

INTRODUCTION

Violence against Women and their Children (VAW/C) are major human rights and public health concerns with devastating consequences for women, children, their families and communities. While women’s organisations have long worked to address this violence, the last decade has seen an increase in donor and government-funded programming to prevent VAW/C, especially in the Global South.¹ There has also been an increase in research to better understand the drivers of VAW and VAC—and the intersections between them—as well as effective ways to reduce this violence and mitigate its consequences.

Most of the recent research in the global violence prevention field has focused on evaluating the impact of prevention programmes using scientific methods popular in the public health field—in particular, randomised controlled trials (RCTs)² which measure specific pre-defined programmatic outcomes. When well-designed and appropriately used, RCTs can contribute valuable knowledge on the impacts of programmes. It is now widely recognised that RCTs should be accompanied by

rigorous qualitative research and monitoring; however, sometimes the elevation of RCTs overshadows the use of other learning and data collection methods – especially those drawing on practice - that enable a more holistic understanding of how an intervention is implemented in a specific context and why changes occur.

This paper by the Prevention Collaborative³ sets out why we believe that practitioner learning and everyday experiences in designing and implementing programmes form an important body of ‘practice-based knowledge’ with significant potential to improve programming — ensuring programmes and approaches are adapted and optimised for the specific context and respond to the needs and realities of those they are intended to benefit. The paper also sets out how we will seek to build on learning from organisations who have already contributed to documenting practitioner knowledge, collaborate with them and others to document, appraise and synthesise ‘practice-based knowledge’ and support its application to prevent VAW/C.

KEY ISSUES THIS PAPER ADDRESSES

- What is Practice-Based Knowledge?
- Why is Practice-Based Knowledge not currently prioritised in the VAW/C prevention fields?
- Why is Practice-Based Knowledge important for feminist-informed prevention work?
- How will the Prevention Collaborative work to elevate Practice-Based Knowledge?

¹ The terms ‘Global South’ and ‘Global North’ are used in this paper to call attention to existing power imbalances in knowledge creation across and within different contexts which we hope to address collaboratively, and are not intended to reinforce division.

² Some noteworthy RCTs in this field include SASA! and the SHARE trials; you can find the summaries generated by the Prevention Collaborative here: <http://prevention-collaborative.org/category/evidence/study-summary/>

³ The Prevention Collaborative is a growing global network of practitioners, researchers and activists working collaboratively with key actors to support the delivery of cutting-edge violence prevention programmes informed by evidence and feminist-principles. These principles include: (i) recognition of patriarchal power and structures as the root cause of violence against women; (ii) a commitment to an intersectional understanding of violence; and (iii) accountability to women and women’s organisations.



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WHAT IS PRACTICE-BASED KNOWLEDGE?

There is little consensus about what Practice-Based Knowledge entails, but agreement that it is closely tied to the learning accumulated by practitioners responsible for designing and delivering programme interventions and other strategies of social change.

In the violence prevention field, this diverse group can variously include the staff of non-government organisations (NGOs), local government officers,

activists and violence prevention networks and movements.

In line with our understanding of what constitutes ‘knowledge’ (see below), we consider Practice-Based Knowledge to be part of—not separate from—a broad spectrum of knowledge generation and learning. Our working definition of Practice-Based Knowledge, inspired by Raising Voices, Uganda⁴, is below.

Practice-Based Knowledge comprises the cumulative knowledge and learning acquired by practitioners from designing and implementing diverse programmes in different contexts, including insights gained from observations, conversations, direct experiences and programme monitoring.

More specifically, this includes:

- Practical knowledge and skills gained through hands-on action (e.g. facilitating community activities and dialogues, running a training session, responding to backlash).
- Stories and experiences shared with practitioners by programme participants and other stakeholders.
- Direct observations of programme activities (e.g. a community dialogue, a couples training) being implemented and their consequences – both intended and unintended.
- Analysis of monitoring data collected to track progress of certain activities and their outcomes.
- Individual and group reflections on personal and organisational culture, practices and power dynamics and how these facilitate or constrain programme implementation and results.

⁴ Learn more about Raising Voices’ work at www.raisingvoices.org



Practice-Based Knowledge is related to the concrete experiences of practitioners implementing programme activities in a specific local context. It captures how they understand programme processes and impacts, including how wider events and the actions and responses of programme participants, field staff and other local actors shape programme processes and outcomes.

It can be generated from multiple sources in a variety of ways including storytelling, audio-visual techniques, conversations, group discussions, observations, participatory exercises, brainstorming, and field-notes – which may resemble or be very different from more traditional research methods.

'KNOWLEDGE' IN THE PREVENTION FIELD

The Prevention Collaborative believes that 'knowledge' includes a variety of forms of information - numerical, narrative, experiential, audio and visual - that can support collective understanding of the causes, consequences, dynamics, and experiences of VAW/C, as well as the action necessary to address and prevent this violence.

Our view of knowledge is shaped by our feminist values and a recognition that all knowledge is 'positioned.' In other words, we believe that knowledge production is a political process which shapes our understanding of reality and is, in turn, shaped by it, and that there are many, diverse ways of knowing and learning.

We are fundamentally committed to support the diversification and decolonisation of the types, topics and producers of knowledge, while redressing historical imbalances where knowledge has largely been collected and analysed by researchers from the Global North operating within Western scientific paradigms.

We believe that a relevant, useful body of knowledge is drawn from both evaluative research and practice-based learning, and meets the following criteria:

- It comprises a diversity of voices and perspectives, and is generated by a range of actors including practitioners and researchers, as well as survivors, community members, and activists.
- It acknowledges how the knowledge is 'situated' – including the position of the author or other learner and the specific historical, socio-cultural and geographical context to which it refers.
- It defines the different types of knowledge and outlines clear criteria for judging the strengths, limitations, quality, relevance, and applicability of each form of knowledge.
- It recognises that people and organisations learn in different ways, and therefore seeks to gather and communicate knowledge and learning in ways that are accessible to different audiences, in particular those whose lives the knowledge is intended to be about.





WHY IS PRACTICE-BASED KNOWLEDGE NOT CURRENTLY PRIORITISED IN THE VAW/C PREVENTION FIELDS?

While important initiatives are being undertaken by a limited number of organisations to document practice, efforts to elevate Practice-Based Knowledge in the violence prevention field are still limited. Our analysis suggests that there are a number of inter-related reasons for this:

THE EXPECTATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL DONORS

In the Global South in particular, most violence prevention programmes and approaches have been funded by international development agencies and donors from the Global North. These donors often prescribe which interventions are to be implemented and which results are to be documented and reported. This sometimes stifles the initiatives of local organisations to use different approaches to document outcomes and learnings.

DOMINANT HIERARCHIES OF 'EVIDENCE'

Over the last two decades, donor organisations have increased their focus on 'evidence-based' programming. However, 'evidence' has tended to be narrowly defined as data and analysis generated through means deemed by the (Northern) scientific community to constitute 'rigorous scientific design'—such as RCTs, quasi-experimental studies, cohort studies and cross-sectional studies—with many of the resulting studies published in peer-reviewed journals in the Global North.

In the VAW/C fields,⁵ the focus on these forms of research and evaluation arose in response to demands to move beyond small-scale studies and testimonies about violence prevention projects in order to generate data that is generalisable to wider populations. This growth in impact evaluations using control or comparison groups has been immensely valuable, generating strong evidence on the core drivers of VAW/C and identifying several effective

programmes that have achieved measurable shifts in violence prevalence and related attitudes and behaviours. This evidence has shown that violence *is* preventable and has been important to justify the recent growth in policy focus and funding for preventing VAW/C.

However, while an essential development for the field, this has also resulted in a considerable narrowing of the type of research and programmes that get funded and which elements of a programme or theory of change are deemed worthy of investigation. There has been an almost exclusive focus on measuring 'impact' in terms of a limited number of outcomes (over other criteria of evaluation such as sustainability, relevance, etc.), often at the expense of understanding why and how interventions interact with local dynamics to contribute to complex change.

THE DROWNING OUT OF OTHER VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES

As a result, the voices, theories and perspectives of 'expert' policymakers, consultants, researchers and large donor agencies have dominated those of practitioners and activists working locally around the world, as well as those of the women, men and communities these programmes engage. There has been little funding available to support local organisations, activists and movements to document and synthesise other forms of knowledge and learning, especially those that are practice-based, narrative, indigenous or locally produced.

LIMITED CAPACITIES OF ORGANISATIONS TO DOCUMENT PRACTICE-BASED KNOWLEDGE

Organisations – in both the Global South and North – have also therefore not had the time or human capacities to share know-how and develop systems and processes to document, synthesise and share practice-based knowledge and feed this back into programme implementation and adaptation.

⁵ It is important to emphasise that we see the VAW/C prevention fields as global, comprising the work of actors in the Global South and Global North and the exchanges that happen between and within these regions.



WHY IS PRACTICE-BASED KNOWLEDGE IMPORTANT FOR FEMINIST-INFORMED PREVENTION WORK?

BETTER UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF PRACTITIONERS

Elevating the diverse voices and experiences of practitioners across different contexts in the Global South and Global North is essential to redress historic knowledge biases and improve understanding of violence and prevention work in diverse political, social, historical and cultural contexts. This should include opportunities for practitioners – who are often members of the communities they are serving – to share their own theories and insights about violence and its prevention and seldom discussed personal impacts of prevention work, such as emotional hardship or vicarious trauma.

UNDERSTANDING PROGRAMME DYNAMICS AND PROCESSES

The more that Practice-Based Knowledge is documented, synthesised and shared, the more it can help us to better understand the ‘nuts and bolts’ of prevention programming and how to replicate, adapt and scale promising interventions and practices.

While traditional forms of research and evaluation can show whether a programme is effective in terms of pre-defined outcomes, different forms of practice-based learning can generate a more nuanced understanding of the detailed workings of prevention approaches. This can enable understanding of the direct experiences and activities of those who are involved and how programme activities have interacted with local dynamics to produce change.

This is also important to examine other key issues such as the relevance of a programme to the needs and priorities of local stakeholders and whether positive changes are likely to be sustained longer-term.

INTENDED AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Documenting and analysing Practice-Based Knowledge can also help to track the ongoing consequences of programme activities and social change strategies – both intended and unintended – especially in terms of shifting power relations, beliefs, behaviours and norms. This may include community-level consequences, such as resistance or backlash, a pace of change that may be too rapid to be sustainable or a positive ripple effect that was not expected. This information can provide insights on how to address day-to-day opportunities and challenges, leading to more adaptive, agile and strategic decision-making.

TELLING A MORE INCLUSIVE STORY ABOUT PREVENTION

It is important to remain critical about who is driving the narrative around what counts as ‘evidence’ and ‘positive results’ to embrace and amplify more diverse ways of understanding violence and violence prevention. Learning from Practice-Based Knowledge may inform more comprehensive and inclusive narratives of violence prevention rooted in politicised, feminist approaches and the realities of those who experience violence and engage directly to prevent it.





HOW WILL THE PREVENTION COLLABORATIVE WORK TO ELEVATE PRACTICE-BASED KNOWLEDGE?

The Prevention Collaborative will endeavour to work with practitioners and activists to elevate Practice-Based Knowledge and encourage stakeholders in the VAW/C prevention fields to value and apply this knowledge. This will be a core component of our work in the coming years across our four strategic pillars:

- 1) Knowledge
- 2) Accompaniment
- 3) Community
- 4) Advocacy



KNOWLEDGE

KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES AND GUIDANCE

We are committed to source and share a range of knowledge resources that feature Practice-Based Knowledge on VAW/C prevention. We will also partner with practitioners and organisations to support documentation and synthesis of Practice-Based Knowledge in ways that are accessible and useful to those supporting the implementation of prevention programmes. These resources will be available to search, browse and download on our Knowledge Platform (www.prevention-collaborative.org/knowledge-platform) and for the use of our Prevention Mentors and the organisations they support through Learning Partnerships (see below).

We recognise that in curating, writing and disseminating these knowledge resources, we are participating in shaping and defining what counts as knowledge. In this respect, we are committed to avoid replicating the same power imbalances that feminist approaches seek to address by remaining aware of our own power as knowledge translators and ensuring that power is balanced equally in our partnerships. We will prioritise accountability to practitioner experiences,

ensuring mutual and participatory learning processes that are representative of a diversity of viewpoints and knowledge sources and ensure practitioners are involved in how concepts are articulated and framed. We will also invite a diverse range of individuals and organisations to write or contribute to our Practice-Based Knowledge resources.

RE-IMAGINING VALIDATION AND RIGOUR FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

We wish to contribute to a conversation in the violence prevention field about how to ensure rigour in documenting and sharing Practice-Based Knowledge as well as the ethics of formulating knowledge inspired by feminist values and rooted in accountability to those who hold the knowledge itself.

Drawing on feminist methodologies, we will engage in dialogue to consider what concepts like validity, rigour and quality might mean and how different sources and types of knowledge can be valued both on their own terms and in terms of how they sit alongside other forms of knowledge to create a broader understanding and inform more effective and relevant programming.



ACCOMPANIMENT

SYNTHESISING PRACTICE-BASED LEARNING

As part of our accompaniment programme (see <http://prevention-collaborative.org/technical-accompaniment/>), we will work with our Learning Partners to develop and pilot mechanisms to document, build on and synthesise Practice-Based Knowledge in each context.

We will seek to understand and respect how learning from research and practice already takes place in each organisation and setting and then discuss whether and how other approaches might complement or extend this. We will also ensure that external evidence on the most effective approaches to address violence is discussed openly to see how it may be relevant in each context.



COMMUNITY

WORKING GROUP

As part of the Collaborative's learning community, we have established a Working Group to lead the Collaborative's thinking around Practice-Based Knowledge. This group comprises a diverse team of practitioners, researchers and activists from different parts of the world who are committed to engaging in a global dialogue about elevating Practice-Based Knowledge. Through this mechanism, the Prevention Collaborative will seek to actively address the challenges inherent in knowledge hierarchies and help re-conceptualise the way we learn from practice.

GROWING OUR LEARNING COMMUNITY

We will continue to host or co-host a number of events to discuss and shape this agenda with interested individuals and organisations. We will seek to share our current thinking, engage in dialogue on the role of Practice-Based Knowledge, and support the growth of a community of practitioners, researchers and activists who recognise the importance of bringing this knowledge to the field and other related disciplines.



ADVOCACY

INFLUENCING POLICY AND ACTION ON KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

This work will inform the development of a dialogue and advocacy agenda on elevating Practice-Based Knowledge in the violence prevention field, including ensuring adequate funding for this work.

This will include focused messaging for a variety of audiences, such as donors and governments, and seeking to grow our global network to include a diverse range of organisations and groups who may also wish to advocate for broadening conceptions of what counts as evidence and elevating Practice-Based Knowledge.



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THE PREVENTION COLLABORATIVE

The Prevention Collaborative works to strengthen the ability of key actors to deliver cutting edge violence prevention interventions informed by research-based evidence, practice-based learning and feminist principles. For more information go to www.prevention-collaborative.org

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