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# Impact of an H3P Approach

A FIT Case Study in Guatemala

Insights from FIT-Funded SMO, Real Humanitarian  
and local partner SERniña (REALgirl)



# Overview

Supported by FIT, Canadian Humanitarian and local partner SERniña (REALgirl) tested the impact and effectiveness of a holistic, family-centered, gender equity focused violence prevention and response program in El Hato, Guatemala. The innovative, 'Holistic 3-Pronged Approach' (H3P) includes:

- 1.** A comprehensive violence response program for victims of abuse with inclusion of boys and men;
- 2.** Family trauma healing and empowerment sessions based on traditional Mayan healing practices; and
- 3.** Community violence prevention education aimed at providing in-depth, locally driven, and holistic support to local partner communities.

The project was implemented in the rural indigenous (Maya - Kaqchikel) community of El Hato, Guatemala. The community of central El Hato has approximately 150 families or 1500 individuals total. El Hato families have an average monthly household income of \$203 USD, less than half the national average, putting households well below the poverty line.



Disclaimer: This resource includes photos of participants. FIT has refrained from identifying names of individuals and organisations to allow for privacy and safety. FIT SMOs receive approval to share photos from the participants or those responsible for participants portrayed.

# The H3P Innovation

The H3P Approach is built on the understanding that to see real and lasting social change, projects must 'go deep' by working with a smaller number of people and providing more in-depth and comprehensive support. Far too often, international projects focus on reaching as many beneficiaries as possible, losing opportunities to create sustainable change.

The design for the innovative H3P Approach flows out of this core belief. By doing deep work in one community and collaborating with a group of committed families, Real Humanitarian expected to see real healing and lasting change on individual, family, and community levels.

The innovative project focused its work with 26 families and reached over 290 family and community members (48 women, 27 men, 115 girls, and 100 boys) – seeing measurable improvement around gender equality as well as increased violence awareness and violence prevention buy-in on a community-wide level.



## The H3P Approach

The H3P Approach offers survivors of violence comprehensive violence response services including legal support, psychological support, and therapeutic support. This was a key innovation of the project, as research determined that most regional and international violence response programs are unilateral in their support.

The H3P Approach was a gender transformative (GEM 3) project. Every activity of the project aimed to address gender issues in El Hato, and all Monitoring and Evaluation strategies focused on analyzing the shifts needed on personal, familial, and community levels to create more gender equity within the El Hato community.



# Holistic 3-Pronged Approach' (H3P)

## 1

### Family Focused Interventions

In collaboration with trauma-healing and restorative justice experts, family psychologists, and gender and positive masculinity consultants, the innovation provided families that had a history of violence with in-depth family support to help them heal from past trauma, and collectively create non-violent homes where each member of the family had the opportunity to reach their highest potential.

Individual, couple and family therapy sessions | Small group healing sessions | Small group empowerment sessions | One-on-one therapy for family members | On-going, family-centered social work support.

## 2

### Community Wide Interventions

To address gender-based violence and gender inequality at the community level, the innovation led girl empowerment, violence prevention, and positive masculinity workshops for youth, educators, and parents.

Empowerment workshops for girls | Positive masculinity workshops for boys and fathers | Quarterly in-school parent workshops | Quarterly teacher training sessions.

## 3

### Victim Support Interventions

To address urgent and ongoing violence cases, the innovation provided comprehensive violence response services to any victim of violence in El Hato. To avoid re-victimization, the project acted as the sole point of contact for victims so they could receive all the support they need in one place.

Case support | Legal support | Psychological support | Individual and group therapy for victims, family members, and perpetrators.



# Key Learnings

**As an innovation testing project, there were significant learnings that provided valuable insight and best practices to the sector at large. Key learnings include but are not limited to:**

- The importance of having flexible and responsive work plans and activities.
- The improved effectiveness and impact of working with whole families, including boys and men, to address gender-based violence and gender inequality.
- The value of collaborating with local partners in co-creating a methodology and curriculum, especially incorporating traditional Mayan healing and reconciliation practices. Real Humanitarian worked alongside Q'anil (Feminist Center for Healing) to co-create a methodology for supporting children and teen survivors of sexual abuse, and also worked with Grupo K'iyarem (Collective of Mayan Healers) to develop a new curriculum which blends SERniña (REALgirl) empowerment and equity themes with traditional Mayan healing and reconciliation practices.
- The critical role healing plays in helping individuals find true empowerment.
- The understanding that survivors of familial violence want healing for themselves, their family and even for the perpetrator, not legal action that could result in incarceration or other serious legal consequences (support for restorative justice practices).
- The need to challenge and rethink data collection and validation, recognize holistic and authentic indicators and incorporate healing-based and trauma informed approach/local knowledge in results-based management strategy and MEL practices for gender-based violence.
- The importance of moving away from a broad term such as 'violence' and instead work with staff and beneficiaries to understand the different types of violence that exist and provide them with clear definitions of each.

## Key Results

- The innovation focused its work with 26 families and reached over 290 family and community members (48 women, 27 men, 115 girls, and 100 boys). Some 256 two-hour workshops and 510 therapy sessions were provided. —
- The number of cases of violence before and after the program decreased by 45%, while 79% of participants reported experiencing less violence in their homes, and 67% reported experiencing less violence in their community.
- In addition, 90% of participating women reported taking a concrete action towards their empowerment, 47% of participants were able to name a clear action they have taken in their families or communities to better support girls and women compared to 34% at baseline, and participants demonstrated more gender equitable views after the testing period, demonstrated by a significant increase in their scores on their 'Attitudes Towards Women Scale'.

These findings, as well as exhaustive qualitative data that supports these numbers, demonstrate that access to holistic, in-depth, gender equality focused, violence prevention and response programs, will result in community members adopting more gender equitable views and practices and a decline in the rates of gender-based violence.

# Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment and gender equality are inextricably linked to the prevention of gender-based violence using a holistic approach.

As a result of the H3P Approach, women and girls reported they felt more liberated from limiting gender roles and patriarchal belief systems, especially regarding power-dynamics in relationships and decision-making. Women reported improved relationships with their spouses as their home dynamics became more equitable and there was improved acceptance of women using their voices, sharing their ideas, and being seen as leaders in the family.



**There was a significant change regarding the empowerment of women and girls as a result of the H3P Approach.**

In fact, 90% of participating women reported taking a concrete action towards their empowerment. This includes 12 women seeking sexual and reproductive health support (contraception, Pap tests, visiting a health centre for information), 16 women signing up for adult literacy programs, 1 woman choosing to complete her education, 2 women starting their own small business, and 1 woman applying for and securing an accounting internship. Additionally, 47% of participants were able to name a clear action they have taken in their families or communities to better support girls and women, compared to 34% at baseline.

Women and girls are not only taking empowered action in their own lives, they are also committed to advancing women and girls' empowerment at large. Some 19 women and 18 teen girls have signed on to be part of a 'Women's Community Leadership Group' following the testing period to continue to advocate for and advance women and girls' empowerment.

**“The project helped me understand that I am a woman who has (the right to) space in every place I find myself.” – Woman Participant**

A key learning of the H3P Approach was the value and power of not only seeing women's empowerment as individual but also collective. One of the most documented positive shifts felt by the women and girl beneficiaries was the improvement of solidarity among women in the community and the value of creating networks of 'women helping women'. Collective empowerment was seen as both a successful result, and a catalyst for increased empowerment overall.

# Inclusion of Boys and Men

A key component of the H3P Approach was the inclusion of boys and men throughout the process.

Recognizing that most violence cases have a male perpetrator and that men demonstrate some of the most patriarchal viewpoints, it was crucial to involve men and boys to create sustainable change in gender-based violence and gender inequality. The H3P Approach engaged boys and men in meaningful ways throughout the entire process, and in all three prongs of the approach.

**Positive Masculinity programs were run parallel to girl and women empowerment programs. Boys and fathers were included and provided specialized healing therapies in family interventions.**

**Men who were victims of violence received comprehensive violence response services, and men who were perpetrators engaged with violence response services through a restorative justice approach. Participants and local staff all acknowledge this piece of the innovative H3P Approach as a critical component to its success.**



Women participants recognized a shift in attitudes and behaviors in how men behaved in their home as a result of the H3P Approach. Initially, most men showed little to no commitment to help with domestic chores. However, over time men started to see the importance of supporting their wife in the home. For some, this transformed into a recognition that they are not “supporting their wife” or doing ‘extra’ work, but instead performing their duty, as an equal, to help at home. Couples shared that throughout the testing period they started to divide household chores more evenly. This was also demonstrated among their children. In a closing interview, when asked what has changed in her home dynamics since the H3P Approach one girl responded: “Now my brother helps me with the dishes. He never used to do that before.”

**Participants reported that this shift occurred because of three key areas:**

- 1)** attitude change among men as a result of men’s workshops,
- 2)** improved equity and communication among spouses as a result of family therapy sessions, and
- 3)** improved agency and advocacy among women as a result of women’s workshops.

The impact of the H3P Approach on one of the men participants is reflected [in this story](#).

# Restorative Justice, Healing and Gender-Based Violence



**An interesting outcome that occurred was that of the 124+ cases of violence that were responded to by the SERniña (REALgirl) team during the H3P Approach, only one of the survivors impacted wanted to pursue legal action, despite it being offered free-of-charge with 1:1 support from the SERniña (REALgirl) team.**

Data showed that most incidents of violence within El Hato happened within the home. What became clear at baseline and stayed consistent throughout the project, was that women and children impacted by violence often feared seeking support as they did not want their family torn apart. This fear pushed them into silence. Through more in-depth work with the families during testing, it was clear that even though there was a desire to avoid legal ramifications, there was still a deep desire for victims and their family members for restorative justice.

Rooted in traditional indigenous practices, a restorative justice approach applies principles and practices centered on promoting compassion, respect, taking responsibility, healing, and strengthening relationships. Unlike a punitive approach to justice, the goal of a restorative justice approach shifts the focus from punishing individuals after wrongdoing to repairing harm and preventing recurrence to the benefit of the victim, perpetrator, and their community.

A common misconception is that a restorative justice approach means no consequences for the perpetrator and denies the victim the justice they deserve. However, true restorative justice programs not only increase offender compliance with restitution and decrease re-offending, but they also increase victim satisfaction, when compared to more traditional, punitive criminal justice responses.

Women, girls and key members of the community were supportive of this approach as it allowed them to finally access the support and services they desired, without the fear of breaking up their families which has previously kept them stuck in silence and in ongoing cycles of abuse. The project saw an incredible increase in the number of survivors seeking support rising from 0 to 61.

Real Humanitarian, and SERniña (REALgirl) are committed to making a meaningful and long-term impact. In this case, this means permanently breaking cycles of violence within families and fostering healthy relationships and violence-free home dynamics. As demonstrated through the learning and experience in the H3P Approach, a restorative justice approach is critical to that.



# Data Collection Challenges and the Need to Innovate Further

Data collection on gender-based violence is flawed and requires creativity and innovation.

An unexpected learning of the H3P Approach was the incredible challenge in collecting accurate, reliable and ethical data on indicators of violence. This was a reality discussed, explored, and brainstormed by the local team, MEL consultant, Gender consultant, Canadian team and FIT Project officers. What was discovered was that the typical mechanisms to collect indicators of violence are often unethical and do not lead to authentic results. For example, many programs set the baseline of capturing the number of victims/incidents of violence simply by asking beneficiaries directly. This was also the original planned strategy. But, once the baseline data collection began, through in-depth discussions with project therapists, social workers, and consultants it was discovered how this approach is inaccurate.

First, trust must be established with participants, which is often not yet established at baseline. Speaking up about gender-based violence has been historically shamed in Guatemala. Children and women are taught that it is something you “deal with within the family” but never discuss externally. Therefore, when asking participants about gender-based violence at the baseline, before authentic trust is established, many will minimize experiences to protect their family. In some cases, such questions being asked before relationships have formed can also scare away participants and lead to them dropping out.



Furthermore, in countries such as Guatemala, violence is normalized, and many individuals experiencing violence would not categorize their experience as violence. For example, thinking that a husband hitting his wife is just a form of “communication”. Therefore, if you ask about a participant’s experience of violence, before the program they may respond “no”, not because they are not experiencing violence but because they feel unable to accurately respond to the question. Therefore, the silencing and normalization of violence make it extremely challenging to have reliable baseline indicators, and this is where change must happen in the sector.

Throughout the H3P Approach, Real Humanitarian and SERniña (REALgirl) worked alongside local therapists, social workers, and beneficiaries to ensure reliable data for indicators of violence were collected.

# H3P- A Focused, Targeted Approach to Sustainable Social Change



**Going ‘narrow and deep’ has a greater impact than going ‘shallow and wide’**

Far too often, international projects focus on reaching as many beneficiaries as possible. The H3P Approach pushes back on this approach by testing the theory that to see real and lasting social change, projects must go narrow and deep, by working with a smaller number of people and providing more in-depth support.

The H3P Approach focused on providing long-term (12 months), in-depth, and comprehensive support to a small group of people in one area to bring about lasting and meaningful change on individual, familial, and community levels.

The success of the H3P Approach proves the importance of going narrow and deep. The H3P Approach had unprecedented results for SERniña (REALgirl): rates of violence decreased more, more survivors of violence came forward and sought support, and there were more tangible examples of women and girls taking empowered action in their lives when compared to past projects launched by SERniña (REALgirl) or similar programs.

The learnings from the H3P Approach have deepened Real Humanitarian’s and SERniña (REALgirl)’s commitment to going ‘narrow and deep’ to ensure more sustainable, higher quality, and more in-depth programs.

Explore the work of Real Humanitarian and other FIT-funded innovators using our [interactive map.](#)



**By doing deep work in one  
community and collaborating with a  
group of committed families,  
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