



## **Making the Case: Summary of Baseline Characteristics in Six YMI Project Sites in the Western Balkans (2010-2012)**

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## Overview

The Young Men’s Initiative (YMI) is an adaptation of Promundo’s Program H<sup>1</sup> for the cultural context of the Balkans, a region marked by recent armed conflict and lasting social and ethnic discord. YMI seeks to increase the uptake of gender-equitable, healthy, nonviolent lifestyles among young men aged 14-18. Unlike most adaptations of Program H, YMI is school-based, allowing it to achieve high levels of participation in the project among a younger, more vulnerable age group. In participating schools, YMI sessions are integrated into the regular class schedule with a focus on four program themes: gender attitudes, sexual & reproductive health, violence, and alcohol & drug use. In addition to classroom sessions, YMI also provides students with opportunities for greater engagement through off-site residential retreats and a school-wide “Be A Man” lifestyle campaign. This campaign commonly incorporates social media, promotional materials, and “actions” organized and carried out by student members of “Be A Man Clubs.” YMI intentionally targets technical schools, whose students tend to have lower academic scores and a higher likelihood of violent behavior than their peers in gymnasiums or other schools.

This report synthesizes findings from baseline studies in six technical schools from across the region: one in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), one in Zagreb (Croatia), and two each in Belgrade (Serbia) and Prishtina (Kosovo). The findings included here come only from baseline datasets, and are intended to provide a snapshot of the young men participating in the YMI project in different locations rather than any potential effect of program activities. Baseline characteristics presented in this report provide insight into the knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes of young men in selected schools prior to any intervention. All consenting Grade 1 and Grade 2 male students in these schools completed a self-administered, standardized questionnaire on project themes at the beginning of the school year. The majority of participants were 15 or 16 years old at the time of the survey. The sample sizes are summarized in Table 1 below.

<b>Table 1</b>	<b>Survey Year</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
<b>Sarajevo (S)</b>	2010	294
<b>Zagreb (Z)</b>	2010	339
<b>Belgrade-1 (B1)</b>	2010	682
<b>Belgrade-2 (B2)</b>	2012	216
<b>Prishtina-1 (P1)</b>	2012	355
<b>Prishtina-2 (P2)</b>	2012	347
<b>Total</b>	<b>2010 &amp; 2012</b>	<b>2,233</b>

This brief report summarizes the studies’ findings under the four project themes. While data from the six sites are presented together to illustrate broad trends and patterns, findings should **not** be used to make comparisons between any two schools or sites. Diverging social and contextual factors in each school, a lack of randomization in school selection, and slight differences in survey translations, among other factors, make such comparisons unreliable.

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<sup>1</sup> Program H is a curriculum for engaging young men in critical reflections on social norms of manhood and masculinity. For more information, see <http://www.promundo.org.br/en/activities/activities-posts/program-h/>

## Gender Attitudes

In the questionnaire, students were asked whether they “totally agree,” “partially agree,” or “disagree” with a series of attitude statements about homophobia, gender roles, and justifications for violence. Tables 2-4 present the percentages of respondents who either “totally agree” or “partially agree” with each statement. Across all study sites, participants reflect traditional notions of masculinity and a gendered division of labor within the household, where women bear primary responsibility for childcare and housework. For example, the majority of respondents agree that a woman’s most important role is her domestic responsibilities, and that a man should have the final word about decisions in his home.

<b>Table 2: Totally or Partially Agrees that...</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>
<b>A woman's most important role is to take care of her home and cook for her family.</b>	87%	81%	81%	85%	81%	87%
<b>Changing diapers, giving kids a bath, and feeding the kids are the mother's responsibility.</b>	88%	73%	82%	81%	84%	88%
<b>A man should have the final word about decisions in his home.</b>	87%	70%	80%	83%	79%	80%

*\* Throughout the report, study sites are referred to by the following initials: Sarajevo (S); Zagreb (Z); Belgrade-1 (B1); Belgrade-2 (B2); Prishtina-1 (P1); and Prishtina-2 (P2).*

While the majority of students disagree with the three justifications for intimate partner violence included in the survey, the level of disagreement varies (See Table 3). For example, from one-quarter to one-half of students agree that a man is justified to use physical violence against a wife who is unfaithful. A slightly smaller percentage – from 20% to 45% – agrees that “a woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together.” Students were least likely to approve of violence when a woman refuses to have sex with her husband. Findings also indicate strong agreement with the victim-blaming notion that if a woman is sexually harassed, it is because of how she dresses (from 71% to 80%). These findings indicate that a substantial minority of participating students justify intimate partner violence in certain circumstances.

<b>Table 3: Totally or Partially Agrees that...</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>
<b>If a woman cheats on a man, it is justified for him to beat her.</b>	46%	29%	25%	37%	52%	44%
<b>It is okay for a man to hit his wife if she will not (does not want to) have sex with him.</b>	23%	17%	9%	14%	18%	16%
<b>A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together.</b>	28%	20%	21%	23%	41%	45%
<b>When a woman is sexually harassed, it is commonly because of how she dresses.</b>	79%	71%	74%	80%	75%	73%

Homophobic attitudes are also pervasive across the sample; from 52% to 95% of respondents agreed with the statements that they would never have a gay friend and/or would be ashamed to have a gay son (see Table 4). In addition, qualitative data collected in the same study sites consistently emphasized the extent to which homophobia is a deeply embedded gender norm, as illustrated in the following quotation by a male student in Zagreb: “I mean, rarely anyone likes homosexuals except themselves...they themselves think they are equal. OK, but I look at it as a disease, like something that isn't normal. A lot of people would say that.”

<b>Table 4: Totally or Partially Agrees that...</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>
<b>I would never have a gay friend.</b>	80%	85%	86%	79%	63%	52%
<b>I would be ashamed if I had a homosexual son.</b>	93%	88%	95%	92%	77%	67%

## Violence

*About violence... I have a lifetime of violence. So, I see it often, so that it cannot change. Wherever I go, it's just about violence. (Male student, Zagreb)*

Study findings suggest that respondents are surrounded by high levels of violence, including violence that they experience themselves, violence that they witness, and violence that they perpetrate against others. Within this context, participants hold diverging attitudes related to violence. While students tend to tolerate violence in the abstract or in hypothetical situations (see Tables 3 and 7), they simultaneously report a strong intention to break up fights or intimate partner violence involving their friends (see Table 8). Still, reported perpetration of interpersonal violence is high: 41% to 59% of students indicate they have kicked, punched, or beat another young man/boy in their lifetime (see Table 6).

Findings from survey questions on students' victimization of violence indicate that the most commonly experienced form is physical violence in the home (see Table 5), suggesting that participants are learning firsthand that violence is a common mode of domestic conflict resolution and/or punishment. Also concerning is the 7% of respondents in both Prishtina sites that indicate they have been forced to have sex.<sup>2</sup> Studies consistently link these early experiences of violence to an increased likelihood of perpetrating domestic violence in one's own adult relationships. As with any self-reported experiences, there is also a chance of underreporting. In light of other research citing a high prevalence of domestic violence in the region, it appears likely that the levels of having witnessed violence against one's mother may have been underreported.<sup>3</sup>

<b>Table 5: Experienced sometimes or often...</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>
<b>Insulted or humiliated by someone in my family in front of other people</b>	14%	17%	12%	13%	10%	8%
<b>Spanked or slapped by my parents or adults in the home</b>	29%	28%	49%	42%	32%	29%
<b>Seen or heard my mother being beaten by her husband or boyfriend</b>	4%	3%	5%	7%	3%	4%
<b>Beaten or physically punished at school by a teacher</b>	6%	13%	3%	6%	14%	14%
<b>Had sex with someone because I was threatened or frightened or forced</b>	3%	4%	1%	2%	7%	7%

As summarized in Table 6 below, students' reported perpetration of violence against a man or boy are high (from 41% to 59% of respondents), and a substantial minority – over 30% in four of the six sites – report having been involved in a fight as part of a group or a gang. In addition, findings suggest that the homophobic attitudes discussed above do, at least in some instances, translate into

<sup>2</sup> Among the 26% of students in P1 and P2 who report that they have had sex, the percentage who also indicate they have had sex because they were threatened or forced is 12%.

<sup>3</sup> The questionnaire uses the word *beating*, leaving the possibility that students selected “no” even if they have witnessed their mother being slapped or hit, actions that participants may not equate with violence or the notion of being “beaten”.

acts of physical and emotional violence against someone the respondent thought was gay. In sites other than Prishtina, the rates of this homophobia-related violence are high: from 13% to 22% report hitting or beating someone they thought was gay, and 18% to 27% report verbal abuse or threats. Humiliation – a form of emotional violence – is also common in most sites (from about one-third to over two-thirds of respondents, excluding Prishtina).<sup>4</sup>

Reported rates of perpetrating physical or emotional violence against a girlfriend/ex-girlfriend are low in all six sites (from 1% - 3%, also in Table 6). A disturbing finding, however, is that among participants who report being sexually, 15% to 31% also indicate that they have forced a girlfriend/ex-girlfriend to have sex when she didn't want to or was too drunk to give consent.<sup>5</sup> This is a significant level of reported sexual violence that warrants further attention.

<b>Table 6: Have you ever...</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>
<b>Kicked, punched or beat another young man/boy</b>	46%	55%	59%	41%	45%	41%
<b>Humiliated another young man/boy</b>	44%	68%	44%	34%	15%	12%
<b>Participated in a fight as part of a group or gang</b>	46%	42%	30%	39%	24%	17%
<b>Ever hit or beat someone you thought was gay</b>	17%	22%	13%	22%	2%	5%
<b>Ever made verbal abuse or threats to someone you thought was gay</b>	18%	27%	21%	25%	7%	4%
<b>Threatened to hurt your (ex) girlfriend</b>	3%	3%	1%	2%	3%	3%
<b>Hit or punched your (ex) girlfriend</b>	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	3%
<b>Had sex with your (ex) girlfriend when she didn't want to OR was too drunk to say whether she didn't want to*</b>	28%	24%	15%	31%	25%	31%

\* Percentages of perpetrating non-consensual sex are only out of students who report being sexually active. For the other questions about having threatened to hurt or hit/punched your (ex)girlfriend, percentages are out of all participants who responded to the question.

Baseline results also reflect a strong tolerance for the use of physical violence in various situations. The majority of respondents in all sites indicate they would join in when their friends are fighting (regardless of whether they agree with the reason for the fight) and that they condone violence when they perceive that a gay person is “flirting” with them (see Table 7). In addition, over half of respondents agree with the use of violence to discipline children in four out of the six sites.

<b>Table 7: Totally agree or partially agree...</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>
<b>Even if I disagree with the reason for the fight, I will join my friends that are involved in a fight</b>	84%	83%	81%	61%	60%	64%
<b>It is okay to hit or kick a gay person if he flirts with you</b>	88%	86%	86%	87%	73%	71%
<b>It is acceptable if parents beat their children when they don't behave well</b>	63%	34%	46%	64%	59%	64%

<sup>4</sup> The relatively low percentages of reported humiliation in the two Prishtina sites is possibly due to the Albanian translation of the word “humiliate,” which, according to the local team, may not have been well understood by students.

<sup>5</sup> The reported percentage of sexually active respondents is as follow: S=38%; Z=53%; B1=29%; B2=39%; P1=28%; and P2=24%.

As noted above, students' attitudes about violence in the abstract don't always align with their intentions to intervene to stop fights. Table 8 below shows that the majority of students in nearly all sites report the intention to break up fights between their friend(s) and his girlfriend or another boy.<sup>6</sup>

<b>Table 8: I will try to stop a fight if...</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>
<b>A friend is fighting with another man/boy</b>	58%	54%	51%	48%	60%	65%
<b>A friend is fighting with his girlfriend*</b>	78%	74%	80%	91%	87%	85%

\* The B2, P1, and P2 surveys included a slightly modified version of this question, and the results include the percentage of students who either report he would "try to stop the fight" or "defend his girlfriend," as both responses indicate a desire to stop the violence against the girlfriend.

## Sexual and Reproductive Health

*They [YMI classes on sexual and reproductive health] are good because they are useful. Because, generally, at school, in life, no one talks with us about such things, and no one takes it as an obligation to tell us about this world –to tell us about sex, about drugs. I think that it is very useful in life.*

(Female student, Zagreb)

The study measures participants' knowledge of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) topics by the ability to indicate the correct "true" or "false" response to a series of questions about sexually transmitted infections (STIs), condoms, and fertility. Overall, very basic knowledge (e.g., that condoms protect against STIs) is high across all participants, but knowledge of broader SRH topics varies by site. For certain questions, such as whether some STIs are asymptomatic in men, or whether fertility varies during a women's cycle, the majority of respondents were unable to identify the correct response. These gaps in knowledge are noteworthy, especially in light of the fact that among sexually active participants, the average age of sexual initiation is between 14 and 15. As illustrated in the quote above and in other qualitative data from this study, these students have little access to accurate SRH information outside of the project.

<b>Table 9: Gave the correct True/False response that...</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>
<b>Condoms protect against STIs</b>	94%	91%	97%	97%	84%	84%
<b>Some STIs don't show symptoms in men</b>	22%	31%	16%	19%	21%	19%
<b>People can get HIV by sharing needles</b>	78%	81%	88%	74%	55%	55%
<b>A healthy looking person can have HIV</b>	60%	75%	78%	73%	32%	34%
<b>There are certain days when a woman is more likely to get pregnant</b>	34%	31%	36%	24%	17%	18%

## Drugs & Alcohol Use

*When it comes to alcohol I think that nobody can change it in the young people... because there is some party everyday. So, alcohol is used in everyday life, you know. No one will be able to change it.*

(Male student, Sarajevo)

<sup>6</sup> The findings in Table 8 are from two survey questions: "What would you do if you saw your friend fight with or hit another young man or boy" and "What would you do if you saw your friend fight with, hit, or slap his girlfriend." The questionnaire listed several responses, including: try to stop the fight; join the fight and help my friend; call for help; and do nothing. Additionally the survey administered in 2012 (in B2, P1, and P2) including the option "defend his girlfriend".

With the exception of those in the Prishtina schools, the majority of participants report consuming alcohol. Moreover, regular “binge drinking” (defined as having six or more drinks on one occasion, once per month or more often) is reported by 11% to 38% of participants. Given the association between alcohol abuse, violence, and other adverse health outcomes, the frequency of alcohol use in several of the study sites merits attention. Although respondents were asked about several illicit drugs (marijuana, LSD, inhalants, cocaine, and heroin – not all data shown), they were most likely to report having used marijuana. From 2% to 26% of respondents indicate that they have used marijuana.

<b>Table 10: Reported alcohol and drug use</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>
<b>Report that has used alcohol (ever)</b>	52%	80%	68%	73%	22%	21%
<b>Report binge drinking (having 6 or more drinks on one occasion) at least once per month*</b>	24%	38%	18%	39%	12%	11%
<b>Report that has used marijuana (ever)</b>	15%	26%	6%	9%	2%	3%

\* For S, Z, and B1, the questionnaire asked students how regularly they had had six or more drinks on one occasion over the past six months. In B2, P1 and P2, the questionnaire asked about binge drinking in the past three months.

## Conclusions

**By and large, findings illustrate the pervasiveness of violence and inequitable gender norms in the lives of the participating young men. While some variation exists by site, the findings also underscore significant gaps in basic sexual and reproductive health knowledge, as well as frequent alcohol use, across the region. Taken as a whole, these findings make a compelling case for sustained intervention in all four program areas, as well as for the need to scale up evidenced-based programs in order to increase coverage for at-risk youth.**

It is important to note that these findings are not representative of the cities included, or even of other technical schools in the area. As with any study that relies on self-reported behavior, social desirability bias could have resulted in false reporting. These limitations notwithstanding, the findings presented offer important insights into the crucial teenage years of boys in the Western Balkans region, a transitional stage of life when many attitudes and behaviors that will likely be carried into adulthood are still developing. In particular, the findings suggest that this is a period when participants are surrounded by violence in their private and public lives, and when *social* norms condoning violence may compete with *individual* intentions to stop fights among friends. As such, the findings suggest a critical need to help youth in the region overcome this culture of violence and align themselves to a more peaceful, equitable, and healthy masculinity that can empower them as agents of change in their communities.

In addition to the need for more programs such as YMI that address violence, gender inequality, and health risks during this important life stage, it is also important to apply rigorous evaluation research techniques to document what works in this region and to guide the effective design and scaling up of the best youth programming efforts.

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