



Men Care+

MenCare+  
engaging men  
in a 4-country  
initiative.  
South Africa



South Africa population (1)  
54,767,000

GDP per capita (2)  
7,592 US dollar

Life expectancy (3)  
55/59

Maternal mortality (4)  
150

Adolescent birth rate (5)  
50

Place on Human  
Development Index (6)  
116

Place on Gender  
Equality Index (7)  
116

South Africa has one of the highest rates of father absence in the world. One out of two fathers are absent and only 25% of all children live with both of their biological parents. Labour migration and poverty are among the many reasons for this. Also, it is a common belief in South Africa that men should only be with their children if they can provide for them – if they are unable to do so, they choose to be absent.

A 2009 study by the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) found that more than 25% of male respondents admitted to committing rape and 42% to using physical violence against an intimate partner. Nearly three-quarters of those admitting to having perpetrated a rape said they had done so before they were 20 years old. This underlines the importance of working with young men, challenging their ideas about gender and masculinity before they become adults.

The MenCare+ programme in South Africa, encourages women and men to work together towards gender equality. The programme challenges social and gender norms and patriarchal values. A comprehensive set of strategies are implemented to engage boys and men in social change and as caregiving partners, in order to improve the health of women, men and children, to stop gender-based violence, and to build respectful relationships.

## INTERVENTIONS

### CAMPAIGNS

MenCare+ campaigns to engage men in gender equality. The programme implemented a media campaign in the Western Cape Province that encourages men to become responsible fathers and respectful partners. Billboards were installed around public transport hubs and shopping malls with the message that the positive engagement of fathers in their child's lives has benefits for the children and the fathers themselves. The billboards were complemented with a radio, print and television campaign and community mobilization activities, reaching more than 50 million people across South Africa.

A variety of tools were used to raise awareness on issues of fatherhood, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender-based violence (GBV). Printed media and radio were used to engage listeners in discussions about fatherhood, parental leave, maintenance, GBV, positive parenting, and maternal and child health. Several short films were produced that tell the personal story of male participants

(1) WorldBank Databank, 2015  
(2) WorldBank Databank, 2012  
(3) WorldBank Databank, 2015  
(4) South Africa demographic health survey, DHS 2003  
(5) WorldBank Databank 2012  
(6) Human Development Index by UNDP, 2014  
(7) Gender Inequality Index by UNDP, 2014





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in the MenCare+ programme. In the films, a number of men reflect on their own childhood experiences and share the changes that they have experienced in their own lives and in the relationships with their wives and children after participating in the MenCare+ programme.

### EDUCATION AND SERVICE PROVISION

Sexual and reproductive health groups for young men

Young men are engaged through community mobilization and invited to join education groups. This includes awareness-raising presentations and/or dialogues, community outreach and door-to-door campaigns. In the group education for young men, participants reflect on their views on gender, relationships and SRHR, including the importance of family planning and the use of contraceptives. After the 10 sessions, the young men are often questioning and challenging traditional and cultural gender norms and acknowledging the importance of accessing sexual and reproductive health services. The graduation ceremonies, organized after the last education session, are used as community events to highlight the achievement of the young men and act as an accountability measure for them within the community. They provide a forum for interaction with community stakeholders, families and parents, and allow for positive peer recognition of the young graduates. As an outcome of these groups, some participants became involved in community mobilization, community volunteering and awareness-raising sessions. Some of the young men's groups have continued to meet on a regular basis. For example, one group of young men from Khayelitsha continued to meet regularly and has partnered with the City of Cape Town towards registering their own local soccer team.

*"We started to treat our sons and daughters more equally and we renewed our appreciation for each other."*

*Couple that participated in the fatherhood group*

### FATHERHOOD GROUPS

Research shows that men's parenting of their children is often affected by how they were fathered themselves. Poor parenting, an absent father or a father who fails to be a role model can encourage a concept of fatherhood that says fathers don't need to care, or that fathers don't have a role to play at home. MenCare+ breaks this cycle by discussing masculinity, gender norms and roles, and fatherhood in its fatherhood groups. The group education for fathers focusses on SRHR, gender equality and caregiving. The men are offered a safe space to talk among each other about what it means to be a man, a father and a partner. A participant opened up during a fatherhood group meeting, stating that he deeply regrets having been an absent parent during years of being in and out of prison. The parenting sessions helped him to realize that: "This time I want to be right by my wife's side and to be an involved father. The parenting sessions have prepared me well to support my partner during pregnancy, birth and caregiving". For some of the sessions the fathers are asked to bring along their partner. The reasons for this is that once a father wants to become more involved in caregiving and parenting, sometimes the partner also needs to change her social and gender norms.

## COUNSELLING MEN ON INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

South Africa experiences high levels of intimate partner violence, with 1 in 4 women reporting having experienced violence at the hands of their intimate partners. MenCare+ seeks to stop violence by engaging men who use violence in their intimate relationships. MenCare+ partners in South Africa have trained a substantial number of counsellors in the methodology of the Toolkit for Men: Male counselling in the context of intimate partner violence. The counsellors were strategically recruited from organizations that already have programmes that are engaging men in issues of fatherhood, gender equality and/or domestic violence.

MenCare+ facilitated the counselling for men who admitted to using violence in their intimate relationships, with the aims of identifying its causes, changing their behaviour and working towards achieving gender-equitable relationships together with their partners. After individual and couple counselling, the men have the opportunity to join a support group for men who have participated in the counselling programme. The men of this group developed their own social and accountability network. This network played a supportive role in sustaining behaviour change, and these men became agents of change among their families, friends and communities.

*"We have moved from an abusive, despondent relationship to one that is free from violence and characterized by respect and effective communication."*

*Mr and Mrs Solomons, participants of gender-based counselling*

## ADVOCACY

### POLICY REFORMS

MenCare+ partners in South Africa have been involved in advocacy around the government's White Paper on Families. Advocacy activities focus on the need for policy reforms. As a result, the Minister of the Department of Social Development showed support for the MenCare+ positive discipline campaign, as well as the campaign on parental leave. MenCare+ advocates for 10 days of paternity leave and 100 days of parental leave for each parent (which cannot be transferred to the other partner) within the first 1000 days of a child's life. The positive discipline campaign was initiated by MenCare+ to make the public aware of the negative consequences of corporal punishment for children and to mobilize public support for the amendment of the Children's Act to prohibit corporal punishment in all spaces in South Africa.

MenCare+ South Africa also co-hosted the National Summit on Fatherhood and Active Parenting of Teenagers in partnership with the National Department of Social Development. During the summit, staff of partner organizations and government departments were trained by MenCare+ partners on how to encourage engaged fatherhood and active parenting of teenagers.

### PARTNERSHIPS

MenCare+ partners in South Africa established several partnerships with government bodies, in order to ensure sustainability. A key partnership was established with the National Department of Social Development. The partnership started with the National Fatherhood Seminar, with the aim of reviewing the





The MenCare+ programme is a 3-year, 4-country collaboration between Rutgers and Promundo-US, created to engage men aged 15–35 as caregiving partners in maternal and child health and sexual and reproductive health rights. The programme is supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and is implemented in Brazil, Indonesia, Rwanda and South Africa (2013-2015).

MenCare+ South Africa is a joint partnership between Sonke Gender Justice and MOSAIC Training, Service & Healing Centre for Women. These organizations are known for their success in achieving gender equality by engaging men and also in the prevention and treatment of domestic and sexual violence. The programme is supported by the City of Cape Town and the Department of Health. At the start of the MenCare+ programme, three communities in South Africa were selected for programme implementation: Khayelitsha, Mitchells Plain and Gugulethu. The implementation areas later expanded to Kensington, Wynberg, Mfuleni, Delft, Manenberg and Lavender Hill/Retreat.

National Fatherhood Strategy. Through this partnership, MenCare+ assisted with the training of social workers in five provinces in South Africa. A partnership was also established with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), with the aim of sensitizing social workers on the importance of father involvement in child development and to find ways to unblock structural barriers to father involvement within the child protection system. This collaboration resulted in seminars in three regions in the Western Cape. Partnerships have also been established with the Western Cape Department of Correctional Services and the Department of Defence to address the issue of father absence. Partnering with the government has enabled the programme to extend and strengthen the training on male involvement, for social workers in the provinces. The MenCare+ South Africa programme has also become crucial to the implementation of the National Fatherhood Strategy.



For sexual and reproductive health and rights