survey: 12% men, 22% women

About 1 in 4 men and nearly 1 in 3 women reported reduced communication and increased quarrelling

Nearly 1 in 5 men and women reported feeling more frustrated with their partner at the time of survey, compared to before the pandemic

Results: Strong relationships support resilience

Those reporting **better partner relations** at time of survey were more likely to report:

- improved financial situations during confinement ($p < .05$)
- increased couple communication ($p < .01$), which was also associated with improved financial situation

Those who reported **worsened relationships** also reported:

- increased quarrelling, reduced communication, and more frustration with a partner
- Were more likely to report that women took on most of the additional care work

Men who reported **worsened relationship quality** also reported more general anxiety, stress about basic needs, and frustration with children.

Results: Long-term impacts of Bandebereho on relationships

Bandebereho participants *more likely* to report:

Improved relationships during stay at home period

- 62% vs. 49% of non-participants (OR: 1.66; $p < .001$)
- non-participants were up to **2.5 times more likely** to report a worsening of relationships than Bandebereho participants (OR: 2.45; $p < .001$)
 - **Increased couple communication**
 - 56% vs. 42% of non-participants ($p < .001$)

Results: Long-term impacts of Bandebereho on risk factors

Bandebereho participants were *less likely* than non-participants to report:

Increased frustration or anger with their partner

- 14% vs. 23% of non-participants ($p < .05$).
- Women: 14% vs. 26% of non-participants ($p < .05$).

Increased quarreling had increased since the pandemic

- 14% vs. 25% non-participants ($p < .01$)
- Women: 18% vs. 30% of non-participating women ($p < .01$).

Increased alcohol consumption by men

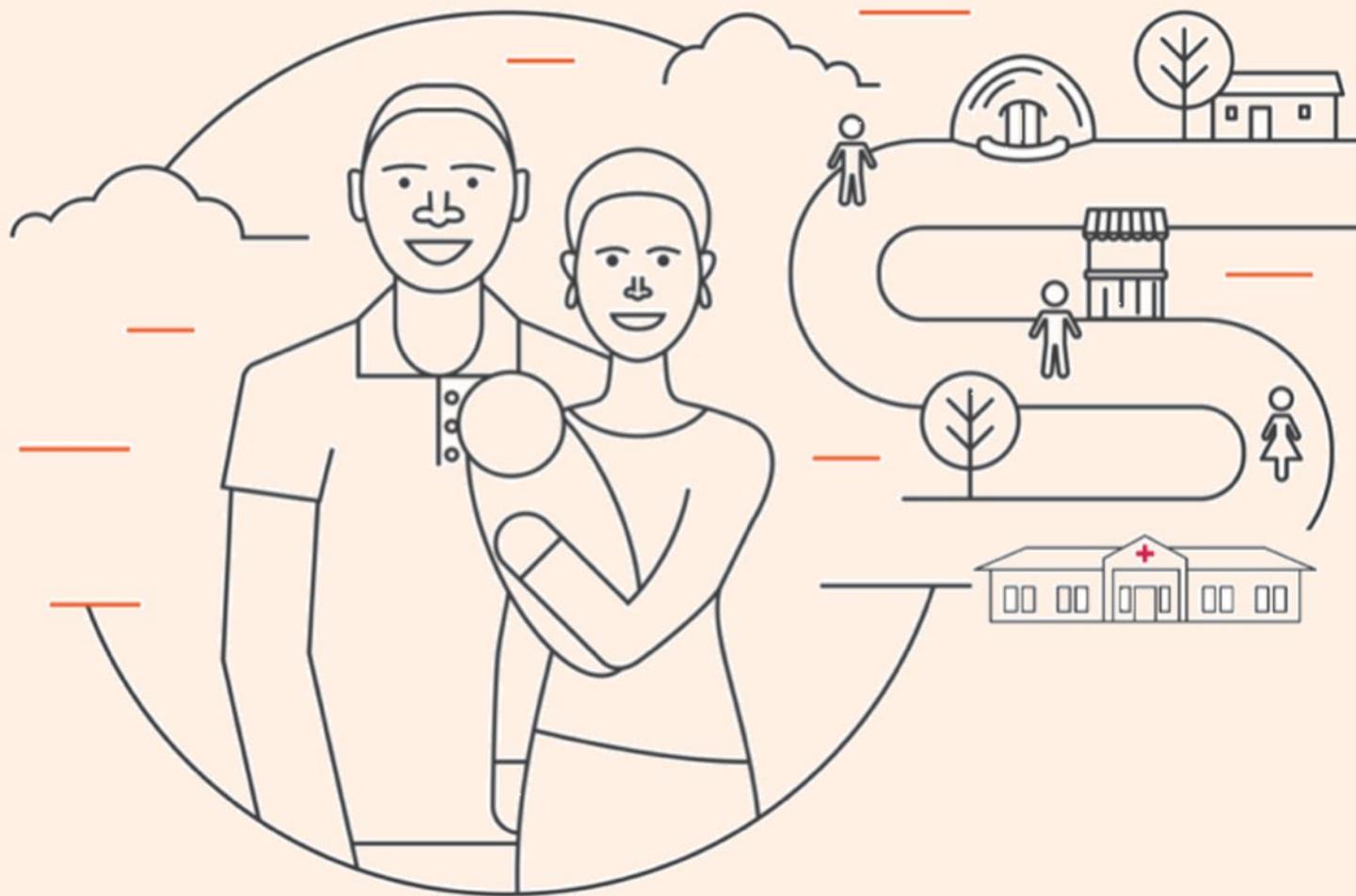
- Men's reports: 6.7% vs. 2.3%, $p = .098$
- Women's reports: 5% vs. 0%, $p < .05$

Results: Overall, the protective effects of the program seem to have lasted through a crisis

Despite similar hardship – increased financial strain, stress, and caregiving demands – Bandebereho couples generally fared better than non-participants

In terms of various known risk factors for IPV and VAC, including—worsening relationship quality, increased quarrelling, increased feelings of anger and frustration, and alcohol use—some of the positive, protective impacts of the Bandebereho program seem to have continued during a period of extreme stress.





Thank you - Murakoze