



## Be a Man, Change the Rules: Findings and Lessons from Seven Years of CARE International Balkans' Young Men Initiative

### Why We Have Activities

What does it mean to “be a man” to adolescent boys in the Balkans region? Can it mean keeping the peace instead of perpetrating violence? Having fun without drugs and alcohol? Practicing safe sex?

YMI participants were born during or immediately after the Yugoslav wars and grew up in a time of tumultuous post-conflict recovery. Across the region, interpersonal violence—including violence experienced and perpetrated by youth—remains high. In fact, 37% to 55% of male youth in our evaluation indicated they have kicked, punched, or beaten another boy in their lifetime. Moreover, our findings underscore the pervasiveness of gender norms that encourage violence, such as acceptance of violence in intimate relationships, homophobia, and the notion that physical strength is a core feature of “being a man.” Data also point to significant gaps among adolescent boys in basic sexual and reproductive health (SRH) knowledge as well as frequent alcohol use.

### What did we do?

For the past seven years, a coalition of local, regional, and international organizations has been promoting positive masculine identities under the banner of the “Young Men Initiative” (YMI). Coordinated by CARE International Balkans, implemented by collaborating institutions in four countries, and evaluated by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), YMI seeks to promote a lifestyle prioritizing good health, nonviolence, and gender equality through educational workshops and community campaigns.

### What did we learn?

Investing in gender equality work with young people (and boys and men) does bring tangible results in the development of a more gender equal and human rights based society. Working with boys through school-based activities and off-site retreats to explore their social roles creates change.

**Boys had more equitable attitudes towards women.** They were from 5-15 percentage

I began to respect girls and women more, and also respect people's opinions, differences and diversity.  
Uroš, Belgrade



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points less likely to think that a woman's primary role was to stay at home and cook.

**Boys were less homophobic.** Boys were 3-17 percentage points less likely to think it was acceptable to beat a gay person.

**Boys were less likely to think violence is acceptable**—both violence against women and as a general solution to their problems.

**Boys had more open ideas about what it meant to be a man.** There was a 27 percentage point improvement in the number of boys thinking that physical strength was the most important characteristic for a man.

**Boys were more likely to stop violence.** 76% of retreat participants indicated they had intervened to stop a fight by the end of the program, compared to 41% at the start of the academic year

### What did boys tell us?

Don't take our word for it. Here's what boys told us about their experiences with "Be A Man".

'Be a Man' changed us for the good... like not using name calling, not exercising violence against those who are not as strong, and many other things.  
—participant, Prishtina

I think that in our region... there was a standard that a man brings bread and a woman doesn't... however we all asked ourselves, 'Why shouldn't a woman bring it as well?' So, there should be no difference between men and women. Only their sex is different.

— participant, Sarajevo

I began to respect girls and women more, and also respect people's opinions, differences and diversity.



Uroš Radulović, Belgrade

### What lessons will we take to future programming?

Interactive techniques and off-site retreats are particularly effective in challenging deeply embedded social norms.

Generating strong rapport with students is critical.

A greater program focus on violence can potentially lead to better outcomes.

A longer timeline is critical to detect changes. The short study duration (eight months) and the fact that the violence prevention sessions occurred near the end of the program limits our ability to detect changes that may have occurred, particularly in students' behaviors.

You can learn more about the Young Men's Initiative in the evaluation here [insert link to PDF when posted], or on our webpage at <http://www.care.org/work/education/youth/be-man>. Hear the boys talk about their own experiences here: <http://www.youngmeninitiative.net/en/?page=44>.



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