Preaching to the choir: effects of the Mentors in Violence Prevention programme on 'the bad apples'

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Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) is a systematic education programme aimed at addressing gender inequality and preventing violence among boys and men. The programme originates from Canada and the USA, and since 2015 has been introduced in a number of Swedish schools. Whereas most evaluations of MVP and other programmes addressing gender-based violence focus on broad changes, we argue that these evaluations fail to provide insight into where and for whom the programmes are or are not effective. By identifying the participants with knowledge and attitudes furthest away from the target assumptions of the programme and following them throughout the programme, we can see what effects the programme has on those with the most problematic knowledge and attitudes. The study shows that MVP does not seem to contribute to a more positive development for the group of students whose knowledge and attitudes are furthest from the programme’s target assumptions. Moreover, the study shows that the comparison group shows a more positive development over time than the MVP group. This leads to the conclusion that MVP seems to have limited potential to change the specific group with low levels of knowledge about violence and most problematic attitudes towards violent behaviour.

Key words Mentors in Violence Prevention • MVP • preventing gender-based violence • evaluation • violence prevention

Key messages
• Identifying the group with attitudes and behaviours furthest away from the target assumptions of the programme makes it possible to see the intervention’s effects on these ‘bad apples’.
• The findings suggest a small but significant positive change among both the intervention group and the comparison group, these changes are however greater in the comparison group than in the intervention group.
• There is a risk that the MVP programme only leads to positive changes for those with knowledge and attitudes already close to the programme’s target assumptions.
Introduction

In the past decade efforts to prevent men’s violence against women (gender-based violence) (GBV) have undergone a shift in focus from viewing men as perpetrators to viewing them as an active part in the prevention of GBV (Minerson, 2011; Carlson et al, 2015; Tolman et al, 2016; Westmarland et al, 2021). Interventions such as the Mentors in Violence Prevention programme (MVP), therefore aim to educate and empower both men and women in the struggle to end GBV (Minerson, 2011; Tolman et al, 2016; Eriksson et al, 2018; Jonsson, 2019).

From a young age, men’s violent behaviour is already evident both as victims of violence and as perpetrators. In an overview by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, 10.4 per cent of boys (16–19 years) have stated that they have been subjected to physical violence in year 2020, compared to girls in the same age where the number is 6.5 per cent (Brottsförebyggande rådet, 2022). In total, 28 per cent of boys and 20 per cent of girls aged 15–16 stated that they’ve committed a violent crime during 2019 (Westerberg, 2020). In a cross sectional study with samples from nine youth health centers in Sweden, 6 percent of a total of 2,250 young women reported being subjected to sexual violence. About a third of these were committed by a former or current partner (Blom, 2015).

Internationally and in Sweden, several group-oriented initiatives that aim to prevent GBV are being made, even though violence prevention work, both in practice and in theory, is a new field. Most of these efforts have been shorter campaigns and lectures about GBV (Eriksson et al, 2018). These temporary interventions do not have a major preventive effect (Flood, 2009). As a counterweight to this, more long-term interventions have recently emerged (Barker et al, 2007). According to research conducted by the WHO, programmes with gender-critical perspectives seem to have the best effect (Barker et al, 2007; 2010). One such programme is MVP, a systematic education programme that addresses gender inequality and aims to prevent violence among boys and men. The programme originates from Canada and the USA (Katz, 1995; Katz et al, 2011).

The Swedish agency for Youth and Civil Society Issues (MUCF) assessed the possibility for MVP to be transferred to Sweden (Sjögren et al, 2013). The programme has therefore been re-programmed to fit a Swedish school context by the Swedish organisation ‘MÄN’, a ‘non-profit, pro-feminist organization’ (mfj, 2019a) that ‘take[s] action against men’s violence towards women. [And aims] to change destructive masculinity norms and reduce male violence’ (mfj, 2019b).

MVP

The MVP-programme is based on the theory of social justice (Katz et al, 2011) and pro-feminist understanding of violence and power. The starting point of social justice is a focus on the social context of violence and on how individuals can participate in different ways in the maintenance of violence and male privilege. The programme highlights men’s role in the use of violence, the extent of violence, how violence is
linked to masculinity and how violence can be seen as a continuum where ‘less serious’ forms of violence are associated with more serious violence (see Kelly, 1988). The idea is that there is a ‘progression in abuse’ and that physical violence is preceded by psychological or emotional violence, as well as less serious forms of physical violence, such as sexual harassment, and racist and homophobic language (Eriksson et al., 2018).

The theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2016) is not explicitly mentioned in the programme. However, there are clear theoretical links with it (Gottzén et al., 2013). It is worth noting that in the United States the programme originally used high-status young men, star athletes, to bring about change (Katz, 1995). These athletes can be seen as embodying hegemonic masculinity. Thus, the programme – at least in its original version – can be seen as using ‘hegemonic’, high-status men to convey a message of non-violence and equality.

MVP is based on a spectator approach, and a central part consists of scenarios depicting various forms of violence and including perpetrators, victims and bystanders. After each scenario, the spectators are given different options for what they are expected to or can do. The goal is to discuss the participants’ own experiences and relate them to the scenario presented, and by extension to show what it is possible for different individuals or groups to do in the situation, depending on their own position (Katz et al., 2011). The present study, however, does not focus on bystander intervention and the participants’ ability and confidence to confront violence. Instead, it focuses on the target group’s knowledge and attitudes towards violence and patriarchal notions.

In earlier evaluations done in the USA, MVP has been found to produce significant positive changes in attitudes and predicted behaviours among students (for example, Ward, 2001; Cissner, 2009). During 1999–2000, Ward (2001) conducted a mixed method evaluation of MVP at Northeastern University, Massachusetts. The results suggested that the MVP programme led to a positive change among the students and increased their level of knowledge and awareness about gender violence and equality. The programme led to significant changes in attitudes toward gender violence among the students, and their confidence to confront male violence against women also increased. Further, the evaluation data revealed that students who underwent the MVP lesson series were satisfied with their experience of the programme (Ward, 2001).

In a mixed method evaluation Cissner (2009) found that the MVP programme at Syracuse University was effective among high school students. Feedback from both stakeholders and participants was generally positive. In addition, Cissner (2009) argues that the MVP was successful in decreasing participants’ sexism.

**MVP in Sweden**

The Swedish MVP programme is a manual-based lesson series implemented in primary and secondary school. The overall aim of the Swedish MVP programme is to restrain and prevent men’s and boys’ violence. Students and teachers learn to take responsibility for each other and speak out against violent actions. Furthermore, the programme aims to (I) raise awareness about violence, (II) question conventional norms about gender, relationships and violence, (III) generate dialogue, and (IV) inspire leadership and bystander interventions (mfj, 2019b). The programme consists of seven two-hour lessons. The first lesson focuses on violence and actions that can counteract violence. The second lesson aims to get the participant to question stereotypical gender and masculinity norms. The third lesson focuses on sexual
violence and how to counteract it. Lesson four focuses on sexual harassment and how to counteract it. Lesson five problematises and dispels rape myths. Lesson six highlights heterosexism and verbal abuse. The seventh lesson is a workshop where the participants create a plan to reduce violence.

Responsible for the intervention are teachers at each school. To make sure that the teachers follow the programme as intended they receive manual training led by MÄN. The teachers can also receive consultation during the programme (Eriksson et al, 2018).

**The effects on the ‘bad apples’**

Although many men do not condone or use violence against women, a significant number of them do (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2013; Tolman et al, 2016; Øverlien, 2018). Identifying the group with attitudes and behaviours furthest away from the target assumptions of the programme would make it possible to see the intervention’s effects on these participants. Previous evaluations of MVP, however, fail to provide insight into effects on the actual participants in the prevention programmes (Tolman et al, 2016), which makes it difficult to draw any conclusions about whether the programme influences those particular participants. To measure the effects of various preventive measures in the school environment, and specifically violence prevention, is complicated (Cissner, 2009; Skolverket, 2011). When examining the quantitative effects of these interventions, pre- and post-tests (quasi-experimental studies) are common designs (for example, Ward, 2001; Cissner, 2009; Skolverket, 2011). Results from such studies indicate, among other things, difficulties in identifying effects as a result of the school environment. In other words, there are limited opportunities to control for only those aspects that constitute the intervention itself (Eriksson et al, 2018). The study presented here is not an exception to this.

Another problem with previous pre- and post-test designs that have been pointed out is that they tend to examine cross-sectional data. This increases the probability of achieving statistically significant changes, due to large groups, but lacks the possibility to identify individual changes among the respondents since the cross-sectional data does not necessarily deal with the possibility that individual ‘A’ answers at both pre- and post-tests (Eriksson et al, 2018). It is therefore impossible to analyse whether the intervention actually changes the same individuals, or if observed changes are due to a new population. This should justify the adoption of a broader approach when it comes to evaluations of effects, one where the data is not only cross-sectional but also individual, allowing for analyses of specific groups. In this case, that would be the groups whose knowledge, attitudes and behaviours are furthest from the target assumptions of the programme. By using a sub-sample of participants, this study enables us to follow those participants who in the pre-test reported values that were furthest away from the programme’s target assumptions to see whether these individuals change their attitudes and behaviours as an output of the programme. In other words, this study makes it possible to examine whether the programme leads to changes for the groups in greatest needs of change.

**Aim of the study**

The present study examines the effects on participants in the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme in selected Swedish comprehensive schools (aged
This is done by identifying and analysing individual changes for those participants whose knowledge and attitudes are furthest from the target assumptions of the programme. The study will answer the following questions:

i. What changes occur in the target group’s knowledge and attitudes towards verbal, physical and sexualised violence over time?

ii. To what extent can any effects on participants’ attitudes and behaviours be attributed to the intervention?

**Method**

The present study is based on data from a quasi-experimental, pre-test/post-test design (Eriksson et al, 2018). The study was carried out at seven different primary (age 12–15) and secondary (age 16–19) schools in Sweden; six of these made use of the MVP programme and one were included for the purpose of comparison. All but one of the schools chose to participate (self-selected). The comparison school was recruited by the research group. It is comparable to the self-selected schools in terms of criteria such as municipality size, population composition in the municipality, and the academic/vocational orientation of the school.

**Participants**

A total of 832 individuals participated in the study; 481 of them were students who participated in the MVP project and 351 were in the comparison group. Of all the students, 506 (61%) were in grades 7–9 (age 12–15) and 326 (39%) attended upper-secondary school (age 16–19). The comparison group consisted partly of students who attend schools where MVP is used but did not participate in the programme, and partly by students at the comparison school where the MVP programme was not available. This means that 58 per cent of the population are in the group that received MVP and 42 per cent are in the comparison group. In the following presentation, the two comparison groups are merged into a distinct group, and hence there are no or only minor differences between the separate groups.

There is an over-representation of boys in the population, seen in relation to the gender distribution between boys and girls in Swedish schools. A total of 542 of the students were boys (65%) while 290 students were girls (35%). The distortion in the case of gender is not a result of dropout, but can be explained by the selection group. The upper-secondary schools included in the survey have a high proportion of boys. This over-representation is due to the schools’ orientations and profiles, which mainly attract male students. As a result, this group is also large in the study. The analytical methods used to study differences between boys and girls consider the differences in group size.

In total it is possible to follow 459 individuals over all three measuring points: (T1) before the intervention; (T2) shortly after the intervention; and (T3) three to six months after the intervention. The analysis and conclusions in the present study are based on these 459 individuals, and although there may be minor internal missing values, they should not affect the conclusions in any way.
Procedure
The study examined whether students’ knowledge and attitudes have changed as a result of the MVP programme. The changes are compared with a sample of students not receiving any structured violence intervention. By analysing the same individuals over all three measurement occasions it is possible to identify changes on both group and individual levels. More specifically, it is possible to identify where and for whom the programme is or isn’t effective. Conclusions based on the individuals who responded on all three occasions have the advantage that the change becomes clearer, but the disadvantage in this study is that the change may not be significant because fewer students are included in the analysis.

Instruments
The data was collected by using a questionnaire capturing the essence of the MVP intervention. When designing the questionnaire, instruments developed in the USA to measure ideas about rape myths, gender norms and gender equality were considered (Banyard et al, 2004; 2014; Cissner, 2009). The American evaluation questionnaires were somewhat problematic to translate and use directly, as they were developed for a context that differs from Sweden. Some questions from the American questionnaire were included in the survey, to enable comparisons with results from previous studies. When developing the questionnaire, other questionnaires regarding violence and harassment in a Swedish school were considered (for example, Hellfeldt et al, 2014). In addition, instruments that were developed by Jackson Katz together with researchers at California State University Long Beach have been considered. In the American version of the MVP, many sports metaphors are used and the abbreviation itself refers to ‘Most Valuable Player’. In the version used in Sweden the connection to youth sports and sport leadership is discarded. Hence, questions such as ‘As a leader, I believe it is my responsibility to initiate discussions about gender violence prevention in my sphere of influence’ were discarded in the Swedish instrument. Questions such as ‘It is important to be a role model’ were included (see Eriksson et al, 2018). To avoid validity threats, a pilot study was conducted. A total 50 students participated in a test-retest pilot study. Only questions with test-retest reliability above 0.7 were considered acceptable (Cronbach, 1951; Streiner, 2003).

All indices consist of a combination of questions that capture the degree of knowledge and attitudes. The number of questions in each index varies between three and five. Cronbach’s alpha was used to create indices and the alpha level was set to 0.68. Each question ranging from 1 = not serious at all to 7 = very serious. Answers on the lower ends 1–3 were interpreted as knowledge and attitudes furthest from the target assumptions of the intervention. The following indices (see Eriksson et al, 2018) were chosen to identify the participant’s knowledge and attitudes:

(i) Knowledge and Attitudes toward Verbal Violence (KAVV) In this index students responded to questions such as: How serious do you think the following actions are? To use words as gay or lesbians as an insult; To call someone a ‘whore’. (Cronbach’s Alpha 0.84).
(ii) Knowledge and Attitudes Physical Violence (KAPV). When observing KAPV the students responded to questions such as: *How serious do you think the following actions are?* Threatening someone with a knife or other weapons; Beating someone who provokes you; Striking back (Cronbach’s alpha 0.68).

(iii) Knowledge and Attitudes Sexualised Violence (KASV). In this index the students responded to questions such as: *How serious do you think the following actions are?* Saying or writing sexual comments about someone’s body; Sending sexual pictures of yourself to someone; Getting someone to involuntarily send sexual pictures; Touching someone in an unwelcome sexual way (Cronbach’s alpha 0.79).

To analyse the change over time we used repeated sample t-tests when the data was normally distributed, Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test when the data was not normally distributed, and descriptive statistics. According to Norman (2010) and Sullivan and Artino (2013), parametric analysis methods are sufficiently robust in analyses where several questions have been merged into an index. The analysis methods make it possible to determine how likely it is that any differences between the groups are due to random variation or can be attributed to the intervention (Djurfeldt et al, 2010). The data and the analyses have been conducted with IBM SPSS statistics 26.

**Findings**

**Knowledge and Attitudes Verbal Violence (KAVV)**

A total of 57 students, 13 per cent of the overall sample, scored under 3.5 out of 7 at T1. Of these 57 students, 98 per cent are boys and only 2 per cent are girls. Descriptive statistics indicate at least two trends in the changes that take place over time in relation to the KAVV index (Table 1). At first, the changes in mean value point to a positive development over time in both groups, during T1–T2 and T1–T3, which means that the knowledge about verbal violence increases. The mean value in the MVP group increases from 2.6 at T1 to 3.4 at T2, with a slight dip to 3.2 at T3. At the same time the mean value increased in the comparison group from 2.5 at T1 to 3.5 at T2, and slightly dropped to 3.4 at T3. These results are not however in line with the hypothesis, because the positive trend is not limited to or restricted to the MVP group receiving the prevention training. The second trend is a tendency toward disintegration in the group. This change is greater in the group receiving the MVP programme. The disintegration is captured in Table 2 as the standard deviation (Std. Deviation) increased over time in the MVP group, from 0.68 at T1 to 1.60 at T2 and 1.15 at T3. Although the same pattern occurs in the comparison group, the increase in the Std. Deviation is not as dramatic. A paired sample t-test indicates that the changes are statistically significant in both groups (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MVP T1</th>
<th>MVP T2</th>
<th>MVP T3</th>
<th>Comparison T1</th>
<th>Comparison T2</th>
<th>Comparison T3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td>2.5667</td>
<td>3.4000</td>
<td>3.1917</td>
<td>2.4970</td>
<td>3.4667</td>
<td>3.3688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Median</strong></td>
<td>2.7000</td>
<td>2.8000</td>
<td>3.2000</td>
<td>2.4000</td>
<td>3.4000</td>
<td>3.4000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Std. Deviation</strong></td>
<td>.67674</td>
<td>1.59431</td>
<td>1.14585</td>
<td>.66918</td>
<td>1.20277</td>
<td>1.12119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, the intervention group and the comparison group both underwent positive changes over time. Thus, there is an increase in knowledge levels in terms of what constitutes verbal violence along with improving attitudes toward verbal violence. The baseline is different in both groups. (Such differences in the baseline are expected, however.) There is a somewhat greater decline between T1 and T3 in the intervention group than in the comparison group. Based on this result, MVP does not appear to have the desired effect on the group of students with the lowest level of knowledge and the least beneficial attitudes regarding verbal violence. The intervention does not seem to affect the target group’s knowledge and attitudes regarding verbal violence to any greater extent, as both groups show a positive change over time. This result can be compared with the results from the analysis of all students included in the study, where a significant increase occurred in the intervention group while the increase was not significant in the comparison group (Eriksson et al., 2018).

**Knowledge and Attitudes regarding Physical Violence (KAPV)**

Boys are over-represented when it comes to negative attitudes, low level of knowledge of what violence is, and using physical violence. Of the 77 students who fell below the threshold, 84 per cent were boys and 16 per cent were girls. The results show that the intervention group and the comparison group both have a significant (Paired sample t-test) positive development between T1 and T2 (Table 3). Hence, the trend observed in relation to the first index (KAVV) is also evident in relation to KAPV (Table 4), with the exception that the significant change remains in the comparison group at T3. Thus, the intervention does not appear to change the knowledge or attitudes regarding physical violence among the MVP participants with the lowest KAPV scores. Nevertheless, the changes that occur in both groups between T1 and T2 are similar and can be an effect of several interacting factors. One such factor is that there is ongoing values-based work at the comparison schools. The measurement itself can also have a certain effect on the level of knowledge, attitudes and attention regarding these behaviours, and furthermore the maturity aspect can be a factor that contributes to a positive change.

![Table 2: Paired sample t-test KAVV T1-T2 and T1-T3, intervention and comparison](image_url)
Table 3: Paired sample t-test KAPV T1-T2 and T1-T3, intervention and comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 MVP: T1 KAPV - T2 KAPV</td>
<td>.97297</td>
<td>1.24816</td>
<td>.20520</td>
<td>.55682</td>
<td>1.38913</td>
<td>4.742</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2 MVP: T1 KAPV - T3 KAPV</td>
<td>.32456</td>
<td>1.11632</td>
<td>.18109</td>
<td>-.04236</td>
<td>.69149</td>
<td>1.792</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 Comparison: T1 KAPV - T2 KAPV</td>
<td>1.14912</td>
<td>1.41993</td>
<td>.23034</td>
<td>.68240</td>
<td>1.61584</td>
<td>4.989</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2 Comparison: T1 KAPV - T3 KAPV</td>
<td>1.05263</td>
<td>1.39395</td>
<td>.22613</td>
<td>.59445</td>
<td>1.51081</td>
<td>4.655</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant **Not significant.

Table 4: Mean, median and Std. Deviation KAPV at T1, T2 and T3, intervention and comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MVP T1</th>
<th>MVP T2</th>
<th>MVP T3</th>
<th>Comparison T1</th>
<th>Comparison T2</th>
<th>Comparison T3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.8421</td>
<td>3.8108</td>
<td>3.1667</td>
<td>2.7179</td>
<td>3.8596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>3.0000</td>
<td>3.6667</td>
<td>3.0000</td>
<td>3.0000</td>
<td>3.3333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>.46973</td>
<td>1.22662</td>
<td>1.14883</td>
<td>.54364</td>
<td>1.25593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowledge and Attitudes regarding Sexual Violence (KASV)

The analyses show similar developments over time as the previous indices (KAVV and KAPV). In the case of changes over time during T1–T2 and T1–T3, the results show positive mean changes in both groups. Parametric analyses (Paired Sample T-test) show that there are significant mean changes in both groups on all measurement occasions. The analysis of effects at the follow-up measurement T1–T3 shows similar patterns as the analysis between T1 and T2. The intervention group has a somewhat better baseline, but not as much positive change as the comparison group. (The baseline for the intervention group is slightly higher and the increase slightly lower than for the comparison group, which has a lower baseline but a slightly higher increase.) The positive changes are significant for both groups (Table 5). The sample in this index is, however, relatively small in both groups. The results indicate that the MVP intervention has no significant effect among the group with the lowest KASV scores.

Discussion and conclusion

The overall findings suggest that there is a small but significant positive change among both the intervention and comparison groups. The positive changes in all indices...
are greater, however, in the comparison group than in the intervention group. This indicates that the regular values-based work in the comparison groups seems to have a more positive effect on the target group than the MVP programme. These results are somewhat puzzling, as they are not in line with the hypothesis. In relation to the aim of the study it is therefore not possible to conclude that the intervention has a positive effect on the participants’ knowledge about violence and sexual harassment, or on their patriarchal beliefs. Further, the MVP programme seems to create a larger gap in the target group than in the comparison group. As shown in Table 1, the standard deviation increased over time from 0.68 at T1 to 1.60 at T2 in the MVP group, which means that the positive changes in the target group are more a reflection of positive changes in individual participants than an overall change in the group.

To further understand why the MVP group has smaller positive changes for all indices than the comparison group, the concept of disempowerment (Fook, 2016) can contribute an answer; the group with the most patriarchal and violent behaviour may feel that they do not need to be empowered or lectured to in this matter. When other classmates are strengthened, specific individuals may also feel disempowered, which Fook highlights as a problem; one person’s empowerment may be another person’s disempowerment. This can be due to addressing too many target groups, which may be a problem when the MVP programme targets all students. Dworkin, Fleming and Colvin (2015) also address the issue of disempowerment, where men in GBV interventions feel that they are expected to bear individual responsibility for social problems.

Boys seem to be further away from the target assumptions of the programme than girls, that is, have less knowledge about, and more problematic attitudes toward, verbal violence. This conclusion is based on the fact that there is an overrepresentation of boys in all indices when it comes to who reported more patriarchal and violent attitudes and more verbal violence. This result may reflect a fact that has been pointed out in other research, namely that men’s and boys’ violence against women and girls is a structural problem not only for women and girls, but also for men themselves.

Table 5: Paired sample t-test KASV T1–T2 and T1–T3, intervention and comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>MVP: T1 KASV - T2 KASV</td>
<td>1.15323</td>
<td>1.82080</td>
<td>.32703</td>
<td>.48535 to 1.82110</td>
<td>3.526</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2</td>
<td>MVP: T1 KASV - T3 KASV</td>
<td>1.04167</td>
<td>1.65842</td>
<td>.30278</td>
<td>.42240 to 1.66093</td>
<td>3.440</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>.002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>Comparison: T1 KASV - T2 KASV</td>
<td>2.07955</td>
<td>1.82963</td>
<td>.39008</td>
<td>1.26833 to 2.89076</td>
<td>5.331</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2</td>
<td>Comparison: T1 KASV - T3 KASV</td>
<td>1.79545</td>
<td>1.73143</td>
<td>.36914</td>
<td>1.02778 to 2.56313</td>
<td>4.864</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant.
This also highlights the need for effective GBV interventions.

The results raise questions about MVP’s potential to change the knowledge and attitudes regarding verbal violence in the specific group of mainly boys furthest away from the target assumptions. These results differ from previous analyses carried out on the basis of the entire population (Eriksson et al, 2018). In the previous study (Eriksson et al, 2018) the significant positive changes were limited to the MVP group. One conclusion is that the MVP programme has limited potential to change the level of knowledge and contribute to positive attitude changes for the specific group of boys with the least knowledge and most negative attitudes regarding verbal violence. The conclusion drawn from the analysis is that the intervention does not seem to contribute to a more positive development for the group of students who have low levels of knowledge, have negative attitudes and practice physical violence than the regular values-based work does.

The absence of differences between the intervention group and the comparison group, together with the fact that the comparison group in some sense shows a more positive development over time than the MVP group, leads to the conclusion that the studied intervention has limited potential to change GBV for the specific group of mainly boys with negative attitudes and violent behaviour. A recent published study by Bruno et al (2020) points to several pitfalls and challenges, that is, a demanding pedagogical model, othering of violence and problems connected to the feminist framing of the MVP that may reduce the positive aspects of the intervention. The data analysed in the present study can give further understanding of how the pitfalls and challenges identified by Bruno et al (2020) may influence those in most need of change.

This is in line with other evaluations of programmes aiming to reduce GBV. Namy et al (2015) have conducted a qualitative evaluation of the programme Young Men’s Initiative (YMI), which also focuses on reducing GBV, conducted at four schools in Belgrade, Sarajevo, Pristina and Zagreb. They point to short time frames as one potential problem with GBV intervention programmes in general and YMI in particular:

> These responses likely reflect the deeply entrenched patriarchal context in which these boys live, and raise important questions around the limits of change that interventions such as this can achieve within short time frames – considerations raised in other studies of male engagement programming. (Namy et al, 2015: 218)

GBV interventions seem to struggle to reach out to the group with most patriarchal and violent attitudes and behaviours. Gibbs, Jewkes, Sikweyiya and Willan (Gibbs et al, 2015), in an evaluation of the GBV programmes Creating Futures and Stepping Stones conducted in South Africa, state the following:

> Yet not all men sought to enact such changes, nor could all men who attempted to change sustain them. The case-studies point to the challenging social environments young men live in. High levels of poverty, widespread unemployment, peer networks that focus on alcohol and drug use and widespread patriarchal norms all contribute to some men not changing. Furthermore, many were highly invested in dominant youth masculinity and simply may not have
wished to change. Brief interventions such as Stepping Stones and Creating Futures remain critical for those it does impact on. (Gibbs et al, 2015: 220)

Gibbs et al (2015) highlighted poverty, unemployment and destructive peer networks in which alcohol and drug use occurred as constituting especially challenging social environments where patriarchal norms tend to be present. These factors all contribute to why some men are not changing. Economic marginalisation undergirds gender power (Gibbs et al, 2015). Interventions targeting only GBV and no other issues, such as class, may not be very effective in changing those who need it the most. Social class, however, not precede toxic masculinity. Instead, Connell (2005) and Greig (2009) argue that class and masculinity should be seen as ‘intersecting’ or ‘interacting’ with each other. “We cannot understand class or global inequality without constantly moving towards gender” (Connell, 2005: s. 48). And the opposite also holds: we cannot understand gender without understanding class. Considering the interplay between gender and class, it is possible to recognise multiple masculinities, for example, working-class and middle-class masculinities. Differences between class settings are important to recognise, but they do not make up the only pattern of differences (Connell, 2005).

Previous research shows that programmes designed to empower men in the struggle against gendered violence seem instead to be disempowering (Pease, 2008). Feelings of potential disempowerment were already evident at an early stage of the present study. While some of the participants of the programme, all young men, questioned the purpose of the programme and the evaluation during the pre-test, asking; ‘why us in particular?’, ‘why not other classes?’, ‘why not other schools?’, a few of the participants asked whether the programme was offered to them based on their immigration, ethnic or religious background. These experiences, gathered in the data-collection process, can be interpreted in line with Dworkin et al, 2015, as critical expressions of the problem ‘that they are being asked to bear individual responsibility’ for structurally framed problems (Dworkin et al, 2015: 133). Further research is needed, however, addressing aspects of how marginalisation affects GBV.

WHO (2002) stresses the need for an ecological approach when preventing violence. This approach should focus not only on individual risk factors but also (I) personal relationships, (II) physical environment such as neighbourhoods, schools and public places, (III) gender inequality, cultural attitudes and practices and finally (IV) macro factors regarding social and economic inequality.

The results of this study do not question the MVP intervention’s preventive potential for the overall population of students (that is, Ward, 2001; Cissner, 2009; Eriksson et al, 2018); there is however a risk that the programme will mostly influence those with knowledge, behaviours and attitudes already close to the target assumptions of the programme. Therefore, the programme risks only preaching to the choir, since the ones most in need of change do not exhibit positive changes that can be ascribed to the intervention.

Limitations

The present study was conducted at the same time as MVP was introduced in Sweden and may have coincided with difficulties conducting the programme properly because of the leaders’ lack of experience. On the positive side, though, such early-stage evaluation may lead to more rapid identification of problems that need to be solved,
that is, may benefit implementation. The somewhat modest effects of the programme do not necessarily need to be the fault of the MVP programme as such, but may perhaps stem from programme fidelity aspects – the teachers’ lack of experience, lack of belief in the programme and lack of ability to teach according to the programme. Some of these fidelity aspects depends on school contexts and resources rather than lack of skill. These aspects, however resulted in some deviations from the manual that may affect the outcome of the programme.

A potential validity threat of the present study is that the MVP schools are self-selected and not selected based on criteria and randomised samples, one should be cautious about generalising the results to schools in Sweden more broadly. However, both the MVP schools and the comparison schools do somewhat reflect Sweden’s geographic, demographic and ethnographic diversity.

The comparison group includes schools conducting regular work to promote equality and prevent discrimination and violence. To our knowledge, however, the ongoing values-oriented work is not systematic and/or standardised in the same way as the MVP programme. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as a comparison between non-systematic values-based work and a systematic intervention programme. Whether the MVP programme can compete with other systematic prevention programmes in Swedish schools cannot be determined by the present study.

It is difficult to obtain and track changes in knowledge and attitudes when all participants (even the control group) already receiving some intervention to promote equality and prevent discrimination and violence, even if not in a systematic way. Qualitative methods can, for future research, contribute to a better understanding of participants with knowledge and attitudes furthest away from the target assumptions and their absence of change.

Notes
1 The terms ‘gender-based violence’ (GBV) and ‘violence against women’ (VAW) can be used interchangeably, because GBV is mostly perpetrated by men against women. GBV also includes violence against men, boys and sexual minorities, or those with gender-nonconforming identities. Violence against women (VAW) is thus one type of GBV (VAWG, 2014).

2 The programme aims to create a secure context that enables reflective conversations on these issues. The pedagogical philosophy is that we learn best by training together with peers and by ourselves to raise knowledge and awareness around violence (mfj, 2019a). This part of the programme is, however, not a subject for quantitative evaluation and is therefore disregarded in the present study. Whether or not the programme succeeds in creating a secure context is not an uninteresting issue, but it should be elucidated using qualitative methods.

3 The main evaluation consisting of on qualitative and one quantitative sub-study was carried out on behalf of the Swedish National Agency for Education, which in turn received a government mandate to let external researchers evaluate MVP (Authors own, 2018). The project was approved by the ethical board (ERB in Uppsala no 2016/067). The present study is based on a sample of data from the quantitative sub-study in the main evaluation. The main study has also resulted in another article by Bruno et al (2020) which instead focused on analysing data from the qualitative sub-study.
Preaching to the choir

The self-selected schools were participating in the project ‘A municipality free from violence’ under the supervision of Men for Equality (Eriksson et al, 2018).

In grades 7–9, the proportion of girls varied between 45.7% and 48% in municipal compulsory schools during the school year 2016/2017, and in the three-year national high school programmes the proportion of girls varied between 48.3% and 48.7% in years 1–3 of high school.

According to the governing documents (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022), the school system should, through its democratic mission, promote a school climate where all children and students feel safe and respected. This means that the comparison group also undergoes active measures to curb violence and violent attitudes. MVP has been created to supplement the regular values-based work.

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**Conflict of interest**
The authors declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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