

Addressing Gender Inequity during Early Adolescence in Indonesia: Implications for Programs and Policies from a Human-Centered Design Process

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Why focus on gender during early adolescence?

Early adolescence is a time of rapid change. Cognitive development accelerates and puberty brings both physical and socio-emotional changes. Social expectations also shift, exposing very young adolescents (VYAs) to more gendered experiences and expectations.¹ Results from the Global Early Adolescent Study (GEAS), a multi-country longitudinal study exploring gender socialization and its implications for adolescent health and wellbeing, demonstrate that these changes influence treatment of boys and girls from a young age and lead to distinct gendered behaviors that can be detrimental to adolescent's health.² As such, early adolescence – the time between 10 and 14 years of age – is a critical opportunity for intervention.^{3,4} Building VYAs' sexual and reproductive health (SRH) knowledge and skills and fostering more gender-equitable attitudes, behaviors and norms lays the foundation for their future health and well-being.

But reaching adolescents themselves is not enough. To truly create a supportive environment for gender equality among VYAs, programs must reach the people, systems and organizations that influence adolescents' lives, including families, community networks, schools, health systems, civil society and other government services.⁵ These social and structural determinants of gender inequality influence how gender norms, roles and systems take shape during adolescence and how VYAs navigate power relations and their emerging gender identities during this crucial period.

This document shares key learnings from a human-centered design process with VYAs in Indonesia and suggests three key implications for programs and policies:

1. Invest in activities that bring families and communities together to address gender norms
2. Intentionally address the intersection of gender and violence among both boys and girls
3. Use a systems approach to create a culture of collaboration between different sectors that shape adolescents' lived experiences

Elevating Youth Voices in Designing Gender Transformative Interventions through Human Centered Design (HCD)

As part of its efforts to advance innovative social and behavior change (SBC) approaches for youth, and particularly to foster more meaningful youth engagement in designing programs that shape their lives, Breakthrough ACTION supported a human-centered design (HCD) process in Denpasar and Semarang, Indonesia from April-September 2022 in partnership with the GEAS and Perkumpulan Keluarga Berencana Indonesia (PKBI) Bali.

WHAT IS HCD ?

Human-centered design is a way of thinking that places both the people that programs serve and related stakeholders at the center of the design and implementation process. With emphasis on research, ideation, iteration, and prototyping, this process seeks to achieve novel solutions to complex problems. While there are many different HCD processes, all of them, at their core, are rooted in empathy: a comprehensive understanding of the stakeholder(s) involved in the challenge at hand.

Process

The HCD process in Indonesia was designed to build on SETARA (Semangat Dunia Remaja or Teen Aspirations), a two-year comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) intervention implemented in junior high schools in Indonesia under the Explore4Action project.⁶ The HCD process sought to design complementary interventions that would go beyond the individual level and address each level of the social-ecological model, reaching not only VYAs, but also critically the people around them who are influential in shaping social and gender norms – including parents, caregivers, teachers, and community leaders- as well as the systems and structures that shape their lives, especially families and schools.



Parents engaging in an activity at the Family Festival prototype in Semarang

The project formed a Core Design Team (CDT), made up of a multi-disciplinary group that coalesces the four voices of design—intent, design, experience and expertise—and the necessary diversity of skills and experience to drive the design process. The CDT established a set of design challenges – framed as “How might we...?” statements, based on GEAS research from Indonesia (which includes its evaluation of SETARA) and prioritized eight statements according to their potential impact on gender inequities among VYAs (see Box 1).

The CDT then held two days of idea generation workshops in Denpasar, Bali that brought together a diverse range of perspectives from adolescents, parents, representatives from the Ministries of Health and Education and other influential community members to generate ideas or concepts for how to promote a gender equitable environment for VYAs. The design challenges were used to inspire idea generation but not all challenges would necessarily be addressed by the emerging prototypes. Following the workshops, the CDT evaluated the ideas generated and prioritized a sub-set of concepts for subsequent prototype design and testing (See Box 2 for definitions). VYAs in the idea generation workshops repeatedly emphasized the impact of bullying related to gender-based attributes and norms on their mental health and well-being. As such, prototypes that could impact this outcome were prioritized.

Box 1: Design Challenges

- How might we help VYAs access information about gender?
- How might we create opportunities for boys to support each other?
- How might we help VYAs and their parents feel comfortable talking with each other about puberty, sexuality, and gender roles?
- How might we change the social expectations for how boys and girls should act?
- How might we stop bullying and/or harassment based on gender?
- How might we work with religious leaders to improve gender equity?
- How might we ensure communities support and provide equal opportunities for boys and girls?
- How might we increase institutional support for gender equity for VYAs?

Box 2: Concepts and Prototypes

A **concept** is an idea that details the way it is foreseen in a tangible reality. It answers the questions: What, how, when and who? Once concepts detail the way ideas should be materialized, prototypes are built.

A **prototype** can take any shape: a song, a poster, a role play, a drawing, a game, or anything else. Prototypes are the means to show, interact and receive feedback from users through a concrete object or activity. They are built quickly with inexpensive materials and iterated upon according to the collected feedback.

A month later, the team held an adaptation workshop in Semarang, Central Java to refine the concepts into medium-fidelity prototypes and carry out three days of testing. After synthesizing the findings, the CDT identified five of the six prototypes to carry forward into high-fidelity testing:

Family classes

Family classes emerged out of the need and desire to help parents and children spend more time together and be more comfortable discussing gender and bullying. This concept entails a series of dynamic classes for adult caregivers/parents of VYAs and VYAs that include traditional games, communication skills building activities, and other exercises that surface gender norms and create space for critical reflection and discussion about those norms. Invitations to join the Class could be improved by more clearly explaining what the classes were about, what they will be doing, and what the expected benefits are. The Family Class may be a natural complement to certain aspects of SETARA, especially if held at schools where SETARA is being implemented.

Interactive video

This concept includes a series of short videos that are intended to expose and initiate collective identification, reflection, and discussion about gender norms. Each video contains several multiple-choice questions that prompt participants to vote on how they think others would respond to different

scenarios. The collective, anonymous votes are displayed to reveal how the group voted and a facilitator leads the group through a discussion, which is designed to expose differences between perceived norms and actual norms and create a space for critical reflection. Audiences liked the video because it was novel, entertaining, and realistic and parents lingered long after their session concluded. A trained, dynamic facilitator is needed to work with VYAs. Small group discussions emerged as a favorite part among VYAs, who appreciated getting to express what they feel.

Creative exhibition

The creative exhibition is designed to encourage boys, girls and families to recognize, empathize, and reflect on how bullying affects others. It is comprised of a four-exhibit journey that leverages technology and interactive digital media to enhance youth engagement and provide a pivotal experience with bullying that catalyzes behavior change. The exhibits include digital polling to capture initial attitudes towards gender-based bullying; an immersive exhibit that allows visitors to experience bullying through testimonials of victims, art and virtual reality; the interactive video (see above); and finally, a self-facilitated reflection space that encourages visitors to express themselves through art (drawing, modeling, writing, etc.) and create public commitments to become agents of change. Attendees valued the opportunity to express themselves through art and generate commitments for the future, while virtual reality headsets and audio testimonials were some of the highest points in the experience.

Safe Schools Toolkit

The Safe Schools Toolkit merged three stand-alone concepts (teacher training, teacher recognition, and reporting system) from low-fidelity testing into a new diagnosis concept designed to involve all the key stakeholders in the school (parents, teachers, students, headmasters and other staff members from the school). The toolkit includes four steps: pre-screening to understand whether the school would benefit from the approach; a self-assessment/diagnosis to evaluate the current state of the school environment in terms of gender equality, bullying and support systems; formulation of a roadmap based on critical areas from the diagnosis; and post-evaluation tools to measure improvement. As this concept was tested at low fidelity in Semarang, further testing is required to get more evidence about feasibility and scalability.

Multi-stakeholder forum

The Multi-Stakeholder Forum convenes leaders from key public departments, including the Department of Health, the Department of Child Protection and Women's Empowerment, the Department of Family Planning, the Department of Education and School Headmasters to leverage and strengthen existing programmatic infrastructure to create gender equitable environments for VYAs. While these departments all have work related to VYAs, they had no existing mechanism to coordinate around the issues of VYA SRH, gender-based violence and mental health. The prototype consisted of a workshop that focused on uncovering opportunities for collaboration and strengthening existing programs. All participants recognized bullying as an issue that needs addressing and agreed that schools and parents have a significant role. School-based interventions around bullying tended to dominate the discussion, therefore in high-fidelity prototyping there is a need to identify appropriate community-level forums as well.

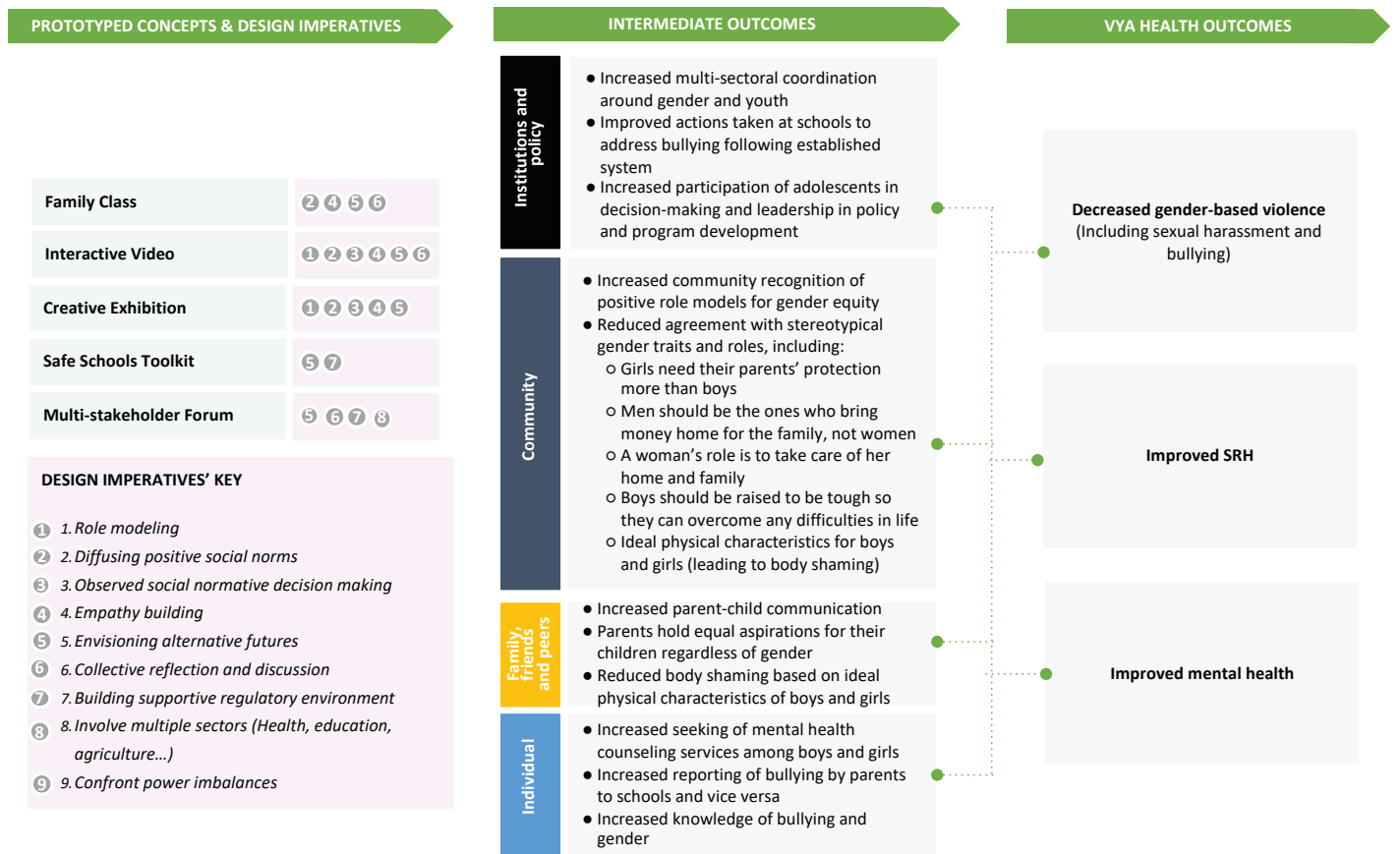


Father and child watching a low-fidelity virtual reality video at the Museum Exhibit in Denpasar

Working Theory of Change

While refining the prototype concepts, the CDT developed a working theory of change to illustrate how the prototype concepts might improve the both the long-term health outcomes (reducing gender-based violence, improved SRH and mental health among VYAs) and the intermediate outcomes (see Figure 2). Each prototype concept was tied to a set of “design imperatives” - attributes that the concepts must possess – based on evidence from gender transformative and SBC intervention research.

Figure 2: Working Theory of Change after Medium-Fidelity Testing



Implications for Programs and Policies

The design concepts that were tested were designed by young people and thus guided by their needs, ideas and creativity. These initial ideas, along with the GEAS research and the findings that emerged from prototype testing, highlight three important implications for programs and policies:

1. Invest in activities that bring families and communities together to address gender norms

Co-creation activities with adolescents revealed that children deeply desire engagement of their families, and the wider community, in addressing the challenges they face in navigating gender norms, bullying and SRH during this critical phase of development. The HCD experience also showed that parents need support in parenting VYAs and helping to navigate the changes and challenges that occur at this age. They also deeply valued the opportunity to support each other and work together to create a supportive environment for adolescents to thrive. All groups identified prototypes that brought communities together to create the opportunity for shared reflection on gender and gender-based bullying and joint involvement in creating positive change. It is critical that programs engage parents, teachers, communities, and other key influencers to meaningfully shift gender norms held by these groups that affect VYAs; individual-level interventions with VYAs alone are important, but insufficient.

2. Intentionally address the intersection of gender and violence among both boys and girls

During the co-design process, it quickly became apparent that adolescents have a strong felt need to address bullying and mental health and rapidly reframed the design challenges to explore how a supportive environment for gender equality among VYAs could impact those important outcomes. They explored creative ideas to tackle existing norms around gender that were influencing both the perpetration of violence and the experience of mental health challenges, such as expectations that masculinity requires boys to be “tough.” Of note, the adolescents easily acknowledged the impact of gender norms on both boys and girls and identified solutions that reached all VYAs, not just girls. Programs are needed to meet this felt need of mental health support and violence prevention, working with boys and girls as partners in change.

3. Use a systems approach to create a culture of collaboration between different sectors that shape adolescents’ lived experiences

Parents, community leaders and government officials engaged in co-design saw the need for different actors that influence adolescents’ lives to work together – including community structures, schools, education departments, health systems, women’s empowerment efforts and social support services. The low-fidelity concept of leveraging existing Healthy Village Forums evolved into a multi-stakeholder forum that can be established by convening leaders from key public departments to leverage and strengthen existing programmatic infrastructure to create gender equitable environments for VYAs. High interest in this prototype during testing indicates the potential for strong collaboration, but larger institutional support will be critical for success. Sustained change in fostering a supportive environment for gender equality among VYAs requires a shift in how systems that support adolescents operate, from one of cooperation to one of partnership.

Next Steps

The five concepts that passed the medium-fidelity design gate will advance to high-fidelity testing in early 2023, during which the team will refine the design concepts based on user feedback and ensure that the components of the concepts are supported by behavioral theory. High-fidelity testing will assess scalability, particularly the ability of these concepts to work together as a package, as well as the level of institutional support and buy-in. The team will consider a number of key questions to improve the design and anticipated impact on the desired outcomes:

- How well does the design deliver on the intent?
- How can we leverage social media to strengthen these concepts as a cohesive package?
- How can we amplify the gender component of each concept and across concepts to most effectively surface and address gender norms?
- How can we expand beyond the very viable school setting and into communities?
- How can we work together with other existing programs and partners to ensure complementarity?

In mid-2023, a suite of prototype packages will be available that can be piloted in Indonesia and adapted to other contexts.

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