

Modern Man Challenge: Evaluating a Men-Focused Intervention to Prevent Intimate Partner Violence in Liberia



Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a widespread global problem, but little is known about how to reduce it in low-income countries, especially with programs that focus on men. Researchers worked with IPA, the Airbel Center at the International Rescue Committee, and the Behavioral Insights Team to design a text message-based behavioral intervention, the Modern Man Challenge, that aims to reduce IPV by promoting behavior change among men. The research team is now conducting a small exploratory clustered-randomized evaluation in Monrovia, Liberia to explore potential impact avenues of Modern Man Challenge on IPV.

Policy Issue

Intimate partner violence is a widespread global problem, but little rigorous evidence exists about interventions to address it in low-income countries. Where evidence does exist, the causal factors underlying IPV are not well-understood, and most programs found to be effective have focused on helping women cope with violence rather than focusing on changing behavior by men themselves. Men between the ages of 18 and 45 perpetrate IPV at comparatively high rates, and programs that aim to shift how these men view their roles in relationships may be effective at reducing such violence. Evidence from behavioral science suggests that a promising strategy to shift these views and change men's behavior is to appeal to men's existing aspirations related to their masculine identities and provide concrete actions they can take in their relationships to achieve those goals.

In sub-Saharan African countries such as Liberia, a communications boom has expanded the number of people with access to mobile phones in recent years. This poses a new opportunity to provide behavioral interventions that aim to reduce IPV to more people at lower cost than would have previously been possible.

Evaluation Context

Intimate partner violence is common in Liberia: a demographic and health survey in 2007 found that 45 percent of women aged 15-49 had experienced IPV, with 29 percent reporting experiencing it in the last 12 months.¹ In addition to physical violence, large proportions of women reported being subject to controlling behaviors by their husbands or partners, such as accusations of unfaithfulness or being



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COUNTRY

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PROGRAM AREA

Health

TOPICS

Information & Communications Technology (ICT), Intimate Partner Violence, Violence

TIMELINE

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prevented from meeting with female friends.²

The Modern Man Challenge intervention was designed by the Airbel Center at the International Rescue Committee and the Behavioral Insights Team with assistance from a research team from IPA. The program uses interactive text messages to provide guidance for men about shared household management, sex-positive communication skills, joint financial planning, and emotional regulation skills in order to promote gender-equitable, violence-free relationships. The team used human-centered design principles to prototype and pilot the program in Liberia and Uganda before beginning this randomized evaluation. (A series of blog posts detailing this process is available below.)

Details of the Intervention

Researchers are now working with IPA, the Airbel Center, and Behavioral Insights Team to conduct a full randomized evaluation of the Modern Man Challenge's impact on intimate partner violence in Monrovia, Liberia.

A community-wide baseline was conducted in the 16 community clusters in early 2018 and all men between the ages of 18 and 45 were invited to attend a recruitment event. The 16 clusters communities were divided into two groups, after which the research team determined which men in each group were eligible and asked them to consent to participating in the project. The resulting groups were as follows:

- **Modern Man Challenge (342 men in eight communities):** At the recruitment events in these communities, a speaker gave a brief introduction, after which participants completed a 10-question quiz comprised of true/false questions about gender roles and expectations in intimate relationships. After the men completed the quiz, they were guided by a member of the research team in a discussion about the answers, and invited to join the Modern Man Challenge text message activity.
- **No Modern Man Challenge (251 men in eight communities):** At the events in these communities, participants received a "Strong Man" quiz and presentation about men's health. The format was the same as the Modern Man Challenge recruitment events, but the content was different.

The program was then delivered via text message for a six-and-a half week span in November and December 2018.

Following the program delivery, the research team conducted both quantitative and qualitative surveys with participants. The concluding survey with participating men and their primary women partners was conducted in June and July in 2019. The research team also surveyed 75 additional men and their primary women partners in each community to measure effects of the program on people who did not receive it directly, and to understand how and the extent to which men who choose to participate in the program may differ from those who do not. This survey will enable researchers to understand the impacts of the Modern Man Challenge on rates of intimate partner violence and controlling behavior in relationships.

Results and Policy Lessons

Analysis ongoing; results forthcoming.

The project team has published a series of blog posts detailing the human-centered design process:

- ["Modern Men" — Harnessing the Telecommunication Boom to Reduce Intimate Partner Violence](#)
- [The Road to Testing Innovations in Behavior Change and Gender Norms: How Can We Leverage Mobile Phone Technology to Reach and Engage Men to Reduce Violence Against Women?](#)
- [The Road to Testing Innovations in Behavior Change and Gender Norms: Beginning a Rigorous Trial of the Modern Man Challenge](#)

Sources

[1] Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) [Liberia], Ministry of Health and Social Welfare [Liberia], National AIDS Control Program [Liberia], and Macro International Inc. 2008. Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2007. Monrovia, Liberia: Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) and Macro International Inc. Page 227.

[2] Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2007, Page 232.