



# PARENTING FOR RESPECTABILITY

# POLICY BRIEF

## THE ISSUE

Approximately 56% of Uganda's 35 million population is below the age of 18 years, and its vision to become a middle-income country by 2040 depends on these children's ability to contribute to national development, which is highly contingent on safeguarding their wellbeing and rights. However, poor parenting, in particular violence against children (VAC) and other forms of maltreatment and neglect of children undermine their wellbeing and the realization of their full potential. Similarly, VAC

is widespread globally, and in Uganda. Nearly, half of all children – one billion aged 2-17 years<sup>1</sup> – reportedly experienced some form of violence in the preceding year [Hillis, S., J. Mercy, et al., 2016]. The 2015 Uganda national VAC survey showed that 59% of girls and 68% of boys experienced physical violence in childhood, while 35% of girls and 17% of boys experienced sexual violence in childhood<sup>2</sup> [MGLSD, 2017]. In Uganda and Sub-Saharan Africa often, such violence is inflicted by people known to the children in their homes, families and communities<sup>3</sup> [MGLSD, 2017; Ravi, S. and R. Ahluwalia, 2017].

Poor parenting is exacerbated by negative gender norms, limited parenting skills, lack of parental attachment and bonding with children, and the existence of intimate partner violence (IPV) and family conflict. In Uganda IPV prevalence remains extremely high among women, with 36% of women who are partnered experiencing physical violence, and 22% reporting partner sexual violence<sup>4</sup>.

These problems make it urgent and critical to address the modifiable influences affecting children's development and wellbeing, with improving the quality of parenting and family life as a starting point.

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## RATIONALE

IPV and VAC are major contributors to morbidity and mortality. These damage social functionality of victims and families, with lifetime implications for their physical, sexual, reproductive and mental health<sup>5</sup>.

Parenting practices, especially in the early years, are precursors of persistent antisocial behaviour and violence in later life<sup>6</sup>. IPV and VAC are linked and interact at multiple levels. They start in the: (a) family, (b) social norms that normalize violence and discourage children and women from seeking help; (c) same household [(d) transmission across generations; (e) similar consequences across lifespan, and finally, (f) intersect with adolescence. Thus, studies have called for integrated approaches in the prevention of VAC and IPV, although most responses have targeted psychosocial problems, e.g. poverty or alcohol abuse, and inter-partner violence<sup>7</sup>.

## POLICY DIMENSION

All children deserve to grow up in a loving environment in order to realize their full potential as productive citizens at least 07 in 10 children still fall out from the immediate social support networks in Uganda. Hence, childcare and development remain instrumental to the realization of the National Development Plan [NDP-III, 2016-2021] targets in line with Vision 2030. The Parish Development Model also provides an enabling policy environment for harnessing community mobilization, mindset change and family contributions to social development.

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Currently, the Parenting for Respectability (PfR) in Uganda undertaken by Makerere University Child Health and Development Centre provides a systemic home-grown approach for positive parenting and family strengthening. PfR combines implementation research and is generating empirical evidence on reduction of IPV, VAC and GBV at interpersonal, familial and community levels.

The PfR programme aligns with major national, regional and international legal and policy frameworks that underscore health and non-health related child developmental outcomes including: nutrition, social, cognitive and emotional development and positive parenting practices. PfR emphasizes the duality of children's rights and responsibilities as well as the attendant obligations of parents to children and families in the parenting relationship. Most specifically, PfR addresses the: Constitution of Uganda [1995], United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC], African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child [1990. Enforced 1999], Uganda Child Act, Chapter 59 [2016], National Parenting Guidelines [2018], Uganda National Child Policy [2020], the SDGs and Child Well-being, Families, Family Policy and SDGs [2020], INSPIRE [2016], Nurturing Care Framework [2018], Integrated Early Childhood Development Framework [IECDF,2016], and National Male Engagement Policy. These collectively provide strategic policy directions towards evidence-based efforts on parenting. Accordingly, PfR demonstrates the undisputable legality of parental involvement in all areas of child development and upbringing; since the child's stability stems from the love, affection and support of both parents. Thus, PfR offers greater scope for linking policy, research and practice in reference to parenting.

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## THE PARENTING FOR RESPECTABILITY (PfR) PROGRAMME

The PfR is a community-based parenting programme aimed at reducing child maltreatment and preventing GBV by modifying the four familial precursors of violence, namely: poor child attachment and parental bonding; harsh parenting; inequitable gendered socialization and parental conflict.

The content is delivered through 16 weekly sessions, each lasting approximately two hours. The first nine sessions engage single-sex groups only, allowing mothers and fathers to learn separately. The single-sex groups are then merged into two mixed-sex groups for the remaining sessions, to enable parents express, discuss and agree on different gendered and parenting concerns. During recruitment, the programme was presented to men as 'a fathers' programme,' rather than a generic 'parenting programme' to dispel the misconception about it being primarily for mothers<sup>8</sup>.

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**PfR is a home grown evidence based parenting programme that addresses child maltreatment and violence against partners**

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Building on the team's prior knowledge, experience and lessons from other parenting programmes it was resolved that group sessions would likely be more practical and cost-efficient than individual delivery in modifying shared social norms.

## UNIQUENESS OF PfR MODEL

The programme incorporates four generic principles, but within pragmatic limits as outlined below.

### a) Harness existing motivation, specifically to maximize respectability

Interventions are far more likely to be effective if they harness existing motivations<sup>9</sup>, are 'culturally compelling'<sup>10</sup> and sensitive to the experiences of the target groups. A key concern of parents in East Africa, and probably across sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), is the family's respectability (*heshima* in Swahili, *ekitiibwa* in Luganda; and *woro* in Luo), requiring children's good behavior and respect for their parents and other adults<sup>11</sup>. Many parents believe that numerous contemporary influences undermine this, in particular schooling, the media, children's rights and restrictions on corporal punishment. PfR seeks to address these concerns without reinforcing undesirable norms.

### b) Work with participants' existing experience, understanding and skills

The ICDP's approach is to "Start with what they know, build with what they have" [Lao Tsu 700 B.C.], identifying indigenous child-rearing practices



to develop, rather than impose external concepts and restrictions. This is done through facilitative, rather than instructive, guidance, encouraging active involvement and sharing. Such community empowerment develops participants' confidence to change their circumstances through "the problem-posing, problem solving process" [Bitel, 2012:1]. This method was partially incorporated into **PfR** activities, especially on bonding and attachment, with input from a Tanzanian ICDP facilitator. Despite the programme's explicit objectives and use of existing materials from evidence-based programmes, PfR still offers communities space for identifying own solutions through reflective practice.

#### c) Intervene at different levels in the socio-ecological framework

PfR is intended to operate at three different levels: the intrapersonal, through modifying knowledge and attitudes; the interpersonal, in particular targeting couple and family relationships; and the community, by involving formal and informal community leaders, participants' families and neighbours in home practice exercises, and sharing learning through community events, thus influencing changes in community norms. It is anticipated that PfR would be complemented in policy and practice by initiatives by the civil society and state actors.

#### d) Involve communities in identifying and addressing IPV and VAC Risk factors

PfR empowers parents to identify and employ own solutions in addressing IPV and VAC risk factors through home practice exercises.

It recognizes that IPV risk factors occur at multiple socio-ecological levels, including:

- Familial level - having been abused as a child, having an absent or rejecting father, inter-partner conflict, and male control of wealth and decision-making.
- Community level - women's isolation and male peer influences that legitimize men's violence.
- At the macro level - associated socio-cultural norms condoning violence within the family, schools and community, rigid gender roles and linking masculinity to toughness, male honor, dominance and ownership of women, - these thrive on weak policy, legislation and enforcement of laws.

### EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PfR INTERVENTION

The quantitative and qualitative evaluations so far conducted suggests that PfR programme is a feasible and effective way to improve parenting, reduce VAC and IPV and, in the long term, gender-based violence in Uganda. The programme reduces parents' use of harsh parenting by 29%, with more parents committed to adopt positive parenting, and contributes to better spousal relationships as evidenced in the reduction of IPV by 26%. Additionally, PfR contributes evidence on how to practically bring together programming addressing violence against women and violence against children, and the process of its development provides valuable insights to others on steps to follow while developing a strong theoretically oriented and evidence-based home-grown parenting intervention<sup>12</sup>. **A key contribution of PfR programme is that it successfully recruited high numbers of fathers, and parental couples<sup>13</sup>.**



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Going forward both state and non-state actors should recognize the opportunity for coordinated/joint action to close the gap between research, policy and practice on positive parenting already provided by PfR.
- 2) Existing policies already provide scope for mainstreaming positive parenting into major state and civil society interventions on child safeguarding and development. Hence, actors should consider multi-sectoral interventions to reduce duplication of efforts and widen opportunities for community mobilization and participation.
- 3) Evidence has shown that most of the IPV, VAC and harsh parent impact child outcomes in later life, yet most interventions in LMICs hardly employ integrated approaches that go beyond addressing psychosocial problems, e.g. poverty or alcohol abuse, and inter-partner violence. Hence, PfR should be expanded and sustained to enhance family stability through multiple approaches, including poverty reduction.
- 4) Adapt and replicate the PfR approach as a guideline for the implementation of National Family Policy and child related programmes to improve parenting, child care, growth and development countrywide.
- 5) Create national awareness of the PfR approach at district levels.
- 6) Establish a monitoring system for PfR within programmes and plan for its replication or scalability and invest in action research on the PfR approach to further understanding of positive parenting.



## REFERENCES

- 1 Hillis, et al 2016
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- 3 MGLSD 2017 National VAC Study
- 4 UBOS 2018
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