



BE A MAN, CHANGE THE RULES!

Findings and Lessons from Seven Years of CARE International Balkans' Young Men Initiative



WHY promote a healthy, nonviolent, and gender-equitable lifestyle among adolescent boys in the Balkans region?

WHAT is the Young Men Initiative?

HOW was the Young Men Initiative evaluated?

WHAT did we learn?



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Be a Man, Change the Rules!

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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?

For the past seven years, a coalition of local, regional, and international organizations has been promoting these positive masculine identities under the banner of the “Young Men Initiative” (YMI). Coordinated by CARE International Balkans, imple-

mented by collaborating institutions in four countries, and evaluated by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), YMI seeks to promote a lifestyle that prioritizes good health, nonviolence, and gender equality through a combination of educational workshops and community campaigns. This synthesis report provides an overview of the program’s rationale, design, and evaluation results from YMI’s implementation in vocational high schools.¹

— 1. YMI in the Western Balkans includes other activities as well, such as regional youth camps, training civil society organizations, and programming for Roma communities.



› Be a Man Club (BMC) community event

WHY promote a healthy, nonviolent, and gender-equitable lifestyle among adolescent boys in the Balkans region?

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 no-

tion 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.

Taken as a whole, these findings make a compelling case for the relevance of YMI in helping male youth in the region overcome a culture of violence and align themselves to a more peaceful, equitable, and healthy masculinity.



› School based BMC activity

WHAT is the Young Men Initiative?

YMI's approach is based on a gender-transformative curriculum adapted from Instituto Promundo's Program H and designed to elicit critical reflection on the gender norms that drive violence and other unhealthy behaviors.² High rates of alcohol use in the region also prompt the program to target high-risk drinking, which is linked to an increased likelihood of violence perpetration in many settings.

YMI is implemented in vocational high schools, allowing it to achieve high levels of participation among boys ages 14 to 18. The focus on youth is important, as adolescence represents a pivotal moment in the socialization process when attitudes and behaviors are still being developed. In participating schools, eight to ten hour-long YMI sessions, led by trained facilitators, are integrated into the regular class schedule over the academic year, with a focus on four key program areas: (1) gender attitudes; (2) violence; (3) sex, health, and wellbeing; and (4) alcohol and drug use. YMI also extends beyond the classroom. The program includes an optional residential retreat where the facilitators lead additional sessions and team-building activities in a more immersive setting. In addition, the program includes a "Be A Man" lifestyle campaign, which is intended

to reinforce key YMI messages and foster change at the school level and beyond. The campaign is supported by a variety of educational materials, social media, and "actions" organized and carried out by student members of "Be a Man" clubs.

YMI's guiding philosophy is that boys should be understood not as obstacles to peace and gender equality, but rather as critical allies in promoting nonviolent, healthy relationships and communities. YMI holds that if students learn about violence as well as how to question dominant gender norms and if they have a chance to practice these new ideas and skills in safe spaces, then they will have a greater likelihood of internalizing this information which, over time, will result in living more gender-equitable, healthy, and nonviolent lifestyles. Moreover as group norms begin to change, the program helps foster a more tolerant, accepting environment at the school level.

This change trajectory whereby boys practice and internalize new ideas is bolstered by several support structures, such as non-violent role models (e.g., YMI facilitators), supportive social networks, and an encouraging school environment.

YMI'S EVOLUTION

The YMI Pilot (2007-2010) included formative research and implementation in five cities across Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. During Phase II (2011-2013), CARE adjusted the program in two important ways based on results from the pilot: (1) basic YMI sessions became a compulsory part of the curricula in participating schools; and (2) voluntary offsite retreats were added for more intensive training and engagement. This new YMI version was rolled out and evaluated in four schools located in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Zagreb (Croatia), Belgrade (Serbia), and Prishtina (Kosovo).

— 2. Program H (H stands for *Homens* and *Hombres*, the words for men in Portuguese and Spanish, respectively) seeks to engage young men and their communities in critical reflections about rigid social norms. The program was developed and validated

in Latin America and the Caribbean and has since been adapted for use in several countries, including Tanzania, India, Peru and Vietnam. For more information visit: <http://www.promundo.org.br/en/activities/activities-posts/program-h/>

› Program M workshop and team building activity.



› Creative workshop with BMC members and Roma

HOW was the Young Men Initiative evaluated?

During Phase II (2011-2013) ICRW evaluated YMI in four vocational schools (Sarajevo, Zagreb, Belgrade, and Prishtina) using a mixed methods approach. YMI implementation in each site followed the academic calendar. Findings draw on data from quantitative surveys (administered before and after the eight-month program with all participating students), in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (with student participants, teachers, and YMI facilitators), and monitoring records. One site (Prishtina) also collected data from a comparison school that did not implement YMI activities. See the table below for details about the study samples.

The evaluation in each site aimed to:

1. Appraise the implementation process;

2. Identify outcomes in the project's four thematic areas (gender attitudes; violence; sex, health, and wellbeing; and alcohol and drug use); and
3. Identify any differential effect of participating in a voluntary off-site retreat, as compared to participating in classroom sessions alone.

The evaluation is unique in its collaborative approach. After each academic year, the collaborating groups—the donor/coordinator, implementers, and evaluator—worked together to validate the evaluation results and draw lessons about how to improve both the design of the program and the relevance of the evaluation. The immense value of this collaborative, iterative learning process is also an important outcome of YMI.

Site	Study Year	Quantitative Respondents‡	In-depth Interviewees*	Focus Group Participants*
Sarajevo	2011/2012	271	8	16
Zagreb	2011/2012	257	8	16
Belgrade	2012/2013	159	9	12
Prishtina (Intervention)	2012/2013	285	7	8
Prishtina (Comparison)	2012/2013	276	--	8

‡ Only students present for both the baseline and endline surveys are included in the sample. Sample attrition ranged from 7% to 26%.
* In addition to IDIs and FGDs with students, we interviewed YMI facilitators and teachers in each program site.



› Be a Man Campaign: Orange day - UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign

WHAT did we learn?

OBJECTIVE 1: IMPLEMENTATION

Overall, we learned that it is feasible to deliver a gender transformative program to boys in vocational high schools. Local partners in all sites implemented the program as planned, with enthusiasm and ingenuity. Key factors in ensuring YMI's smooth implementation included garnering support from the administration and teachers in each school, as well as students' own receptiveness to the program. A common challenge was the short duration of the class periods (40 to 50 minutes) within which to complete each YMI session.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROGRAM OUTCOMES

While results vary across sites, the program achieved some of its outcomes, as presented below by thematic area. Most notably, we find meaningful program effects in increasing gender-equitable attitudes, non-violent intentions, and SRH knowledge. These quantitative findings are substantiated by interview data that provide compelling examples of how YMI participation fosters critical reflection on what it means to "be a man."

OBJECTIVE 3: ADDED VALUE OF OFF-SITE RETREATS

In most sites, participation in an off-site retreat proved particularly powerful. Findings suggest that the immersive environment and in-depth discussions held during the retreats are especially effective at shifting attitudes related to sensitive topics, such as homophobia and violence.

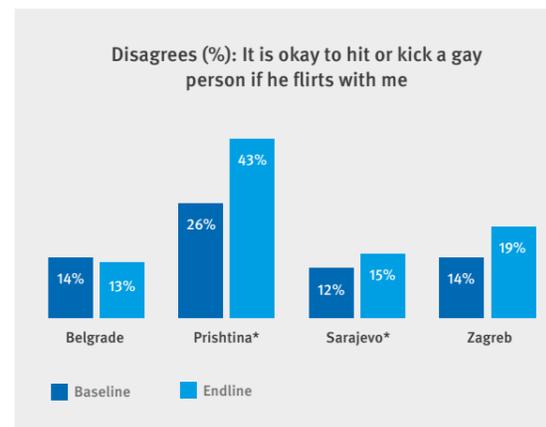
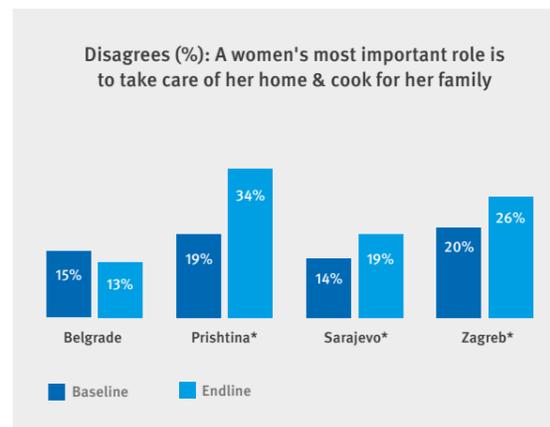
Overall, it is clear that students valued YMI and found it relevant to their lives. Participants reported a strong admiration for their facilitators, whom many of the interviewees explicitly described as positive role models. While the evaluation did not find evidence of reduced violent behavior and alcohol use, it is likely that more prolonged, intense engagement on these issues is required, as well as more time for potential changes to manifest. The many important shifts in participants' reported attitudes and intentions, however, suggest that YMI established a strong foundation from which long-term, transformational changes can take place.



› Program M workshop participants and new BMC members

THEME 1: ATTITUDES ABOUT MEN AND WOMEN

Figures 1 & 2



A star (*) denotes statistically significant changes at $p < .05$

POSITIVE SHIFTS IN ATTITUDES

The program contributed to critical reflection on attitudes about gender in society. While evaluation results vary across sites, overall patterns suggest that after participating in YMI many boys expressed more equitable views about gender roles and sexual diversity. As shown in the illustrative examples presented in Figures 1 & 2, attitudes around women's primary role in the family and homophobia improved across all but one site.

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

Many students also expressed more flexible views about masculinity after the program. For example, in Prishtina 58% of participants disagreed that physical strength was the most important quality for a man, compared with 31% before the program ($p < .05$). Interviewees elaborated on this theme:

To become a man here in our country, we smoke cigarettes, we drink alcohol... Now [I realize] all the smoking and alcoholic drinks do not make a man, but the opposite of a man ... I changed my opinion through these trainings ... Those values which we discussed have changed all the rules.
– participant, Prishtina

LESSONS

Interactive techniques and off-site retreats are particularly effective in challenging deeply embedded social norms. Many interviewees described how these types of activities helped them experience power and inequality from a new perspective. Moreover, students and facilitators alike noted that the extended time period and immersive environment of the off-site retreat allowed for more meaningful discussion. In two out of the four sites, survey results confirm that retreat participants experienced more positive changes in gender-related outcomes than those who only participated in the classroom sessions.

Although we detected several positive changes in attitudes, patriarchal norms are still prevalent. By the end of the program, for example, the majority of students surveyed continued to agree with gender inequitable statements such as “a man should have the final word in his home,” and during interviews some boys expressed restrictive ideas about how girls ought to dress and behave.

Generating strong rapport with students is critical. Experiences from Belgrade underscore the importance of fostering a genuine connection between

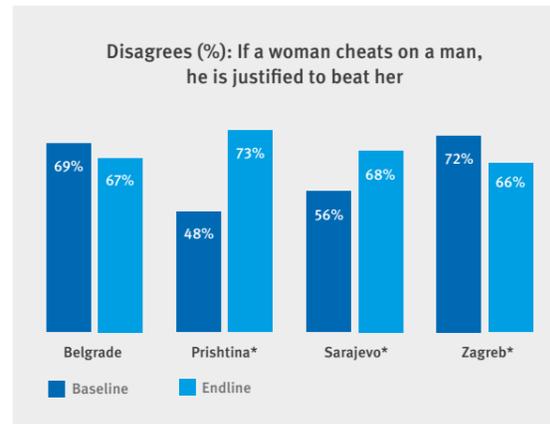
facilitators and students. Due to external events in the city (e.g., the politicization of the Gay Pride parade shortly before YMI started) some students were initially suspicious of program motives, and subsequently it took considerable time for the implementers to build momentum around YMI activities. In addition, the facilitators learned that the sequencing of the sessions is important. Hence, they recommend addressing the most sensitive subjects (e.g., gender and homophobia) only after establishing good rapport with participants.



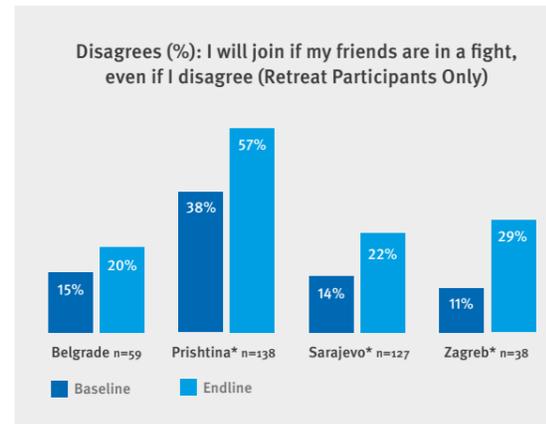
› Be a Man Club members

THEME 2: INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE

Figures 3 & 4



A star (*) denotes statistically significant changes at $p < .05$



VIOLENCE IS WIDESPREAD

Students reported experiencing and perpetrating many kinds of violence, both at home and at school. For example, 28% to 42% of participants reported being spanked or slapped by adults in their home, and 34% to 68% of participants reported perpetrating some kind of physical violence against a peer during the study period.

Those of us that grew up in Prishtina, it was tough to grow up in these streets. As soon as you went on the street at school, they are there and they start fighting with you. Once, twice, and then on the third time, you punch them back. What can you do... - participant, Prishtina

AWARENESS, ATTITUDES AND INTENTIONS AROUND VIOLENCE CAN IMPROVE

Students' awareness of emotional violence increased after participating in YMI, and some interviewees described how they no longer use name-calling, stereotyping, and other forms of emotional violence.

I had always thought that somehow, you know, the physical violence leaves some major consequences. Later I realized that somehow the verbal violence leaves the biggest consequences because, I don't know, bruises will heal... but [emotional violence] remains in the psyche. -participant, Sarajevo

We also find indications that YMI can help reduce tolerance for violence against women in various situations. In Prishtina and Sarajevo, for example, after participating in the program students were less likely to support men's use of violence against women who are unfaithful (Figure 3). Similarly, in both sites the percentage of boys who disagreed with the statement "a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together" increased over the project period.

Additionally, in three out of the four sites students who attended an offsite retreat substantially increased their intentions to remain non-violent if their friends are involved in a fight (Figure 4). YMI's potential to foster non-violent intentions is further supported by our interview data. Several respond-

ents described a shift in the expectation to react violently in situations where a fight appeared likely, noting that this marked a change since the beginning of the program.

Before the [Be a Man] club existed, when two boys were involved in violence—when they fought each other—everyone expected his friend to be involved as well. Now friends try to keep friends out of violence, so that it does not come to the level of killing or death. - participant, Prishtina

LIMITED EVIDENCE OF BEHAVIOR CHANGE

In three out of four sites, we observe no measurable program effect on boys' violent behaviors against peers or intimate partners, suggesting that improved attitudes and intentions have yet to translate into practice. In fact, with the exception of the Prishtina intervention site, boys reported increased levels of physical violence over the program year. This is perhaps indicative of the transitions characterizing boys' lives at this age and the increased risk of violence as they enter high school.

However, in Prishtina—where evaluation results are the strongest—we find promising signs that the program may help deter violence against peers. YMI participants reported the same level of violence at the end of the year as in the beginning, whereas in the comparison site there was a significant increase in reported violence over the program period ($p < .05$). Furthermore, among the retreat participants (about half

of all Prishtina students attended one), peer violence decreased slightly. Several of the boys interviewed provided personal accounts of how the program had inspired them to reduce their use of violence:

'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

LESSONS

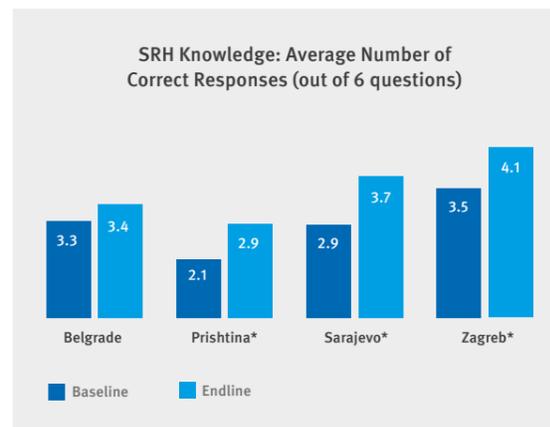
A greater program focus on violence can potentially lead to better outcomes. The YMI program in Prishtina intensified its focus on violence prevention, adding several violence-related sessions to the curriculum. These extra sessions, when combined with the off-site retreats, may have contributed to stemming any increase in violence (as occurred in the other sites) and encouraging boys to proactively prevent violence. For example, 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 ($p < .05$).

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. For example, at the time of our follow-up survey, boys may not have yet had an opportunity to put new ideas and non-violent intentions into practice.



THEME 3: SEX, HEALTH, AND WELLBEING

Figure 5



A star (*) denotes statistically significant changes at $p < .05$

LOW KNOWLEDGE, HIGH NEED

Prior to participating in YMI, boys had low knowledge of many basic SRH facts. For example, before the program more than two-thirds (68%) of students in all sites were unaware that some sexually transmitted infections are asymptomatic in men. These gaps in knowledge are especially noteworthy given that adolescence is when some boys initiate sexual activity: in our study, the average age of first sex among sexually active boys was between 14 and 15.

YMI IS EFFECTIVE IN INCREASING KNOWLEDGE

As shown in Figure 5, students significantly increased their understanding of basic SRH information after program participation in three out of four sites ($p < .05$). The salience of SRH education also emerged during the qualitative discussions. When asked to identify the “most memorable” YMI topic, participants often cited learning about contraception and reproductive health.

[Sexual health sessions] are good because they are useful. Because generally, at school, in life, no one talks about such things. No one takes it as an obligation to tell us about this world, to tell us about sex, to tell us about drugs.
– participant, Zagreb

EXPANDING SOCIAL NETWORKS

Students in all project sites reported high levels of stress and depression. The program helps address boy’s health and wellbeing by expanding boys’ social support networks. Interviewees frequently described making friends and developing a shared sense of social responsibility through YMI activities.

I was pleased [to attend the residential training]. I was glad to be there. First I gained new buddies, and then I had fun and learned something... that previously I didn’t perhaps know. And it was great.
– participant, Belgrade

LESSONS

YMI’s sexual health sessions fill an important need, but some students require extra attention to fully understand all the information. According to students and facilitators across all sites, sexual health topics are among the most popular of the YMI sessions; students have few other sources for this information and are eager to learn more. Yet, we learned through monitoring data that some students, particularly those in Belgrade, were unfamiliar with basic SRH concepts and needed more explanation than what was provided in the YMI curriculum.

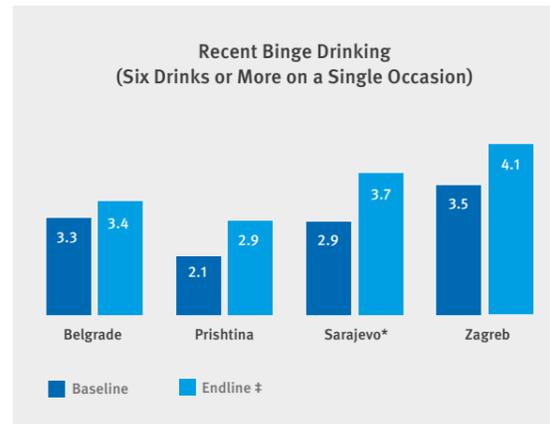
When it comes to imparting SRH knowledge, classroom sessions are equally effective as the off-site retreats. Although our study suggests that the off-site retreats are particularly adept at helping students internalize new attitudes and connect with a supportive peer group, all participants increased their knowledge of SRH to a similar extent regardless of whether they participated in a retreat.



› BMC activity: Raising awareness and marking World AIDS day

THEME 4: DRUG & ALCOHOL USE

Figure 6



‡ In Sarajevo and Zagreb, the questionnaire asked about behaviors in the past six months; in Prishtina and Belgrade the recall period was three months; a star (*) denotes statistically significant changes at $p < .05$;

ALCOHOL USE IS UBIQUITOUS

Many YMI participants reported consuming alcohol, frequently at harmful levels. In the three sites other than Prishtina, regular binge drinking was reported by 24% to 38% of participants at the start of the academic year and there was no improvement by the end of the program (Figure 6). Some students felt that drinking is so widely accepted that it would be impossible for YMI (or any intervention) to change the prevalence of alcohol use.

When it comes to alcohol, I think that nobody can change it... because there is some party every day. So, alcohol is used in everyday life, you know? No one will be able to change it. -participant, Sarajevo

HIGH SCHOOL IS A TIME OF EXPERIMENTATION

Our findings underscore that early high school is a pivotal time to curb boys' use of drugs (predominantly marijuana) and alcohol: many students in-

creased their experimentation during the study period. Despite the lack of a measurable program effect in this area, it is noteworthy that for certain boys, YMI participation strengthened their resolve to abstain from alcohol and substance use.

I do not drink, I do not smoke, I do not do drugs... I learned a lot about how drugs and alcohol affect people... and I realized even more that I do not want to drink, or smoke, or, God forbid, try some psycho-active substance. -participant, Sarajevo

LESSONS

Social media can be an important strategy in promoting healthful behaviors. In Prishtina, the majority of Be a Man Club members (59%) made public pledges to stop smoking on the club Facebook site and several interviewees described a reduction in the frequency of smoking among their friends. This was a promising, unexpected outcome that illustrates how social media can be used to support program activities and strengthen positive peer pressure within friendship groups.

The YMI intervention may be insufficient to curb high levels of alcohol and other substance use (including cigarettes) in the region. Given the lack of program effect in reducing alcohol and drug use, YMI may need to consider re-examining whether its current design is capable of achieving change in this thematic area. While substance use behaviors are linked to prevailing notions of masculinity, change may require a different approach and/or a more intensive focus than is possible within YMI.

YMI youth worker leading a workshop



BMC activity: Street action on World No Tobacco Day

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

YMI has been a collaborative effort by local, national, and international organizations. CARE International Balkans coordinated the effort from its inception. YMI workshop sessions, retreats, and campaigns were facilitated in each site by local implementing organizations: Centar E8 (Belgrade); Peer Educators' Network (Prishtina); the Asocijacija XY (Sarajevo); and Status M (Zagreb). The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) conducted formative research and evaluations of all phases of the initiative.³ Instituto Promundo provided technical assistance on the adaptation of Program H and ongoing support to the implementing partners.

We would like to thank the administration and staff of all participating schools. We also express our gratitude to the student participants for their eagerness, openness, and time.

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— 3. The survey was designed and carried out in collaboration with independent research partners in each location: Srdjan Dusanic (Sarajevo), Ivana Jugovic (Zagreb), Ereblir Kadriu (Prishtina), and Biljana Maletin (Belgrade). Vladimir Turjacanin assisted with data analysis.

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