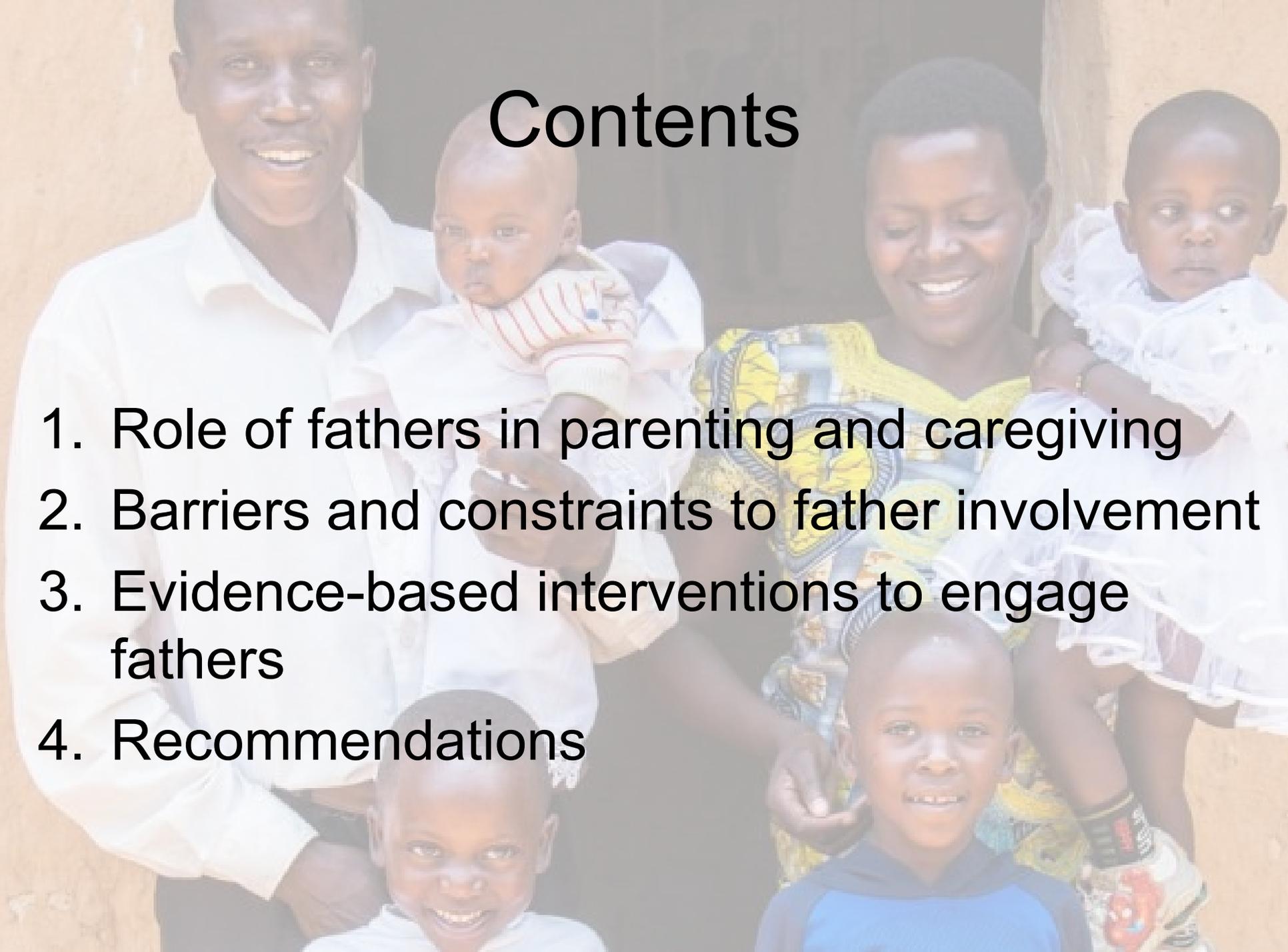


# The Role of Fathers in Parenting for Gender Equality

United Nations online Expert Group Meeting  
Families in development

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A photograph of a family of five people, including a man, a woman, and three children, smiling and holding the children. The man is on the left, wearing a white shirt. The woman is on the right, wearing a yellow and blue patterned top. They are standing in front of a light-colored wall. The children are of various ages, with two being babies and one being a young child.

# Contents

1. Role of fathers in parenting and caregiving
2. Barriers and constraints to father involvement
3. Evidence-based interventions to engage fathers
4. Recommendations

# FATHERS' ROLE IN PARENTING AND CAREGIVING

- Fathers have a profound and lasting impact on their children's development
- Nowhere in the world are men equally sharing caregiving with women
- Intentional efforts at policy, social norm change and interventions to engage men as nurturing caregivers + transform gender relations and institutional practices

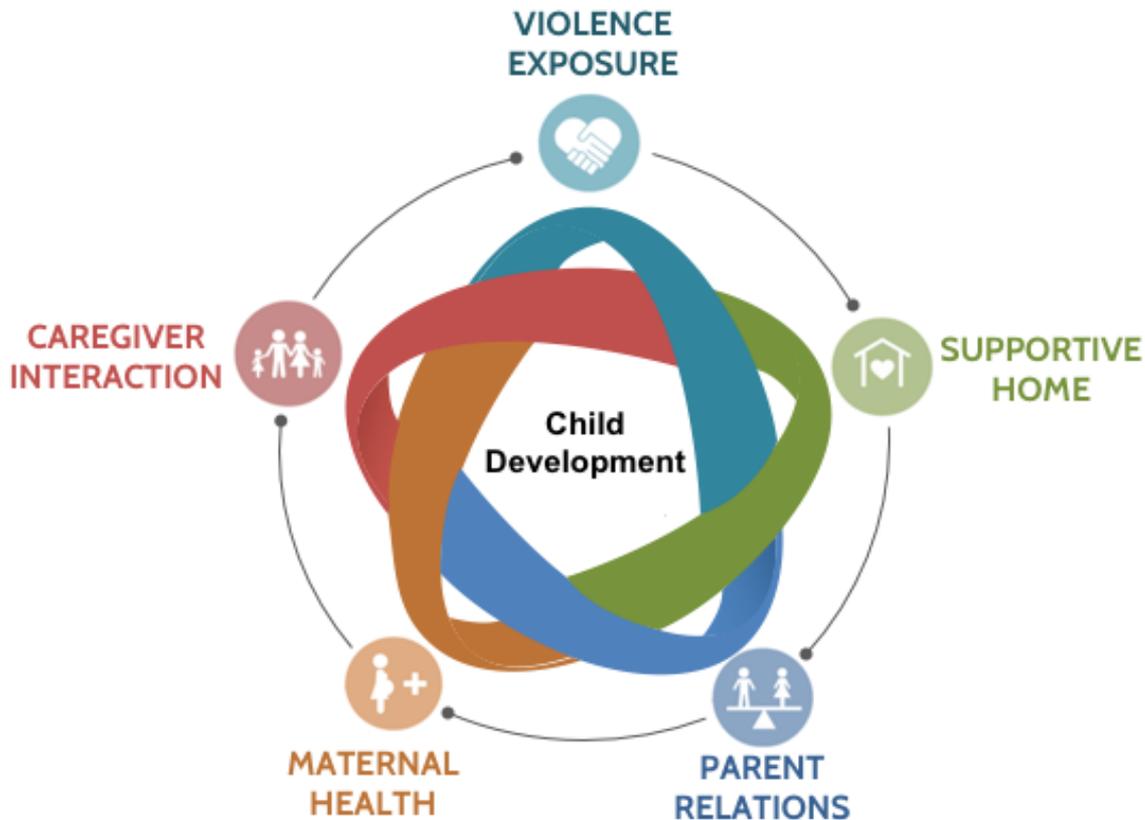


- **Fatherhood is a critical juncture in men's lives to adopt practices that contribute to gender equality or restrictive notions that prevent it**

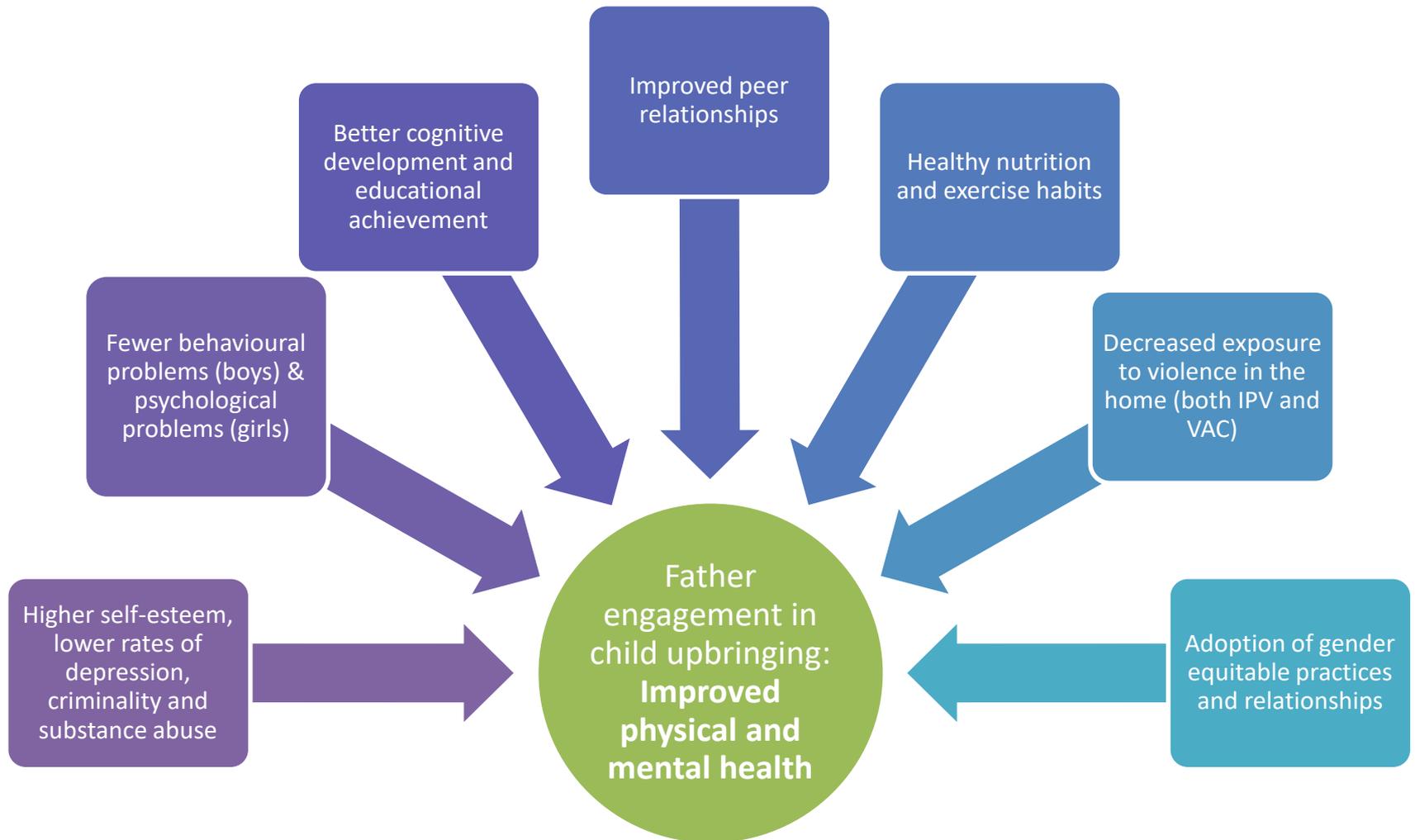
# HOME ENVIRONMENT AND CHILD WELL-BEING

**Children's home environments fundamentally shape their health, well-being, and development throughout their lives.**

Children's opportunities to thrive are impacted by a range of experiences influenced by interactions with and between their parents.



# IMPACT OF FATHERS IN CHILD HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

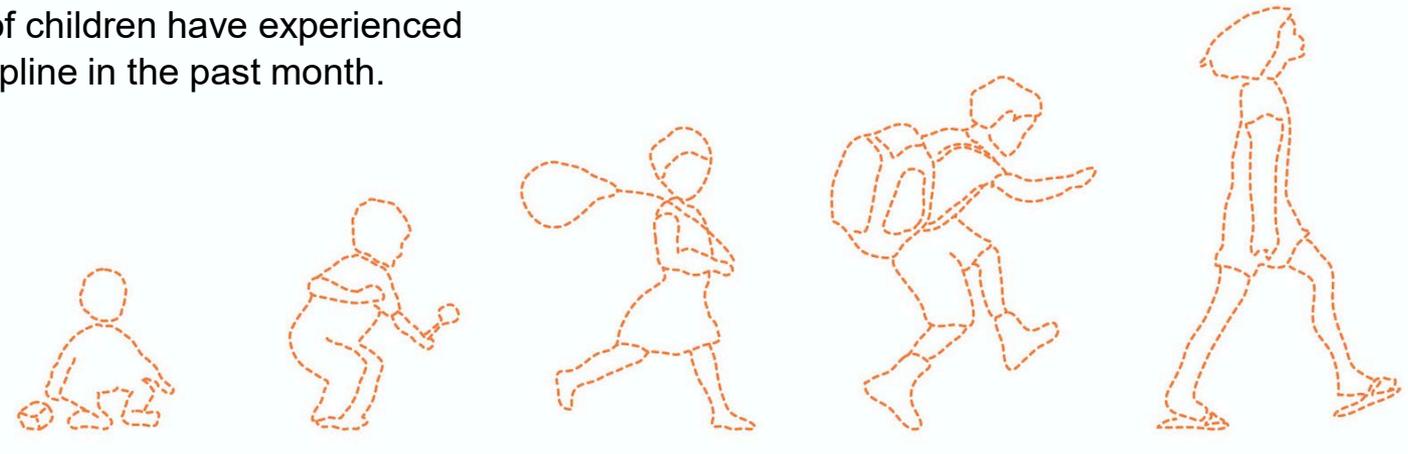


# VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD

Children's exposure to violence – experience of violent discipline or abuse and witnessing IPV – is linked to poor health and development outcomes: injury, mental health, learning and school performance, lack of empathy and aggression, and to intergenerational cycles of violence.

It affects their future capacity to partner and parent without violence and contributes to the intergenerational transmission of violence

**45-90%** of children have experienced violent discipline in the past month.



**1 in 3** women experience intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.

# COMMON RISK FACTORS OF VAC AND IPV

## Individual

- **Witnessed or experienced violence as a child**
- Young age
- Alcohol and drug use
- Depression
- Personality disorder/antisocial behaviour
- **Attitudes that condone violence and gender inequality**

## Family

- **Marital conflict/family breakdown**
- **Male dominance in the family**
- Economic stress
- Poverty/destitution
- Non-biological father figures

## Community

- Community institutions that tolerate or fail to respond to violence
- Lack of services for women, children and families
- **Gender and social inequality in the community**
- Social norms that promote family secrecy
- High levels of criminal violence or armed conflict

## Society

- Gender inequality & discrimination that disempower women politically, economically, socially
- Weak legal sanctions against violence
- Social norms that support violence
- Lack of responsible institutions

**A gender transformative approach is key to address these risk factors and prevent the reproduction of gender inequitable relations that sustain violence**

It examines and challenges restrictive gender norms and power imbalances between men and women and groups based on race, socio-economic status...

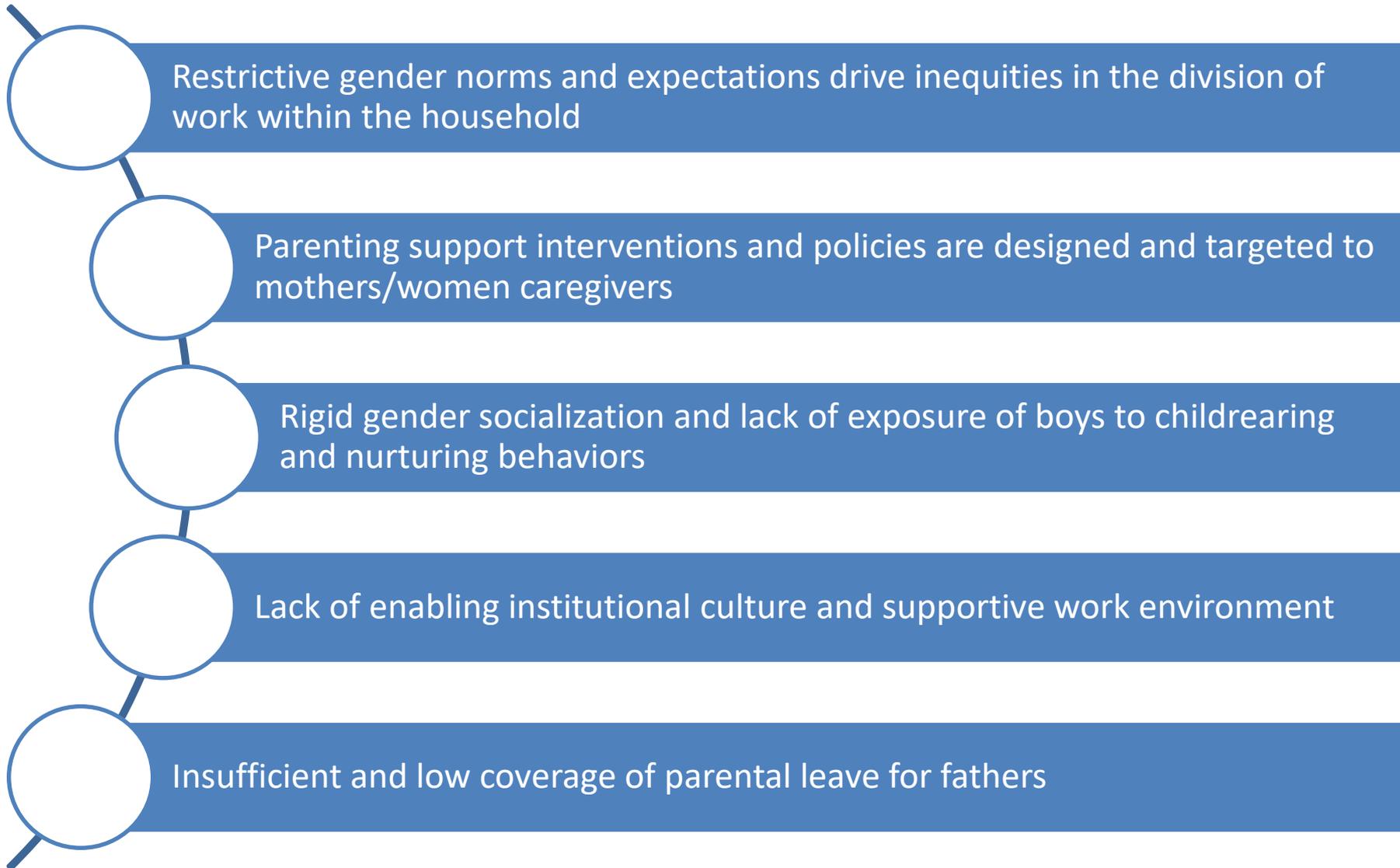
Actively seeks to change harmful gender norms and power imbalance through the adoption of equitable, non-violent attitudes and behaviors.

# FATHERS' POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT

- Actively participating in protecting and promoting the health, wellbeing and development of their partners and children
- Being emotionally connected with their children and partners
- Taking joint responsibility with their partner for the workload
- Fostering a respectful and caring co-parent or /and couple relationship if living together
- Supporting their partner's autonomous decision-making, agency and health
- Resolving conflicts in a peaceful way and working to prevent violence by promoting caring and respectful relationships in the family

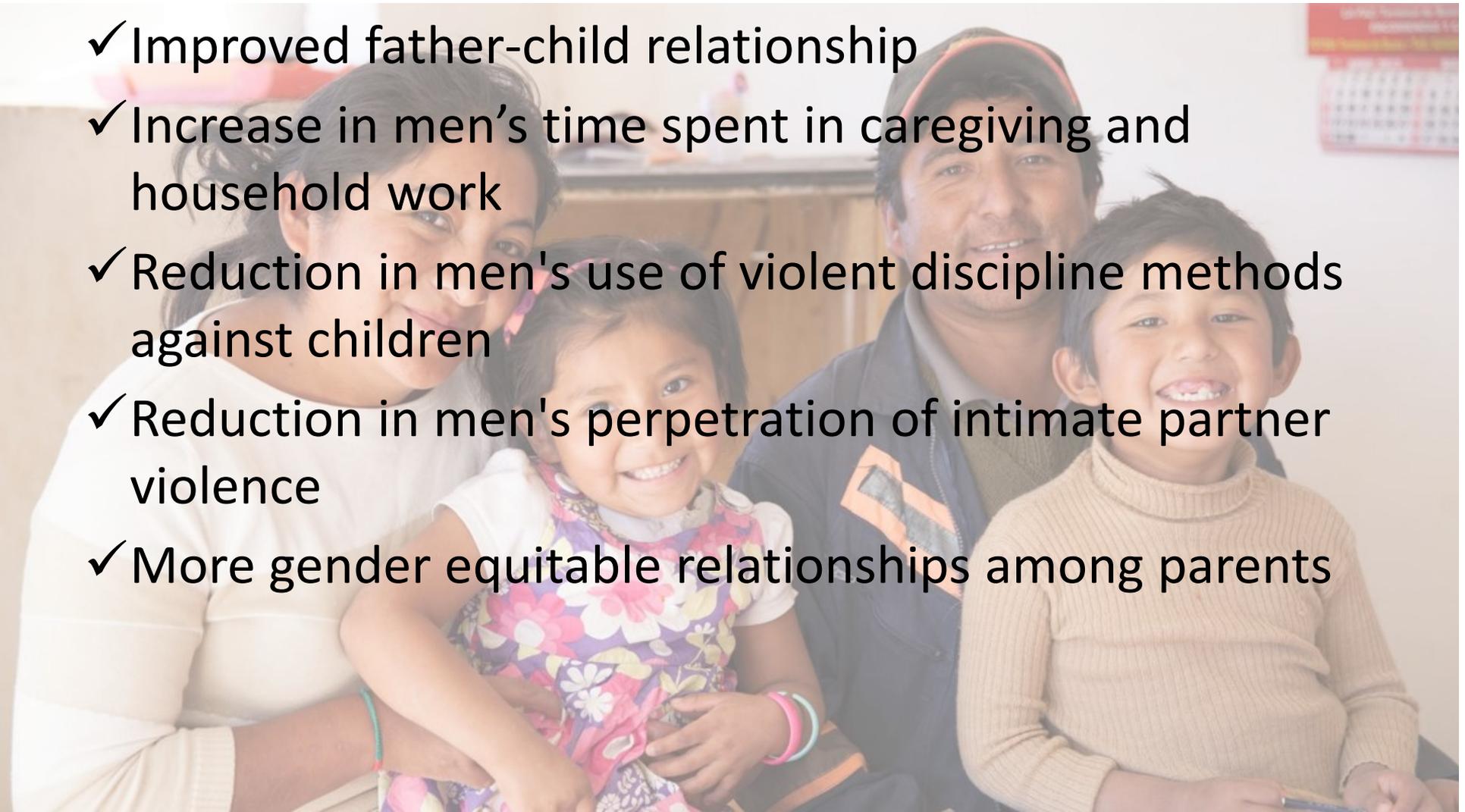


# BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS TO FATHER ENGAGEMENT



# EMERGING EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS TO ENGAGE FATHERS

- ✓ Improved father-child relationship
- ✓ Increase in men's time spent in caregiving and household work
- ✓ Reduction in men's use of violent discipline methods against children
- ✓ Reduction in men's perpetration of intimate partner violence
- ✓ More gender equitable relationships among parents



# GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PARENTING INTERVENTIONS THAT ENGAGE FATHERS



**Program P-  
Banderbereho**

Rwanda  
Bolivia



**REAL  
Fathers**

Uganda



**Parenting for  
Responsibility**

Uganda



**Safe at  
Home**

DRC,  
Myanmar

# PROGRAM P- MODEL OF CHANGE

## ? **LEARN**

Through questioning and critically reflecting about gender norms, to develop new attitudes and skills.



## **REHERSE**

Attitude and behaviour changes, and new skills in safe environments of group educational sessions.



## **INTERNALIZE**

New Gender attitudes and norms.



## **LIVE**

gender-equitable, non-violent and healthy attitudes and behaviour in everyday life in a sustained way. This contributes to positive outcomes such as increased condom use and improved SRH and reduced STIs and HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence and gender equity itself.



## **SUPPORTING INFLUENCES AND STRUCTURES**

Peer groups, questioning and transforming gender norms together, role modeling of gender-equitable lifestyles, and taking action through advocacy in one's community and broader levels, institutions, structures, services and policies support these changes.

# PROGRAM P COMPONENTS



1. **Fatherhood in the Health Sector: A Guide for Health Professionals on Engaging Men**
2. **Engaged Fatherhood: Group Education for Fathers and their Partners**
3. **MenCare Campaigns: Community Mobilization Strategies**

# THE BANDEBEREHO INTERVENTION (PROGRAM P)

**Promotes safe, healthy home environments, father involvement and equitable gender & power dynamics.**

- Participatory, gender-transformative curriculum with 15 sessions for expectant and current parents of children 0 to 5
  - 7 sessions for men only
  - 8 sessions for couples
- Led by trained community facilitators
- On average, men attended 14.1 of 15 sessions, and women 6.8 of 8 sessions
- Government approved curriculum already successfully implemented with more than 1700 couples.
- **Transition-to-Scale:** Ministry of Health commitment to pilot scale-up in one district via the decentralized health system using community health workers.



MATERNAL HEALTH



ENGAGED CAREGIVING



VIOLENCE PREVENTION



GENDER EQUALITY



SUPPORTIVE HOMES



# FATHER ENGAGEMENT LINKED TO MULTIPLE OUTCOMES FOR FAMILY WELLBEING

A randomised controlled trial with 1,199 couples in Rwanda demonstrated the intervention's impact on multiple outcomes that impact children's ability to thrive. Compared to the control group, parents in the intervention reported:

## *Protection against maltreatment*

- 40% reduction in violence against mothers
- Lower rates of men's threats of violence against children
- 14% reduction in physical punishment of children
- Greater use of positive discipline
- Reduction in men's alcohol use

**All current/future research on this intervention is published open access; unpublished learning will be shared quickly, openly online via webinars and reports.**



## *Nurturing care and stimulation*

- 2.7 more hours of stimulating interaction by parents per week
- Greater father involvement in child care and house work (1+ hour/day)
- Increased communication & shared decision-making

## *Health & nutrition*

- Women more likely to attend prenatal visits
- Men more likely to accompany partner to prenatal visits
- Greater partner support during pregnancy

# INTEGRATION INTO PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

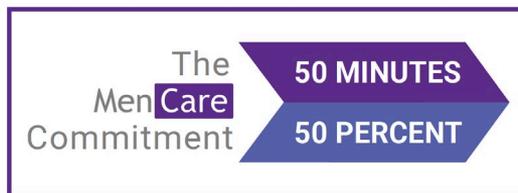
**The Bandebereho intervention was designed – with input from the Ministry of Health – to complement existing health system efforts to improve maternal and newborn health and child development, including men’s engagement.**



- First gender-transformative intervention to be implemented directly via the health system at scale in Rwanda.
- The intervention will further equip CHWs to promote the country’s desired child outcomes.
- Considering gender inequality as a social determinant of health, training CHWs on a gender-transformative approach has the potential to positively impact all areas of their work.
- Delivery of GT interventions at scale in contexts of limited financial and human resources is challenging and more investment is needed to support them

# SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN- MENCARE

- **Global platform** to promote research exchange, evidence based program development, tools for advocacy
- 100+ partners in 55+ countries
- **Shared agenda and strategy** to influence policies around fatherhood and caregiving
- **COVID and #HowICare Campaign**



# RESEARCH, POLICY AND PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Invest in conducting action oriented research to understand barriers to fathers' engagement and positive entry points to catalyze their active involvement
2. Widen the evidence base of fatherhood programs to promote ECD and prevent family violence in LMIC
3. Support the development of theory-driven social norm change interventions that address norms driving inequitable behaviors around parenting
4. Design, implement and evaluate gender transformative parenting programs that can be taken to scale in a sustainable way

# RESEARCH, POLICY AND PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Ensure programs and interventions that engage men are designed and delivered in ways that respond to women's needs, choices and priorities
6. Integrate strategies to actively engage fathers and male caregivers in key services and programs directed to families seeking to promote children and adolescent development that reach large sectors of the population
7. Support equal, fully paid, non-transferable parental leave for all parents to create the conditions that allow for father involvement in their children's lives from an early age

**THANK YOU**