



POLICY BRIEF

Scaling violence prevention in South Africa

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This policy brief shows that interventions can prevent and reduce violence in South Africa. There are however challenges to delivering these programmes at scale. These include limited capacity for implementation, adapting for context, and balancing the need for programmes to be evidence-based while also being responsive to communities' needs. South Africa's policymakers and researchers need to find solutions to these challenges.

Key findings

- ▶ Interventions that prevent violence by addressing risk factors vary in their intended audience, intensity and duration. Of the 44 interventions identified, 75% were intensive programmes, requiring between four and 21 sessions. Interventions lasted between two and 15 months.
- ▶ Programme adaptation was inherent to the development and delivery of programmes. It was undertaken formally and through constant informal ‘bottom-up’ processes that ensured that programmes remained responsive to participants’ needs.
- ▶ Intensive programmes are often only able to reach a small number of participants at a time, while light-touch programmes, such as awareness-raising campaigns, tend to have wider reach.
- ▶ Organisations working to prevent violence often employ community members to deliver their programmes. Some also link programme participants to local employment opportunities. In doing so, they provide accessible, local employment, mostly to women. However, this requires significant investment in staff training, supervision and ongoing psychosocial support.
- ▶ Training and psychosocial support for programme implementers is an important, yet inadequately addressed, aspect of quality programme delivery.
- ▶ Recruiting and retaining programme participants is a challenge, particularly for intensive programmes that require numerous sessions.
- ▶ Many organisations delivering interventions are willing to strengthen their monitoring and evaluation activities. This could increase the available knowledge about programme implementation. However, many lack the technical ability to monitor and evaluate their interventions, and do not have partnerships with researchers who can play that role.

Recommendations

- ▶ The research community should support efforts to evaluate interventions that lack evidence of impact or effect, and should partner with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to do so.
- ▶ National, provincial and local government departments that are custodians of violence prevention policies (such as the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Department of Social Development, and Department of Basic Education) need to develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks that enable flexibility and avoid restrictive performance targets particularly when funding NGO programmes.
- ▶ The Department of Women, Youth and People with Disabilities should undertake a national baseline mapping of community-based interventions to determine existing capacity to implement the Comprehensive National Prevention Strategy of the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide. This would inform an assessment of the available resources and what is needed to sustain programmes and interventions to prevent violence.

Introduction

While efforts to prevent violence hinge on work done by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in communities, there is a gap in understanding what form this takes; how many people are reached; and how interventions are designed, delivered, monitored and evaluated. It is also not known whether or what kind of partnerships and referral pathways exist between these organisations and other necessary support services such as mental health services and support to survivors of violence.

Most published work tends to focus on demonstrating evidence of effect rather than on what it takes to implement the programmes and deliver services. Yet this knowledge is critical if South Africa is to implement violence prevention interventions at scale. This policy brief contributes to filling this gap.

What we did

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and the Western Cape Government (WCG) collaborated to draft this policy brief that presents the methodology and lessons learnt from two mapping projects.

The policy brief draws from three data sources:

- The ISS evidence map of interventions to prevent violence against women and children in South Africa¹
- The ISS review of the evidence in the map²
- The WCG's research on NGOs delivering parenting programmes

Note about terminology

In this policy brief, the term 'intervention' is used broadly to refer to any action that tangibly intervenes in social systems. Interventions can be applied at any level (e.g. societal, household or individual) and can be targeted or universal. Interventions can be programmes, policies or services.

For this policy brief we reanalysed articles and reports referenced in the evidence map for implementation-related data. We identified 44 interventions, ranging

from legislation and policies to programmes. Of the 44 identified, 23 were programmes implemented by NGOs.

The implementing organisations were identified and asked to participate in an interview. Interviews focused on the context and nature of the intervention or programme, financial costs and other resources required for implementation, and policy relevance. The interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams. Out of a possible 23 interviews, only five were conducted. There were three reasons for this:

- Some of the programmes identified in the evidence review were no longer being implemented.
- Others had simply been tested by researchers and there were no NGO implementing partners.
- NGOs did not respond to our request.

Knowledge on how to implement violence prevention programmes is critical for taking interventions to scale

In addition, the WCG gathered data from NGOs in the province through an online survey and interviews.³

This mapping focused on how NGOs delivered parenting programmes, designed and prepared for their programmes, and how programme delivery was monitored and evaluated. This exercise also sought to understand which other family support services were needed to complement parenting programmes and ensure that families were holistically supported in their parenting journey.

NGOs that participated either received funding from the provincial Department of Social Development or the Department of Health, or were identified by other implementers. The survey was sent to 54 NGOs, of which 20 completed the questionnaire (37% response rate). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 organisations.

What is violence prevention?

Violence prevention is a widely used term with no universally accepted definition.

The World Health Organization (WHO) describes violence prevention as the reduction in the frequency of new

cases of violent victimisation or perpetration through direct efforts to remove or reduce the underlying causes and risk factors. This may be done by harnessing the indirect effects of policies and programmes that may reduce exposure to underlying causes and risks.⁴

In 2021 the Violence Prevention Forum (VPF)⁵ undertook a broad consultation to define violence prevention in South Africa. The VPF defined violence prevention as ‘the whole of society working deliberately and sustainably to remove sources of harm and inequality, and heal woundedness, by intentionally growing an ethic of mutual care, respect and inclusion to build peace.’⁶

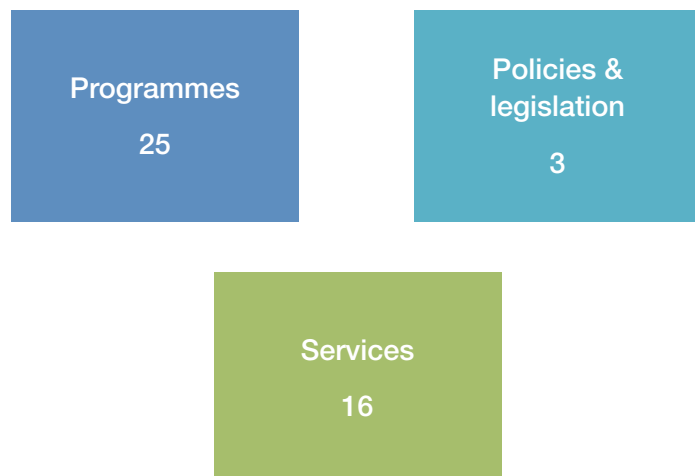
Both the WHO and VPF definitions identify that violence is prevented through interventions that address the underlying factors that support cycles of violence. For example, parenting programmes that seek to improve the quality of caregiver-child relationships increase the chance that children will be protected from experiencing neglect or violence.

What we found about interventions

Nature of interventions

The evidence review identified 44 distinct interventions. Of these, 25 were distinct programmes; three were policies or laws; 16 were services such as post-rape counselling services. Six of the 12 services were interventions provided by government institutions that provide services or a package of services, such as the Thuthuzela Care Centres.

Chart 1: Intervention breakdown



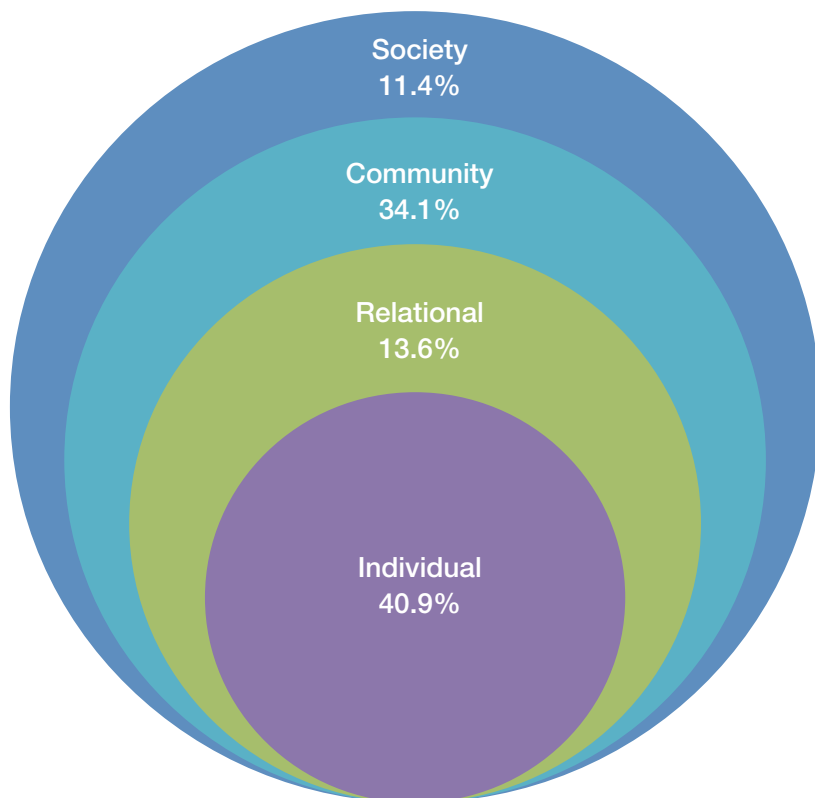
44

VIOLENCE PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS WERE IDENTIFIED FOR THE STUDY

Parenting programmes surveyed as part of the WCG study aimed to support primary caregivers to strengthen the family and build the ability to deal with adversity. These programmes were delivered at four stages of a child's life: infants to toddlers, young children and teenagers.

We mapped interventions on the ecological model, and just over half (54.5%) of the interventions addressed individual and relational risk factors for violence.

Chart 2: Interventions on ecological model



Most interventions (75%) identified in the evidence review, and all the interventions in the WCG study, could be categorised as intensive. Intensive interventions involve multiple interactions or sessions with the same participants over a period of time. These ranged from two to 15 months in duration, with between four and 21 sessions per week or biweekly. Some organisations condensed their programmes into one or two weekends to increase retention. However, condensing sessions has been flagged by evidence-based parenting practitioners as likely to reduce programme impact.⁷

Intensive programmes tended to target few participants per delivery cycle. For example, some programmes targeted around 15 participants at one time/delivery cycle. Less intensive programmes had a wider reach, some targeting over 2 000 participants per delivery cycle.

Measuring the reach of interventions was challenging. First, this information was mostly not included in published papers. When it was reported, the information given tended to be about how many people the programme reached during the research period, and not how many people the NGO could reach annually. Second, many organisations did not have good

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OF INTERVENTIONS
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monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems to keep information about reach. Therefore, the data presented here is indicative rather than definitive.

Responsiveness to context

Adapting an intervention to context and maintaining the integrity in the design of the intervention (i.e. fidelity) is crucial for delivering violence prevention at scale. To do that organisations need to understand the drivers of violence in the community, including economic conditions, levels of substance use, exposure to trauma, education levels, family/household structure, government services availability, among others.

Organisations spoke of different ways in which programmes were adapted. In some instances organisations worked with researchers to adapt interventions that were informed by evidence from the global north to the South African context. Other interventions were adapted to suit a particular local context, having been previously implemented in another community or area. Less formal forms of adaptation occurred when organisations responded to local needs as they delivered an intervention.

To adapt interventions, organisations must understand the factors driving violence, such as economic conditions, substance abuse and trauma

Experiential adaptation is inherent to developing and delivering a programme. Ongoing programme adaptation is usually through a constant, informal, ‘bottom-up’ process. This type of adaptation responds to local community needs and may be important in order to build trust in the organisation and the programme and, consequently, to attract participants. For example, an NGO might add a bullying component to a parenting programme following an incident at the local school.

For organisations implementing researcher-designed programmes, such as the four Parenting for Lifelong Health programmes,⁸ only a minority purposefully ensure fidelity in implementing the programmes. There was a tension between fidelity (whether the programme is implemented as designed) and NGOs’ need to respond to local needs, especially when organisations were implementing ‘standardised’ parenting programmes where modules and content were already developed that may not entirely respond to the local context.

Understanding what is ‘core’ to a programme’s transformative ability and what can be adapted without reducing effectiveness is key to addressing this challenge. However, the research is unlikely to be able to keep pace with the demand for programmes. This means that policymakers, donors and implementers will need to agree on changes to evidence-based programmes that can be applied when scaling up, without compromising the quality of a programme or the experience of participants.



AN EXAMPLE OF ADAPTATION IS ADDING A BULLYING COMPONENT TO A PARENTING PROGRAMME AFTER AN INCIDENT

Staff recruitment and training

There is recognition from organisations, albeit to varying degrees, about the need to work with community members and use existing community resources during implementation.

Organisations regularly employ community members to deliver the programme to participants. Often referred to as ‘change agents’ or ‘community action team members’, these individuals generate interest in the intervention, recruit participants and deliver the programme. Participatory methods such as these facilitate the co-creation and co-ownership of the intervention with communities.

Staff values and practices can conflict with the aims and objectives of a parenting programme, affecting the quality of the programme

In order to use community members in the delivery of interventions, organisations have to invest in staff training and support. Where this information was reported in the evidence review, there were indications that organisations provided different types of capacity-building activities to staff. Most staff delivering violence prevention programmes do not have formal training in delivering a specific programme, or in group facilitation. Most training is done in-house, or where the programme is implemented as part of the research process, the training is provided by a research organisation that the NGO has partnered with.

The WCG analysis found no standardised operating procedures exist on the training content for parenting programmes. However, this is not necessarily a problem. Flexible operating procedures that allow implementers to be responsive to context may be preferable to rigid training that locks organisations in practices that might not fit their context. However, good-quality training is necessary, and ensuring that those delivering parenting programmes share the values and beliefs promoted through the parenting programme is also key.

Some organisations seek to provide regular feedback to staff on their performance (supervision) to improve the quality of their programmes. A minority of organisations delivering parenting programmes assess whether their staff have a special interest in positive parenting and non-violent discipline. However, this is important as staff values and practices can conflict with the aims and objectives of a parenting programme and therefore affect the quality of the programme.

Supervision, mentoring and psycho-social support for staff are an important part of delivering effective violence prevention interventions. This is because programme implementers are often confronted with high levels of trauma from participants, which they need support debriefing. Some organisations



SUPERVISION, MENTORING
AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL
SUPPORT FOR STAFF
ARE IMPORTANT

indicated that they had weekly check-in meetings between facilitators and managers. Others had peer support groups that allowed facilitators to debrief on the previous sessions. Organisations also reported providing psychosocial support on a referral and ad hoc basis.

Both the WCG and ISS studies found that supervision, mentoring and psychosocial support to staff were largely ad hoc and reactive, which can compromise the quality and continuity/sustainability of care and services.

All primary caregivers might need support at some point, and programmes are not intended only for those struggling with caring for their children

Recruitment and retention

Recruiting programme participants is a challenge, particularly for intensive programmes that require numerous interfaces with participants.

For parenting programmes, the WCG analysis found that stigma remained a significant barrier in recruiting participants as these kinds of programmes were perceived to be only for ‘bad parents’ or for those with ‘misbehaving children’. However, all primary caregivers might need support at some point in their parenting journey, and parenting programmes are not intended only for those struggling with caring for their children.

The studies also found that all organisations had difficulty recruiting fathers and male caregivers into parenting programmes. A gendered view of parenting is prevalent in many communities where parenting is viewed as largely the role of women. Yet it is possible that fathers’ involvement in parenting programmes might increase their confidence and involvement in parenting the children under their care.

Several programmes reflected in the evidence review experienced attrition as participants dropped out of activities. The same was found in the WCG analysis. Retaining parents for the full duration of a parenting programme, which can span between one long weekend to weekly sessions for six to 12 weeks, is a challenge. A major contribution to attrition from parenting programmes was that parents who were unemployed found jobs or had to spend time looking for jobs and responding to opportunities.

People participate in activities if there are adequate incentives. These could be intrinsic (e.g., they find the intervention useful, and it is something they want). Attrition can also be related to the programme delivery itself (e.g., the time of day when the activities are carried out, the location of the activities and how accessible it is).⁹ Or it can be a consequence of pressures participants experience where they face competing priorities.

NGOs interviewed said various tools helped with retention. These included outlining expectations from the first session, providing food, transport and child-minding, anchoring the sessions to other services (after-school



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programmes, early childhood development centres, etc.) or after church services, providing regular praise and feedback and issuing certificates at the end. Therefore, careful planning and understanding of potential participants are needed to inform programme delivery and implementation to ensure participant retention.

Referrals

Families attending programmes usually face several common stressors. These include hunger, domestic violence, mental health challenges, substance misuse, unemployment, and a lack of access to basic government services (grants, ID books etc.).

In most cases it is not possible for one organisation to respond to all the needs of a community. Organisations seek to have an extensive referral and support network in and around their community to address these common stressors. This network comprises other NGOs, churches, early childhood development centres and schools, and government (such as the South African Social Security Agency for grants, and Home Affairs for birth certificates or IDs). These networks need to be built and maintained at a local level, and this requires dedicated time and resources.

Emerging lessons

There is a foundation for preventing violence against women and children at scale in South Africa. This policy brief focused only on organisations where programmes had been formally evaluated and those providing parenting programmes in the Western Cape. This excludes a lot of interventions and organisations and is a limitation in terms of the scope of our analysis.

The interventions and organisations are impacting communities positively, despite their limited resources and constrained conditions

In this limited analysis, 44 distinct interventions that reduce risk factors of violence and the 54 organisations implementing these interventions were identified. There is evidence that these interventions and organisations are largely having a positive impact in the communities they serve, despite the limited resources and constrained conditions in which they operate.

We conclude the policy brief with some reflections on policy and research.

Scaling violence prevention

The adoption of national and provincial policies and strategies such as the National Strategic Plan for Gender-Based Violence and Femicide¹⁰ or the White Paper on Safety and Security,¹¹ that have centred violence prevention, is a move in the right direction. However, evidence shows that scaling up needs careful planning and adequate budgeting. Knowing which programmes show promise in some communities is the first step. Programmes cannot



simply be taken from one community to another or even expanded to increase their reach in the current location without some adaptation.

As the government seeks ways to scale interventions in line with recent policies, consideration needs to be given to issues such as:

- How to enable programme adaptation to ensure responsiveness to context and needs of participants
- Recruitment and training and developing career paths for programme facilitators (implementers)
- Supervision, psychosocial support and management of staff to avoid vicarious trauma
- The ability of organisations to manage the expansions while maintaining quality of services
- Ensuring there is sufficient capacity for implementation monitoring
- How to ensure that NGOs have sufficient funding to deliver programmes

As the government seeks ways to scale interventions, consideration needs to be given to programme design, context and implementation

Research

Researchers have been pivotal in the design of many programmes that were identified in both studies. They remain important during programme implementation to generate evidence of effect and lessons for adaptation and improvement. However there is an apparent tension between researchers' desire for fidelity (to enhance rigour in measurement) and implementers' need for flexibility and bottom-up adaptation.

Evaluation methods and approaches that are designed to account for results in complex interventions, such as outcome harvesting, process tracing, and realist evaluations,¹² could be used to measure the performance of interventions in ways that recognise them as adaptive systems with porous boundaries. Researchers testing interventions need to also consider post-trial implementation. We found a few interventions that were tested with no NGO partner to take the intervention forward after the research trial period.

M&E and learning

Organisations are often willing to strengthen their M&E processes and move from compliance to a more qualitative M&E process. However they usually lack the technical skills and knowledge to do so, and do not have partnerships with researchers who could play that role.

There is a need to provide support and training on the components, purpose, and value of evidence-informed and evidence-based programme implementation. The Western Cape principles and values for evidence-



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informed parenting programmes, developed through a bottom-up process, might be a useful model that could be explored further. There is also a need to share the rich, experiential knowledge collected by implementers and contribute to a shared learning platform on violence prevention. Experiential knowledge, process evaluations and outcome evaluations could all contribute to M&E and programme adaptation, which would strengthen the programmes delivered.

Evidence shows that parenting programmes help prevent violence, and caregivers' attendance should be a priority

Conclusion

Researchers can contribute to growing the evidence base of what works to prevent violence against women and children in South Africa. Particularly, we need to know more about community-based interventions that have not been evaluated. In testing interventions, researchers should ideally partner with NGOs and build their capacity to implement the intervention after the trial period.

The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, in implementing the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide and the Comprehensive National Prevention Strategy, should develop M&E frameworks that allow for flexibility and change. This could include developing a framework with a limited number of outcome indicators that allow the tracking of performance outside of the Annual Performance Plan of the national department.

There is strong evidence that parenting programmes contribute to preventing violence. The link between parenting programmes and violence prevention can create the impression that only 'bad parents' need parenting support. However, all primary caregivers might need support at some point in their parenting journey. Normalising the attendance of parenting programmes should be a priority.

To understand the capacity of communities to drive the implementation of the prevention strategy, the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities should fund a national baseline study to map

out interventions being implemented across the country. Mapping existing violence prevention interventions provides insight into what is taking place in communities. In doing so, it can facilitate improved resource allocation.

Notes

- 1 M Amisi et al., Evidence Map: South African interventions to prevent violence against women and children, <https://issafrica.org/crimehub/analysis/research/evidence-map-south-african-interventions-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-children>, 2019.
- 2 M Amisi and S Naicker, An evidence review of violence prevention in South Africa, ISS Policy Brief 162, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/policybrief162.pdf>, 2021.
- 3 The research tools were developed in partnership with researchers and implementers of evidence-informed parenting programmes. The interviews were conducted in partnership with the South African Research Chair in the Development of Human Capabilities and Social Cohesion through the Family at the University of the Western Cape, which is supporting this process.
- 4 The World Health Organisation, Preventing violence and reducing its Impact: How development agencies can help, https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/43876/9789241596589_eng.pdf, 2008
- 5 The Violence Prevention Forum website provides more information about this platform: www.violence-prevention.org/.
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- 9 M Amisi and S Naicker, Preventing violence against women and children An evidence review, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361670571_Preventing_violence_against_women_and_children_An_evidence_review, 2021
- 10 Republic of South Africa, National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide 2020-2030, 2020.
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