

# Men and Boys Health Project in Timor-Leste

## Summary of Evaluation

May 2020



## TIMOR-LESTE

### Programa Saúde ba Mane in Timor-Leste - Evaluation published September 2017

#### Background

Gender equality is a human right, necessary for advancing development and reducing poverty of entire nations. Women in the Indo-Pacific region are often subjected to discrimination and violence and are not provided with the same opportunities as men.

**UN Women estimates that**  
**59%** OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN TIMOR-LESTE EXPERIENCE PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY A PARTNER IN THEIR LIFETIME



Nearly half (47%) of ever married women have reported that their husband exhibits controlling behaviours in Timor-Leste.

Gender equality cannot be achieved without the involvement of men and boys who are often the decision maker in households and therefore have a role in empowering women and girls.

Timor-Leste has a high fertility rate at 4.5 births nationally and 5.2 births in rural regions. Whilst contraceptive prevalence amongst married women aged 15 to 49 years doubled between 2003 and 2009-10, the prevalence rate was still low at 24% in 2016. Nearly one in three women aged 15 to 49 years have an unmet need for family planning, with young women having the highest unmet need.

### Men and Boy's Health Project

Cooperativa Café Timor (CCT), in partnership with Family Planning NSW, implemented the *Men and Boy's Health Project* in Timor-Leste in 2009, funded by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

*The Men and Boy's Health Project* aimed to improve rural maternal and child health outcomes and increase uptake of family planning in Timor-Leste, in line with the primary national health priority. This was done through educating men and boys and challenging the traditions and health service structures that often deem maternal and child health as "women's business".

The project employed a peer education model using self-selected men's groups comprised of boys and men aged 16 and older formed within each target community in Ermera District. The peer educators were volunteers who were trained and supported by CCT staff. A Men's Health training manual was designed and translated into Tetum for the project. The manual was designed to work within the cultural framework of Timor-Leste to promote gradual behaviour change.

### Changes in men's health

An evaluation was undertaken which included interviewing project participants. The majority of interview participants of the Men and Boy's Health project felt that the project was valuable and had a positive impact on communities. Interviews and comparison of baseline and endline surveys indicated an increased awareness in key areas of health including ways for men to stay healthy, and negative impacts of alcohol and tobacco. Anecdotally, changes observed included people smoking and drinking alcohol less frequently; with women and peer educators observing reduced domestic violence as a result of decreased alcohol and drug use. There was an improvement in health-seeking behaviour, with several village leaders saying that people attended health centres when sick more frequently.

### Changes in family decision making

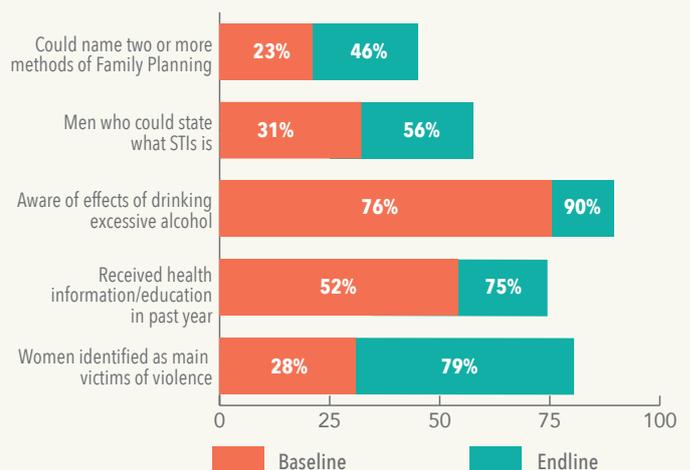
Findings from the endline survey suggested there was an increase in major decisions being made primarily by the husband or male partner alone. This indicates that the objective of encouraging men to take a lead role potentially served to strengthen culturally prescribed patriarchal practices of men being the sole decision-maker in the family. A strengthened Gender Module and the reframing of the language in other modules may help to further address these power imbalances.

Some male project participants and peer educators did identify changes in decision-making in their families. For example, they now planned pregnancies together, made decisions regarding child spacing, and helped their wives more when they are pregnant. Some women reported changes they had noticed in their husbands, including changed attitudes and being more helpful in the household. Furthermore, both male and female interview participants suggested there was a reduction in violence in their communities and, for some, within their own family.

### Changes in sexual and reproductive health

The Men and Boy's Health project saw a significant increase in knowledge about methods of family planning and awareness of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), with 96% of endline respondents understanding that HIV was an STI, compared to 31% in the baseline. Areas that needed further education to promote positive behaviours included safe pregnancy and birthing practices, and the benefits of child spacing.

Impacts of Men and Boys Project Timor-Leste



*"Positive change in men and boys is that they are now helping their wives', daughters, mothers and sisters more."*

*"Personally I have learnt a lot and now my behaviour and attitudes towards my wife has changed. I now take on more roles and responsibilities from my wife".*

### Challenges

A significant challenge of the project was its promotion of certain health practices, and communities not having the resources to implement them. For example, the project raised awareness in communities about attending health centres, however these remain in many rural/remote areas due to rugged terrain, distance and lack of community transport.

### Conclusion

The project was successful in educating men about ways to stay healthy, the negative impacts of tobacco and alcohol, methods of family planning and awareness of STIs.

*Note:* data and information in this report taken from the September 2017 “Evaluation: Men and Boy’s Health Project” covering the period 2014-16.

*“The most significant change for me has been the skills and knowledge I have gained through my training which has changed me and influenced those around me. My family, clan and community are living in a cleaner environment”.*