



# Building Support for Gender Equality among Young Adolescents in School: Findings from Mumbai, India

There is increasing recognition that to reduce gender inequality – a goal fundamental to improving a country's overall health and development – programs must start with youth. Yet there has been limited engagement of both girls and boys during early adolescence to challenge and shift gender norms that contribute to girls and women having less worth, opportunities and decision-making ability than boys and men. Such inequitable gender norms can have a host of harmful consequences for girls and boys during childhood and beyond, including poor sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes, violence and school drop out.

In the last few years a growing body of evidence has emerged in numerous settings, including India, linking individual attitudes around gender to SRH behaviors and the use and experience of violence (Barker, et al., 2007; Barker, et al., 2011; Haberland & Rogow, 2007; Karim, et al., 2003; Pulerwitz, et al., 2006; Verma, et al., 2008). Because gender socialization of both boys and girls begins early in India, it is important to initiate change processes at a young age to shape attitudes and transform behaviors.

In response, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), in partnership with the Committee of Resource Organizations for Literacy (CORO) and the Tata Institute for Social Sciences (TISS), developed a school-based program entitled “Gender Equity Movement in Schools,” or GEMS, for students in Grades VI and VII. GEMS promotes gender equality by encouraging equal relationships between girls and boys, examining the social norms that define men’s and women’s roles, and questioning the use of violence.

This report summarizes the key findings from the first phase of the program, which was implemented in Mumbai public schools across two academic years (2008-09 and 2009-10), reaching more than 8000 girls and boys ages 12-14. In the second phase currently underway, GEMS is being scaled up to over 250 schools in Mumbai.

## Why a School-based Program to Promote Gender Equality?

The public education system is uniquely placed to influence and shape children’s thinking and understanding of gender stereotypes and roles as well as around violence. The United Nations Secretary-General’s Report on Violence against Children (2006) notes that “children spend more time in the care of adults in places of learning than they do anywhere else outside of their homes.” The report also emphasizes the role that education can play in “encouraging children to learn self-respect, respect for others and how to express their feelings and negotiate for what they want without resorting to violence.” Despite high level acknowledgment of schools’ potential to shape norms and behaviors, educational institutions more often than not reinforce gender stereotypes and do little to change patterns of violence. The GEMS program offers a game-changing model for schools in the fight against gender inequality and violence.

**Figure 1 - GEMS Project Design**

	<b>Grades</b>	<b>Year 1 (2008-09)</b>			<b>Year 2 (2009-10)</b>	
		<b>Baseline survey sample</b>	<b>Intervention 1<sup>st</sup> round total participants</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Follow-up survey sample</b>	<b>Intervention 2<sup>nd</sup> round total participants</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Follow-up survey sample</b>
GEA+ Campaign (15 schools)	Grade VI	G-448 B-465	GEA-2300 Campaign ~4500	G-378 B-292	GEA-1200 Campaign ~4500 ^	G-151 B-101
	Grade VII					
Only Campaign (15 schools)	Grade VI	G-437 B-450	Campaign ~3500	G- 298 B-271	Campaign ~3500 ^	G-124 B-93
	Grade VII					
Control (15 schools)	Grade VI	G-579 B-517		G- 424 B-372		G-151 B-134
	Grade VII					

^ Campaign was open to all students in grades V, VI & VII in both intervention rounds

G = girls, B = boys

## Methods

The study used a quasi-experimental design to assess the outcomes of the program on the students (see Figure 1). It was carried out in a randomly selected sample of 45 Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) schools.<sup>1</sup> The schools were randomly and equally distributed across three arms – two intervention arms and one control arm.

During the 2008-09 academic year, students in Grades VI and VII in one of the intervention arms participated in group education activities (GEA) and a school-based campaign. In the other intervention arm, students were only exposed to the campaign. There was no intervention in the control schools. A total of 2035 students (1100 girls and 935 boys) across the three arms completed a self-administered survey before the intervention as well as a second survey at the end of the intervention period six months later (1<sup>st</sup> follow up). The students and their parents provided consent prior to enrollment of the students in the study.

In the next academic year (2009-10), the students in Grades VI had graduated to Grade VII (the previous Grade VII students had moved on to different schools). The students now in Grade VII in the GEA+campaign arm participated in an enhanced intervention. In the

other intervention arm, a second round of the campaign was mounted. Again there was no intervention in the control schools. A total of 754 students in Grade VII (426 girls and 328 boys) across the three arms completed a third survey (similar to the other two) after a seven-month intervention period (2<sup>nd</sup> follow up). All of the surveys covered three broad areas: gender roles, violence and SRH. In addition, a small sample of students participated in in-depth interviews to better understand the nature of the changes they experienced and their views about GEMS.

To analyze the outcome data from the surveys, the research team used a difference-in-differences approach<sup>2</sup> and multivariate analyses. These analytical methods enabled the team to answer the following questions:

- What effects did each intervention (GEA+campaign and campaign only) have on the students during the first academic year compared to the control group?
- Was one intervention more effective than the other?
- Did the students who participated in the intervention over two academic years sustain or improve upon any positive outcomes realized after only one academic year?

<sup>1</sup> The schools were located in M-East, M-West, R-North, R-Central and R-South wards, field areas of the implementing partners, CORO and TISS.

<sup>2</sup> This method compares the difference in outcomes in the different arms before and after the interventions. It accounts for external factors that may have influenced study outcomes in all arms over time as well as any pre-existing differences between the different arms at baseline.

## GEMS Project

GEMS builds on successful efforts in India to foster more gender equitable attitudes and behaviors among youth, such as *Yari Dosti* for young men and *Sakhi-Saheli* for young women. The main components of GEMS and its predecessors are GEA and a campaign. The GEA use participatory methodologies such as role plays, games, debates and discussions to engage students in meaningful and relevant interactions and reflection about key issues. In the case of GEMS, the GEA were conducted by trained facilitators from CORO and TISS and held during the regular school day. Each

session lasted about 45 minutes. The first year covered three themes: gender, the body and violence. The sessions in year 2 focused on deepening students' understanding of gender and building skills to respond positively to discrimination and violence (see Table 1 for a list of the GEA sessions for each academic year).

The GEMS school campaign was a week-long series of events designed in consultation with the students and involved games, competitions, debates and short plays. Both the GEA and the campaign were developed based on findings from formative research.

**Table 1: Group Education Activities Conducted in Academic Years 1 and 2**

Academic Year 1: Activities conducted over a 6-month period (Oct. 2008-March 2009) <sup>3</sup>	Academic Year 2: Activities conducted over a 7-month period (Aug 2009-Feb 2010)
Students in Grades VI and VII	Students in Grade VII only (in Grade VI during academic year 1)
<p>Introduction &amp; ground rules</p> <p><b>Gender</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is gender?</li> <li>2. Division of work</li> </ul> <p><b>Body</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Body and hygiene</li> <li>4. Changing body and changing mind</li> <li>5. Respecting one's own and others' bodies</li> </ul> <p><b>Violence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. What is violence?</li> <li>7. Is it violence?</li> <li>8. Cycle of violence</li> <li>9. From violence to understanding</li> <li>10. Labeling violence</li> </ul>	<p>Introduction &amp; ground rules</p> <p><b>Gender</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gender recap</li> <li>2. Privileges and restrictions</li> <li>3. Gender and power</li> <li>4. GEMS Diary<sup>4</sup></li> </ul> <p><b>Relationships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. What is a relationship?</li> <li>6. Expectations and responsibilities in a relationship</li> <li>7. Conflict resolution</li> <li>8. GEMS Diary</li> </ul> <p><b>Emotions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. What is emotion?</li> <li>10. Expressing emotions</li> </ul> <p><b>Violence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. What is violence?</li> <li>12. Communication around violence</li> <li>13. Assertive communication</li> <li>14. Collective response to violence</li> <li>15. GEMS Diary</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> In year 1, sessions were conducted separately for girls and boys, keeping in mind their relative ease and comfort in discussing these issues. The second year sessions were conducted in mixed groups in response to requests from the students.

<sup>4</sup> The GEMS diary is a workbook with games, comic strips, stories, information and space for students to express their reflections on gender roles, relationships and violence. The content of the diary draws from the first year's implementation experience.

## A Group Education Session on Labeling

There were about 40 boys in the classroom, who at the beginning were noisy and restless. The facilitator announced that the topic for the day was 'Labeling.' He asked the boys if they were familiar with *nava thevna*, the Marathi word for labeling and to write a label they knew of or use on the board. Gasps of surprise and peals of laughter followed the writing of each word. Slowly the board filled up. There was a variety of responses, including those that focused on physical appearance, such as *sukdi* (malnourished) and *takli* (a girl who is bald) and those with sexual innuendos like *pataka* (fire cracker), *raand* (a woman who is having sex with many men), *gulballi* (girl with whims and attitude) and *bayalya* (a feminine boy).

The facilitator then asked the boys to close their eyes and imagine for a moment that one of these terms was being shouted at them. They were then asked how they felt being at the receiving end. The responses that came out included: "bad," "like hitting someone," "very angry," "felt hurt" and "wanting to ask 'what did I do wrong?'" The facilitator next said that many of the labels were directed toward girls. The boys agreed that this was definitely so and that girls were more on the receiving end when teasing occurred.

The facilitator asked the children if the labels felt so bad, was there a way to deal with them and stop the labels. Some boys said that while one felt bad being on the receiving end of the label, it felt good when one lashes out at another by speaking in these derogatory terms. The facilitator elaborated that one word can hurt so much and we indulge in many such words all the time. It was time to rethink what we do and why we do it.

The discussion then was guided toward what can be done to curb this labeling which creates more harm than good. Some suggestions were to speak to a teacher, parent or elder and report it to the police. The last question asked was "Is labeling a form of violence?" The entire classroom fell silent. After a while the hands started rising slowly. Most of the class concurred that it was, indeed, violence.

Source: Observer's notes of a GEMS classroom session

## Measuring Gender Attitudes

The research team developed a scale for measuring students' attitudes toward gender equality. On the questionnaire the students indicated whether they agreed, disagreed or were not sure about 15 statements that clustered around three themes (see box). Those who agreed with a statement, indicating support for gender inequality, received a score of 0. Those who were not sure, received a score of 1 and those who disagreed, received a score of 2, indicating support for gender equality. Total scores ranged from a low of 0 (highly gender inequitable) to a high of 30 (highly gender equitable). The students were categorized into three categories for further analysis: 1) those with low equality scores of 0-10, 2) moderate equality scores of 11-20, and 3) high equality scores of 21 to 30.

### Gender Equitable Measurement (GEM) Scale - Items

#### Role/Privileges/Restrictions

1. Only men should work outside the home.
2. Giving the kids a bath and feeding the kids are the mother's responsibility.
3. A wife should always obey her husband.
4. Men need more care as they work harder than women.
5. Since girls have to get married, they should not be sent for higher education.
6. It is necessary to give dowry.

#### Attributes

7. Girls cannot do well in math and science.
8. Boys are naturally better at math and science than girls.
9. Boys are naturally better than girls in sports.

#### Violence

10. It is a girl's fault if a male student or teacher sexually harasses her.
11. There are times when a boy needs to beat his girlfriend.
12. A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together.
13. There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten.
14. Girls like to be teased by boys.
15. Girls provoke boys with short dresses.

## Key Findings

**While more girls than boys had high gender equality scores at baseline, only a minority of students overall were highly gender equitable.**

Before the intervention, only 10 percent of the boys had high gender equality scores while 72 percent had moderate gender equality scores. Though the pattern was similar among girls, a greater proportion had high gender equality scores at baseline (24%) compared to the boys.

**Violence is an integral part of the lives of young adolescents at school, particularly boys.**

In the baseline survey, students were asked about their experiences of physical and emotional violence at school (both as victims and perpetrators). Physical violence consisted of being beaten, slapped, kicked, pushed, hit with an object, or threatened with a weapon. Emotional violence included being insulted, shouted at, derided via abusive language (*gali*), and locked in a room or toilet.

Two-thirds of boys said they experienced at least one form of violence in the last three months at school. Physical violence and emotional violence were common, affecting 61% and 49% of boys, respectively. Although fewer girls than boys reported experiencing

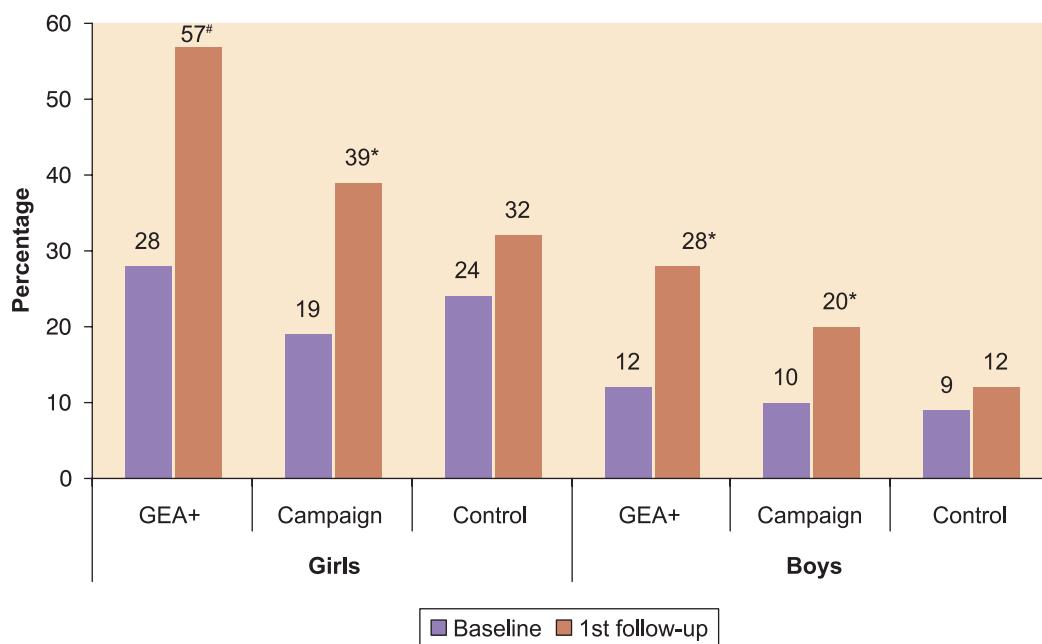
any form of violence (42%), the rates for physical and emotional violence were still of concern (38% and 26%, respectively). For boys the main perpetrators were male classmates followed by older boys, male teachers and female classmates. For girls the most common perpetrators were female classmates, male and female teachers and male classmates. While students – both boys and girls – also reported being perpetrators of violence at school, the figures were somewhat lower than what they reported as victims.

**After the first round of the intervention, there was a positive shift in students' attitudes toward gender equality.**

At the 1<sup>st</sup> follow up there was a significant increase in the proportion of boys and girls with high gender equality scores in the two intervention arms compared to the control arm. As shown in Figure 2, the proportion of both boys and girls in the high gender equality category more than doubled in both intervention arms. There was some reported increase in the control arm but, unlike the intervention arms, this change was significantly lower. For girls, the GEA+ intervention was more effective than the campaign alone.

**Boys and girls demonstrated the greatest improvements in the gender roles/privileges/**

**Figure 2 : Percentage of students with high gender equality scores by study arm**



\*Diff sig. at p<0.05 compared to control; #Diff. sig. at p<0.05 compared to other two arms

**restrictions domain**, which was integrated into many of the GEA discussions as well as the campaign's messages. In the GEA+ arm there was a significant increase in the number of boys disagreeing with five out of the six statements; for girls it was six out of six. Overall, there were fewer positive changes in the violence domain, perhaps because their responses at baseline reflected more gender equitable attitudes (i.e. less tolerance for gender-based violence) compared to those in the gender roles/privileges/restrictions domain. One item in the violence domain does stand out for girls in the GEA+ arm: among these girls, there was an increase in nearly 20 percentage points in the proportion who disagreed with the statement, "A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together."

**Students who participated in both rounds of the interventions sustained their support for gender equality** but there was no significant improvement beyond what was achieved after the first academic year.

**There was a significant positive trend in the GEA+ group that girls should be older at marriage than the legal age of 18 years.**

The proportion of students believing that girls should be at least 18 years old at marriage increased over time in all groups, reaching nearly 100 percent at the 2<sup>nd</sup> follow-up survey. But in the GEA+ group, support consistently increased among both boys and girls for girls to be even older at marriage – at least 21 years. Among all students in this arm the proportion increased from 15 percent at baseline to 22 percent at 2<sup>nd</sup> follow up. In control schools, it declined from 18 percent to 14 percent at

The girl should study further. But if her parents will force her, she will not be able to do anything. She will have to marry. If that girl is 20 or 21 years old, then it's ok to think about marriage, but if she is 15 or 16 years old, parents should not think about marriage.

Girl from GEA+ school

The girl should study. She has the right to study. It is illegal to get her married before the age of 18 and no one should be married off at a young age. One should get married after the age of 18 or 20.

Boy from GEA+ school

2<sup>nd</sup> follow up while it remained around 10-13 percent in the campaign schools. Age at marriage was addressed in several of the sessions that focused on gender discrimination during both rounds of the intervention.

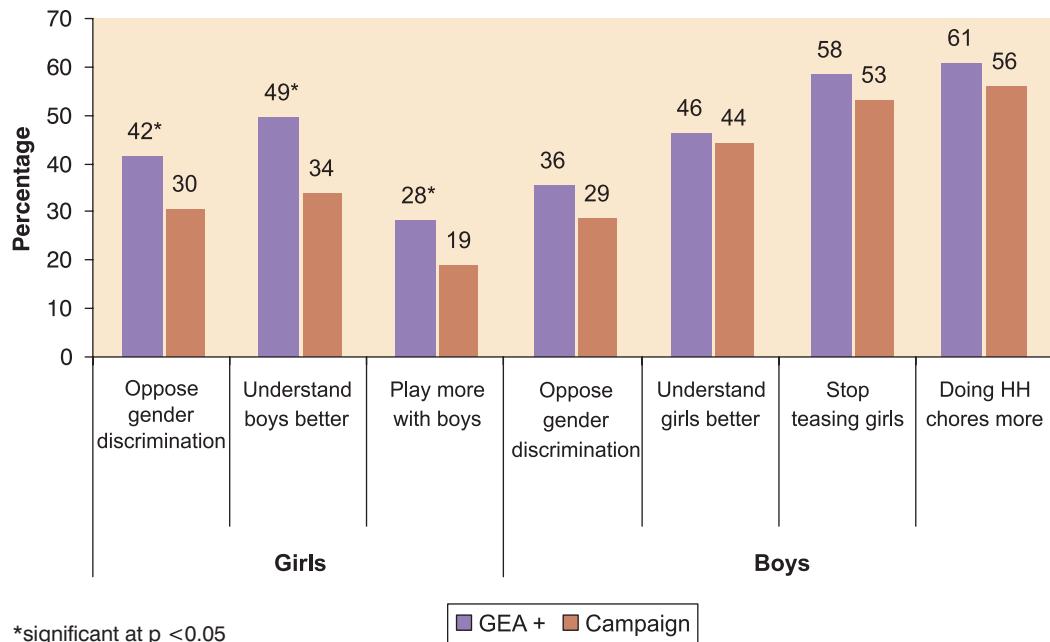
**After the second round of the intervention, more students in both intervention groups reported they would take action in response to sexual harassment.**

The students were asked about how they might respond to someone touching them inappropriately or exposing themselves. At the 1<sup>st</sup> follow up there were no significant positive changes for boys or girls in the intervention arms compared to the control arm in terms of whether they would protest or complain to someone about the offending behaviors. But at the 2<sup>nd</sup> follow up, significantly more students in the GEA+ and campaign groups said they would mount either response. For example, more than seven in 10 students in both groups would complain about the sexual harassment. The increase among the students from 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> follow up was primarily driven by the girls, a promising result given that female victims are often blamed for being the cause of sexual harassment and violence which, in turn, discourages disclosure.

**Boys and girls in the GEA+ schools reported greater changes in their own behavior than those in the campaign only schools.**

Students in the intervention schools were asked whether or not they had undergone certain changes after their participation in the program. For boys in both intervention arms the greatest changes (reported by more than half the boys in each group) were doing more household chores, stopping the teasing of girls and curbing the use of abusive language. For girls, the most common changes were using less abusive language, understanding boys better and opposing gender discrimination. Many of these reported changes were significantly greater among the girls and boys in the GEA+ schools compared to the campaign only schools (Figure 3). At the 2<sup>nd</sup> follow up, there was continued improvement in two indicators: a significantly higher proportion of students in GEA+ schools said they better understood the opposite sex and they opposed gender discrimination compared to campaign schools.

**Figure 3: Self-reported changes in behavior at 1st follow up by intervention arm**



...After the sessions, I changed myself. I started thinking of not reacting too quickly. I used to quarrel a lot with my friend. I used to get angry a lot but now I understand...My family members say this is correct. Both girls and boys have to study equally. They say it is very good.

Girl from GEA+ school

I never worked at home before. I started two years ago at the same time when our sessions began. The sessions were about relationships, communicating with family members, not answering back. I used to think that boys should only do outdoor chores. Now I think that they should help women and work with them [at home].

Boy from GEA+ school

A girl was standing on the road when two or three boys pulled her *dupatta* (scarf). The girl called out for help. We shouted at them and threatened to inform their parents about this. They apologized immediately. I was not frightened while doing so. ...I could not stop harassment in the past. But because of the classroom sessions we got to know many things such as harassment of girls should be stopped, boys should understand the feelings and emotions of girls and girls should oppose violence.

Girl from GEA+ school

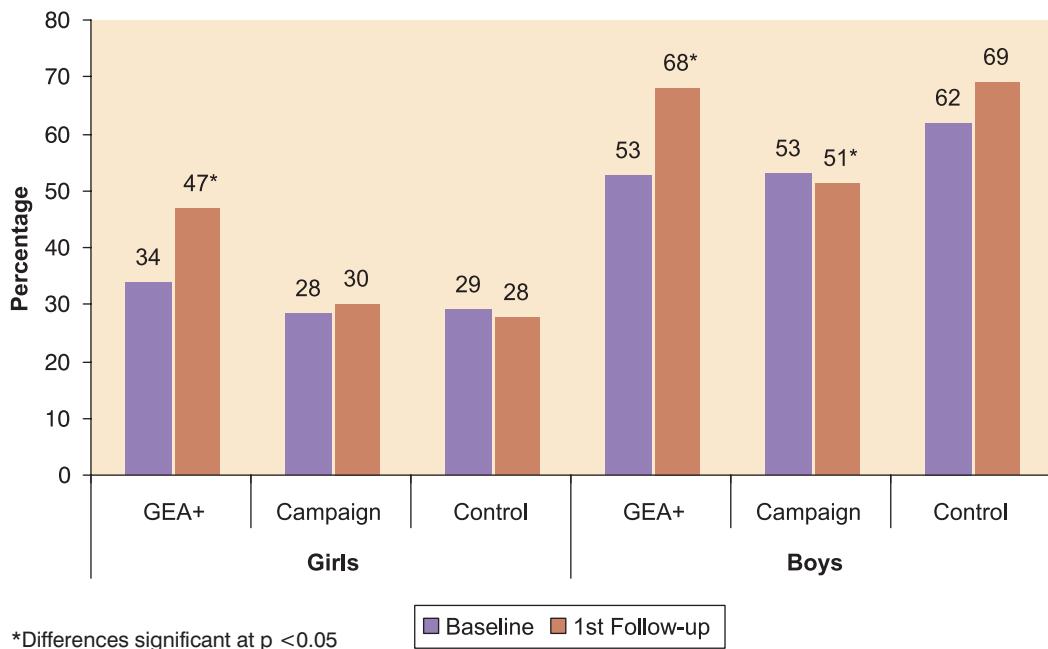
### The results pertaining to students' involvement in school violence were mixed.

As shown in Figure 4, reported perpetration of physical violence by boys in the last three months went up in the GEA+ arm but decreased in the campaign arm from baseline to the 1<sup>st</sup> follow up. These changes were significant when compared to the change in the control group. For girls in the GEA+ arm, the

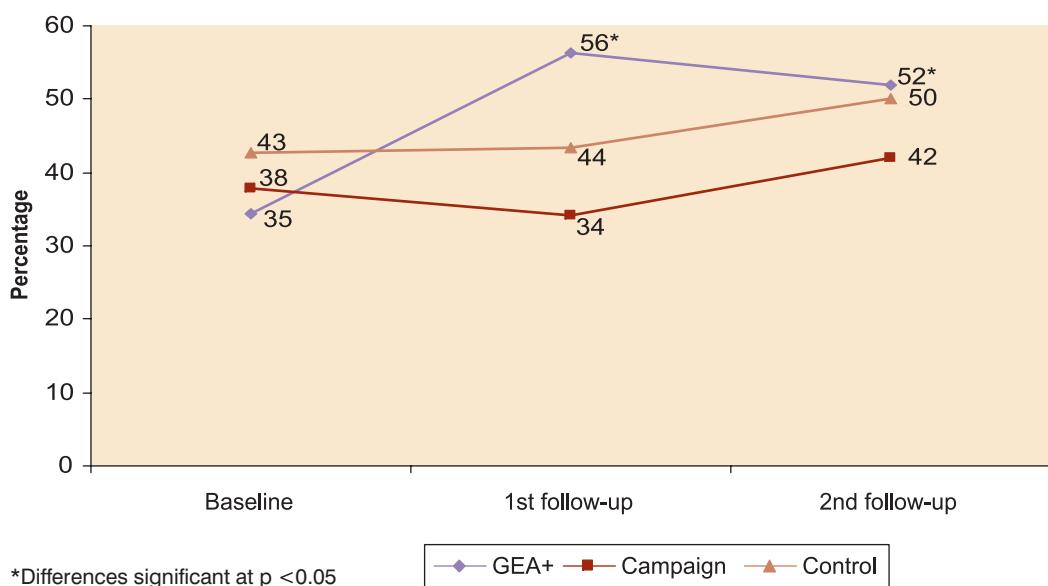
increase in perpetration of physical violence at school was also significant when compared to the control group.

Among the students who participated in both rounds of the intervention, those in the GEA+ arm (boys and girls combined) reported a 4 point decrease in physical violence at the 2<sup>nd</sup> follow-up survey while there was a 6-8 point increase in the other two arms (Figure 5).

**Figure 4: Percentage of students who reported perpetrating physical violence at school in last 3 months**



**Figure 5: Percentage of students who reported perpetrating physical violence at school in last 3 months**



While the survey did not ask students whether they initiated the violence or reacted to it, the reported increase among boys and girls in the GEA+ schools from baseline to the 1<sup>st</sup> follow up, was nevertheless surprising. One possible explanation, as noted by the GEA facilitators in discussions of the findings, is that the group sessions sensitized students to behaviors that

they initially considered normative, like pushing or hitting, but now learned that they were forms of violence.<sup>5</sup> These behaviors are often carried out by groups of children at school or may be individual retaliatory responses, both of which are likely to be particularly difficult to curtail. The decrease in reported physical violence from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> follow-up, however, is encouraging.

<sup>5</sup> The facilitators also noted that they never received any negative feedback from teachers about increased violence among the students. In fact, teachers were appreciative of the program and requested training in conducting the group sessions.

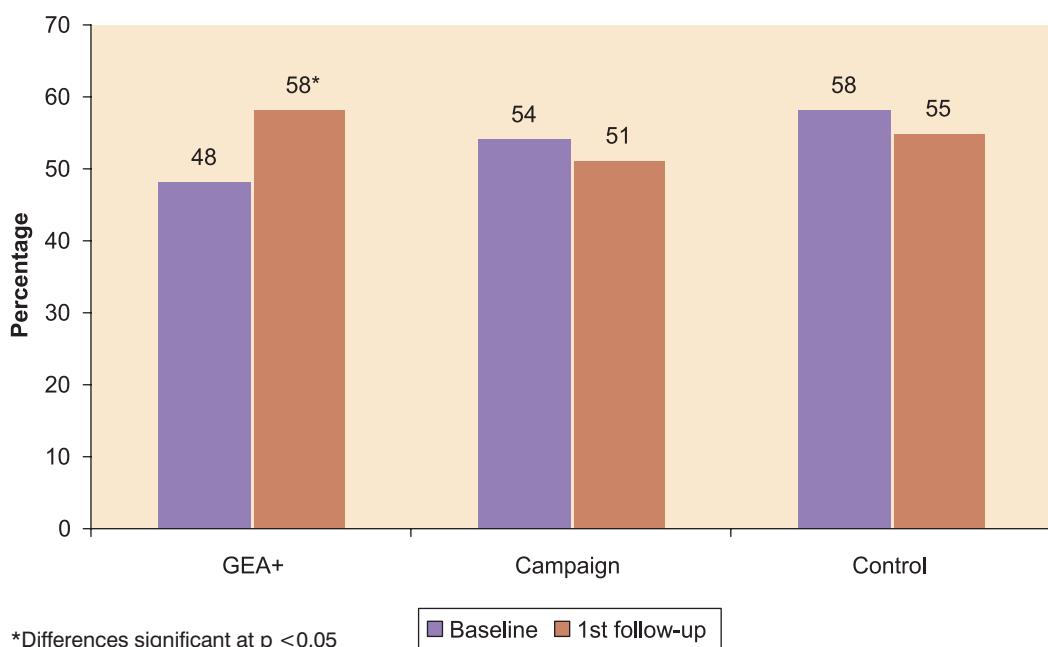
Once a boy used an expletive against a girl. I told him, "If you do this again then you will regret the consequences." He abused me also. Then we broke into a fight. I also used expletives. Later on I felt bad and thought that I should not have done that. Because it means that I have done violence against someone.

Boy from GEA+ school

Another survey question asked about the students' reaction to the last incidence of peer-inflicted violence at school. Responses such as "tried to stop it" or "sought help"

were categorized as positive reactions, while "hit back" was categorized as a negative reaction (another category was no reaction). The findings are presented for boys and girls together because of the small sample sizes. The proportion of students who reported a positive reaction increased in the GEA+ arm from baseline to 1<sup>st</sup> follow up, while at the same time those who reported a negative reaction decreased. These changes were significant when compared to the control arm (Figure 6). At the 2<sup>nd</sup> follow up there was a further increase in positive action among the students in the GEA+ schools but not in the other two arms.

**Figure 6: Percentage of students reporting a positive reaction in response to violence by peers or senior students at school**

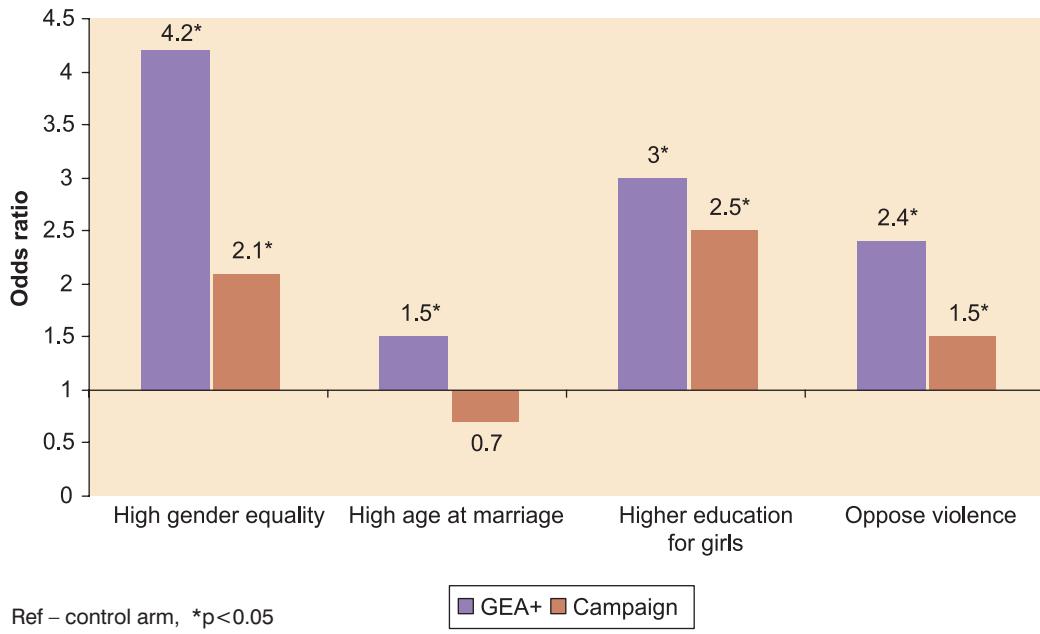


**Overall, students in GEA+ schools were more likely to have high gender equality scores, support a higher age at marriage (21+ years) and higher education for girls, and oppose partner violence.**

The research team conducted logistic regression analysis to better understand the effects of the interventions while controlling for background variables, such as age, sex, working status of the mother and household and personal assets (Figure 7). The models also controlled for the students' gender equality scores at baseline. After two rounds of the intervention, students

from GEA+ schools were more than four times as likely to have high gender equality scores and three times as likely to disagree with the statement, "Since girls have to get married, they should not be sent for higher education," compared to the control arm. The students in the GEA+ schools were also more likely to support a higher age at marriage (21+ years) and disagree with the statement, "There are times when a boy needs to beat his girlfriend." Two rounds of the campaign also succeeded in bringing about significant positive changes for three of the four indicators.

**Figure 7: Odds ratios from logistic regression for four key indicators at 2nd follow up**



Model controlled for age; sex; gender equality scores at baseline; working status of mother; and having TV, DVD/CD player and bicycle at home

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The study finds that students in both intervention groups report more positive outcomes compared to those in the control group. But the data also clearly show that boys and girls in the GEA+ schools demonstrate greater positive changes compared to those in the campaign only schools, highlighting the value of the group education sessions. This finding is consistent with other research that shows GEA to be an effective methodology for bringing about attitudinal and behavioral changes (Verma, et al., 2008).

The outcome variables that demonstrate the greatest changes are clustered around appropriate roles for women and men and girls and boys. Other key attitudinal and behavioral changes are increased support for a higher age at marriage for girls, greater male involvement in household work, increased opposition to gender discrimination and reacting in a more positive way to violence. These changes reflect specific themes around which many of the sessions were organized, giving students a chance for discussion and reflection. The data on self-reported changes in behavior are particularly encouraging, suggesting that girls and especially boys are taking steps in their lives that reflect the aims of the GEMS program.

The effect of the interventions on violence is more difficult to tease out, given that there are both positive and negative findings. But the data do suggest that GEMS is laying the necessary groundwork for increasing awareness, building skills and changing behaviors around violence both inside and outside the school setting. The findings on how students are responding to violence in the GEA+ schools are clearly indicative of a positive shift.

The study demonstrates important changes after just one round of the intervention. Attitudes toward gender equality sharply improved after the first round, and were sustained at the end of the second round. Yet there is also added value in a second round of the intervention given increased support for a higher age at marriage for girls, greater self-efficacy in responding to sexual harassment and more positive responses to violence and discrimination.

The GEMS experience provides evidence of a useful and feasible methodology for creating discussion around gender equality within the school setting. The findings suggest that a methodology which involves students in self-reflection has the potential to make a positive difference in attitudes and behaviors. Schools, being spaces for learning, have a role beyond giving knowledge to also fostering support for gender equality and non-violence.

## Recommendations

- Include and invest in group education activities as part of efforts by schools and educational institutions to change gender norms. Group education activities provide platforms for boys and girls to confront, challenge and ask questions about entrenched gender roles and relationships, contributing to more gender equitable attitudes and behaviors among students.
- Mobilize institutional support and long-term commitment to address violence and create more visible impact. This study

shows that violence among both boys and girls is deeply rooted and normalized, but that a series of group sessions plus a campaign can set in motion a process in which students become more aware of their own and others' behaviors. In school settings, aggressive behaviors among boys in particular are often tolerated or ignored as they are considered natural. Yet schools have an important role to play in helping students distinguish between what is "playful" versus what is "violence" – an important prerequisite for ultimately reducing a range of behaviors harmful to girls and women as well as boys and men.

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