

Promoting Gender Equity as a Strategy to Reduce HIV Risk and Gender-based Violence Among Young Men in India

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Conclusion

Addressing gender in HIV and violence reduction programs is an important and successful strategy, and one that should be regularly taken into account. Findings indicate that both interventions led to positive shifts in gender norms and HIV and violence risk behaviors, indicating that interactive group education activities are key minimal interventions when attempting to tackle gender dynamics and HIV risk.

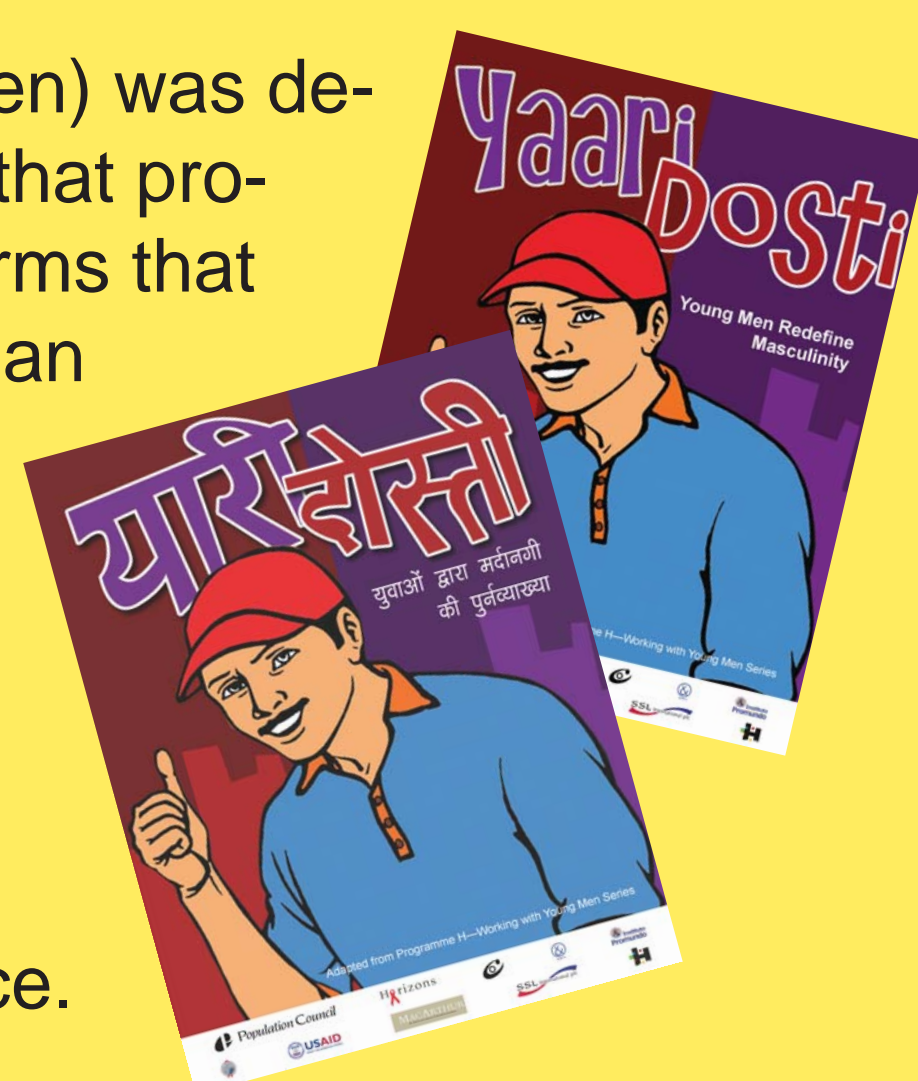
Background

Although there is increasing awareness of the role that gender norms play in fostering partner violence and HIV risk for young men and their sexual partners, few interventions have attempted to influence these norms as a key strategy for HIV and violence prevention. In addition, few evaluation studies have attempted to measure the impact of prevention interventions that focus on gender-related issues. In response to this gap, the Horizons Program, CORO for Literacy, MAMTA, and Instituto Promundo developed, piloted, and scaled-up a behavior-change intervention, *Yaari-Dosti*. The team conducted operations research to examine the effectiveness of the interventions to improve young men's attitudes toward gender roles and sexual relationships, and to reduce HIV risk behaviors and partner violence.

Description of the Intervention

Yaari Dosti (meaning friendship, or bonding, between men) was designed to stimulate critical thinking about gender norms that promote risky behavior and to create support for gender norms that promote care and communication. A gender-equitable man was defined as one who (1) supports relationships based on respect, equality, and intimacy rather than on sexual conquest, (2) is or seeks to be an involved domestic partner and father, both in terms of childcare and household activities, (3) assumes or shares with his partner reproductive health and disease prevention responsibilities, and (4) opposes intimate partner violence.

The India-adapted version of Program H involved implementation of peer-led group educational sessions in urban and rural settings and a lifestyle social marketing campaign adapted and field-tested in the urban settings for the Indian context.



Methods

Participants included young men (16 to 29 years old) from low-income urban communities in Mumbai (n = 537 in total at endline) and rural communities in Gorakhpur (n = 601 in total at endline).

Young men were divided up into 3 groups in Mumbai and 2 groups in Gorakhpur to test the impact of different combinations of intervention activities.

Mumbai (3 arms): Peer-led group education activities alone (GES); GES combined with a community-based behavior change communication campaign (GES+LSSM); and comparison group received a delayed intervention.

Gorakhpur (2 arms): Peer-led group education activities (GES) and comparison group received an unrelated intervention.

Pre- and post-intervention surveys were applied, including measures of support for (in)equitable gender norms using the Gender Equitable Men Scale, and HIV and violence risk outcomes.

Qualitative interviews were also conducted with participants.

Matched cohort data from young men who were interviewed both during baseline and follow up were used for analysis.



Characteristics of the Study Population

Table 1 Profile of sexually active young men

Background characteristics	Mumbai (Urban)			Gorakhpur (Rural)	
	GES+LSSM (n = 333)	GES Comparison (n = 321)	Comparison (n = 221)	GES (n = 524)	Comparison (n = 516)
Mean age (yrs)	21	20	22	19	19
Married (%)	11	10	21	26	29
Education (median years)	9	10	8	10	8
Employed (%)	70	57	79	31	45
Mean age at first sex among those sexually experienced (years)	18	18	18	16	16

Results

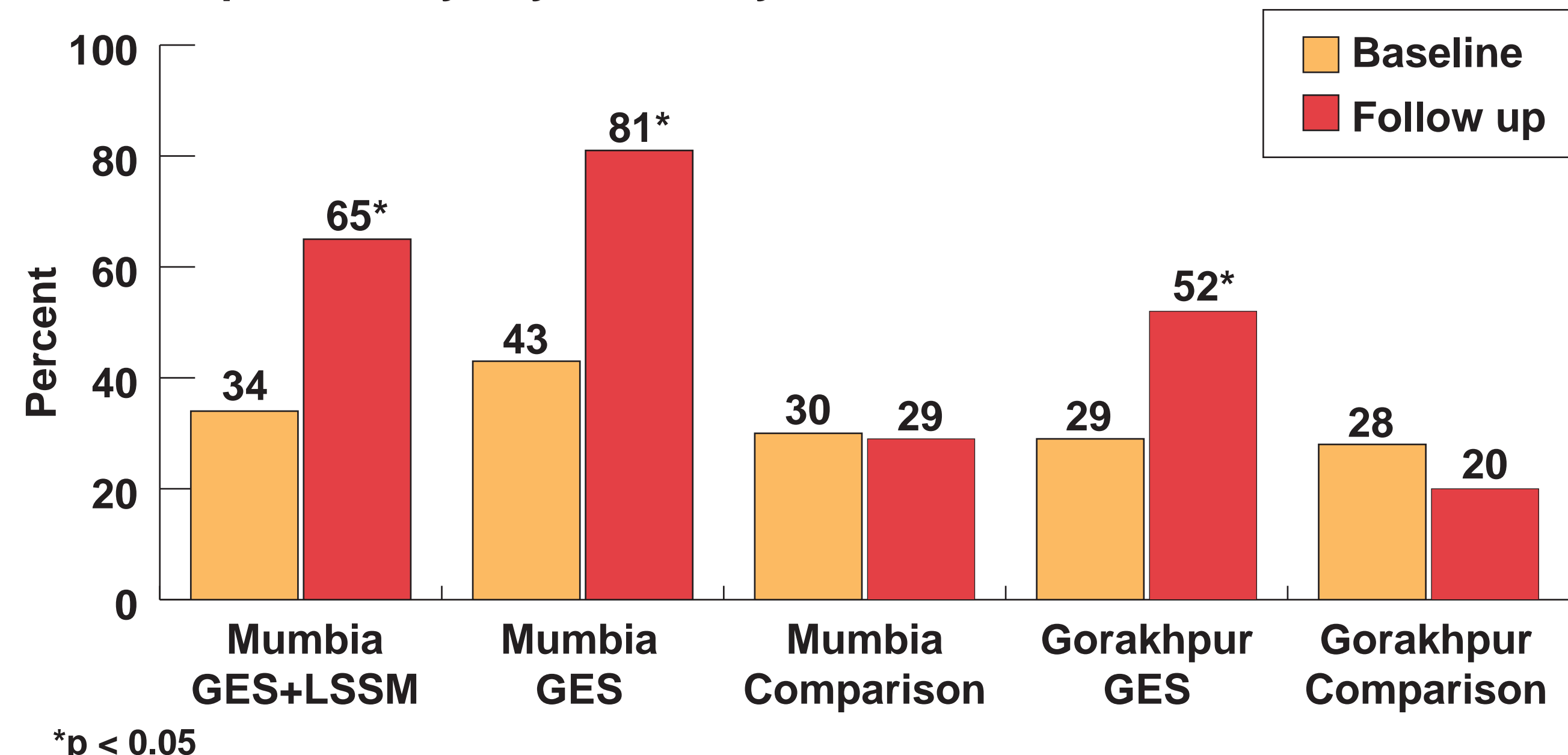
There was a significant shift ($p < 0.05$) in all intervention sites towards more support for equitable gender norms, but not control sites.

GEM Scale scores were trichotomized into "high equity," "moderate equity," and "low equity." Young men in the intervention sites moved from the "low gender equity" category into the "moderate gender equity" and "high gender equity" categories. Changes in the comparison sites were not significant.

Report of condom use at last sex significantly increased ($p < 0.05$) with all partner types in the intervention areas.

Among the young men who had sex in the last three months, condom use at last sex with all sexual partners increased significantly ($p < 0.05$) in the urban and rural intervention sites from baseline to follow up. In contrast, condom use stayed the same or decreased slightly in the comparison sites (see Figure 1).

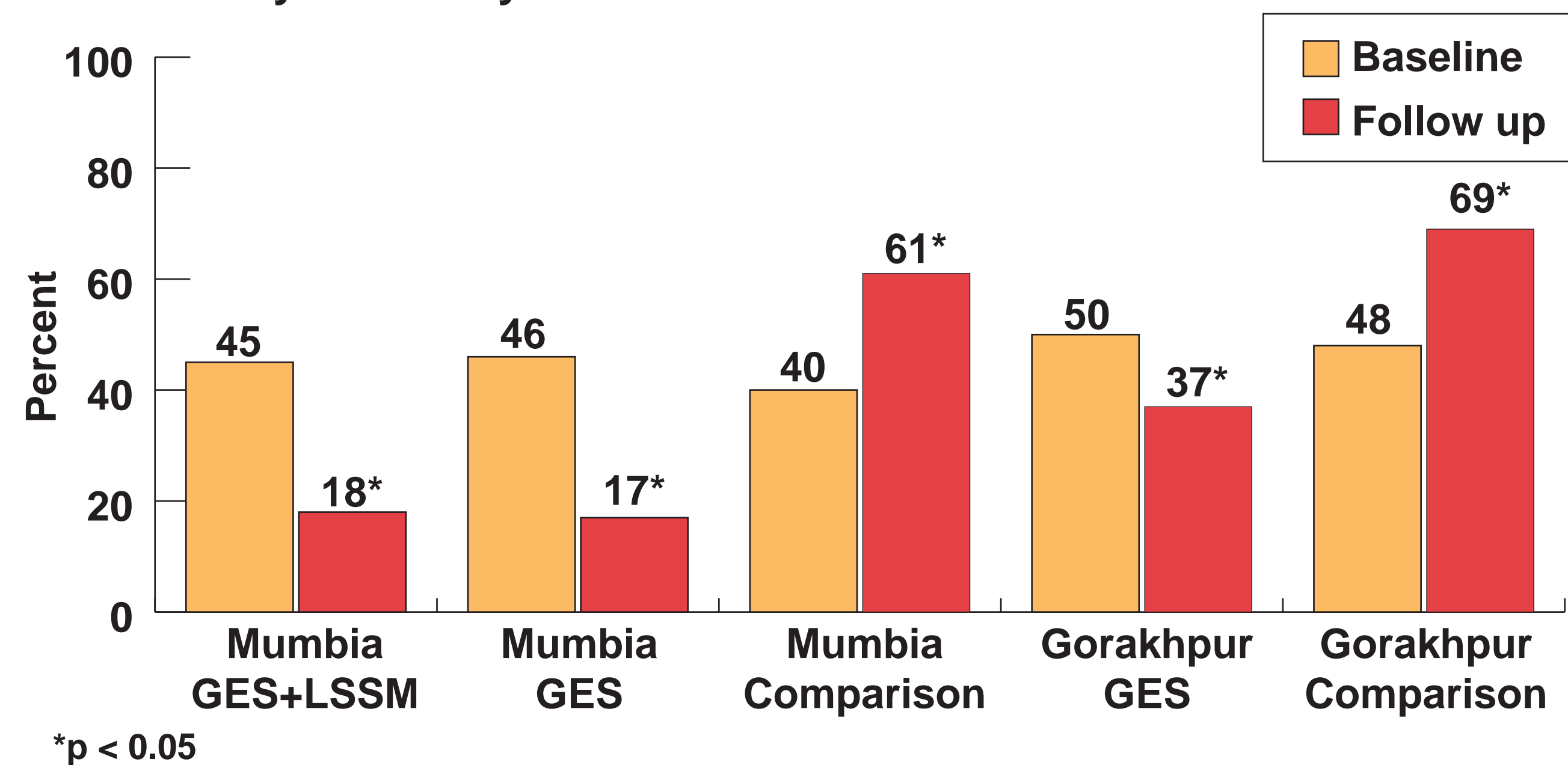
Figure 1 Changes in condom use at last sex in the last 3 months with all partners by city and study arm



Partner violence significantly decreased ($p < 0.05$) in all intervention areas, but not in control sites.

The proportion of men in the urban and rural intervention sites who reported violence against a partner (either sexual or non-sexual/romantic) in the last three months declined significantly ($p < 0.05$). In contrast, reported partner violence increased significantly in both the urban and rural comparison groups (see Figure 2).

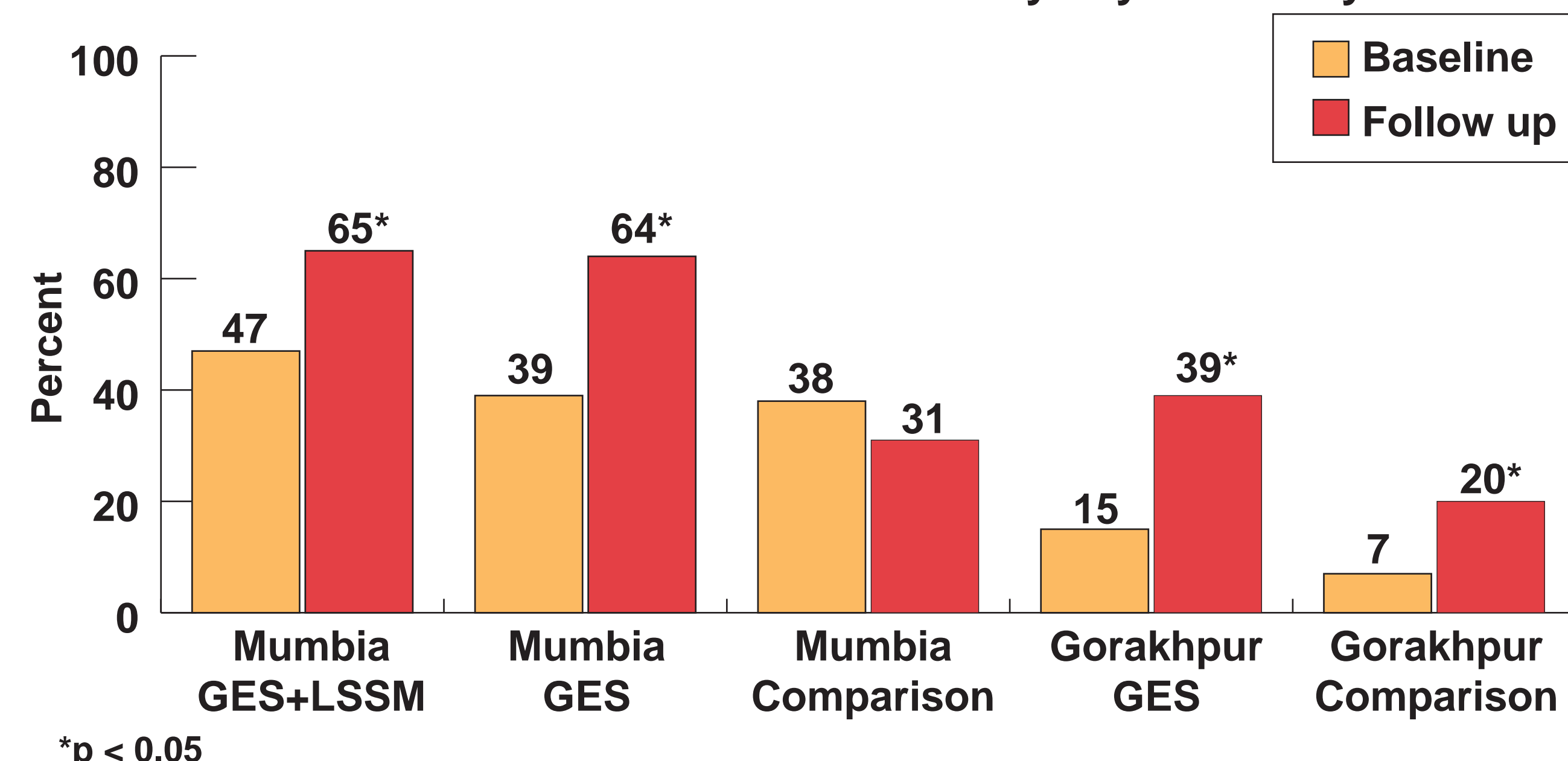
Figure 2 Changes in self-reported partner violence in last 3 months by city and study arm



Partner communication significantly improved in the intervention sites.

In both urban intervention sites the number of men discussing condoms, sex, STIs, and/or HIV with a partner increased almost one-and-a-half times from baseline to follow up, while it decreased in the comparison site. The proportion of men communicating about any of these topics with a partner more than doubled in the rural intervention arm. However, it also more than doubled in the comparison arm (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Changes in partner communication about condoms, sex, STIs, and/or HIV in the last three months by city and study arm



Qualitative interviews highlight relationship between change in gender equity and risk reduction.

Comments from young men during in-depth interviews supported the relationship between increased support for gender equity and risk reduction. One young married man reported that since participating in the YD program, he started to respect his wife and communicate more with her, and stopped engaging in multi-partner, extra-marital sex.

After the session on gender and discussions with the peer leaders, I realized the importance of my wife. Slowly, slowly I started discussing with her, started helping in her work and this has created more love and affection between us. I started respecting her and one day she requested me to keep away from my girlfriends and not bring them in the house. I have accepted it, initially it was very difficult for me, but now I have completely stopped meeting with the girlfriends.

Young married man

Next Steps

Based on this study's successful results, project collaborators are now proceeding to scale up the *Yaari Dosti* program in India's public education sector.

For a copy of the report or the training manuals (English or Hindi), please visit the Population Council booth (#449), the Population Council website (www.popcouncil.org), or contact Ravi Verma (rverma@icrw.org).