Positive Youth Development (PYD) is both a philosophy and a targeted approach to youth development whereby relationships that youth have with key people and institutions in their social context provide opportunities for youth to enhance their knowledge, interests, skills and abilities. Simply put, PYD approaches expect that if young people have the knowledge, skills, and support they need, they will thrive as adults, enjoy good health, succeed economically, make meaningful contributions, and have happy families. Making sure youth thrive will foster their positive development, as well as that of successive generations. PYD engages youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems.

The PYD approach has been shown to have positive impacts in the U.S. and other high-income countries (Catalano, 2002) across an array of sectors, including health, education, delinquency and violence.

The PYD approach draws our attention to four broad domains:

- **Assets**: the availability of skills, tools, resources
- **Agency**: the ability to use skills, tools, and resources and to make independent decisions
- **Contribution**: the results of using assets for your own good and good of others
- **Enabling environment**: the existence of safe, supportive, encouraging places to learn and grow

**Research Questions and Methods**
Given the lack of evidence about the use and effectiveness of PYD approaches in low and middle income countries (LMICs), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) commissioned the YouthPower Learning project (www.youthpower.org) to undertake a meta-review, a type of literature review that collects and critically analyzes multiple research studies. For this meta-review, we developed a comprehensive plan and search strategy by identifying, appraising, and synthesizing all relevant studies based on

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1For a list of low and middle income countries as classified by the World Bank as of July 2016, see: https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519
a working definition of PYD. The review aims to answer two main research questions:

- How have Positive Youth Development approaches been implemented in LMICs?
- What does the evidence say about the effectiveness of these approaches?

This meta-review drew upon peer-reviewed and grey literature published in English, Spanish, and French after 1989. Using a systematic search strategy for peer-reviewed papers, a purposive search in repositories and a survey disseminated to youth-serving organizations, development agencies, and universities, we identified 21,576 peer-reviewed papers and 3,705 grey literature documents. These reports and papers were screened in a three-step process to select the final documents to be included in the data extraction. The 105 (42 peer-reviewed literature, 63 grey literature) documents included in the meta-review are all based on evaluations of programs that either the authors or the review team classified as PYD. We considered programs to be “PYD” if they engaged young people (10-29 years of age) and incorporated at least two outcomes within the PYD framework. The quality of the evidence presented in papers was assessed by reviewing their respective research design, measures, and analysis. One-third of all papers reported results from randomized controlled trials (RCTs). The review also included papers reporting other research designs, such as quasi-experimental, pre-post non-experimental, mixed methods, qualitative, and post-test quantitative or qualitative designs (Graph 1).

**Result 1: Have PYD Approaches Been Implemented In Low And Middle Income Countries?**

**Yes!**

**WHERE AND WHAT ABOUT?**

The review identified 97 PYD programs in 57 countries. The review found 29 programs in China, South Africa, and India, with an average of nine programs in each country. Each of the other 54 countries included in the review had only one or two programs each. Around 80% of programs measured health outcomes (i.e., HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health, or mental health), and less than half had outcomes related to democracy, conflict and humanitarian assistance, economic growth, education and environment (Graph 1). Many of the programs addressing health outcomes also include outcomes related to the other aforementioned sectors. Although the review found PYD programs in most sectors, it is worth noting that the study did not find any programs with outcomes related to the environment, nor ones that focused on LGBTI youth.

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1 Grey literature documents include evaluation reports, program descriptions or other reports associated with interventions.
2 The screening process included limiting the review to LMICs.
WHO IS CONDUCTING AND FUNDING THESE PROGRAMS? WHO ARE THEY TARGETING?
Forty-two percent of all programs were funded by foreign governments and foundations. NGOs alone (45%) and universities alone (22%) were among the main implementers. USAID funded more than 16% of the programs. Programs are also being implemented by consortia, such as NGOs working with together governments and universities. Sixteen percent of the programs focused on the full age range of interest (10-29), with the rest addressing smaller age segments, as seen in Graph 2. Some programs targeted only youth, but many also involved parents or other adults in their activities.

WHAT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES ARE THEY CONDUCTING?
Most of the programs conducted a variety of activities in more than one setting (i.e. individual, household, in-school or out-of-school). As would be expected from PYD, which is a holistic approach, none of the programs conducted only one type of activity. More than three-quarters of the programs (81%) conducted some sort of educational activity (Graph 3), either in schools or in other settings, in combination with activities such as social events, media, and youth-friendly service provision. In addition, a few provided direct services, such as job placement or psycho-social services.
Most of the programs identified targeted more than one PYD domain, with 37 (35%) targeting all four domains. All but one program targeted at least one construct under the Assets domain. Examples of assets targeted by programs included health education, access to health information and skills training, including vocational training. Less than half of the programs focused on developing other, more general and transferable assets, such as social skills, emotional regulation, and problem-solving skills. Four-fifths of programs included at least one construct within the Agency domain, such as “sense of self” (self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem), “self-determination,” “belief in future” or “positive behavior” (making positive, rather than risky, behavioral choices).

Eighty-six percent of programs targeted at least one construct within the Enabling Environment domain, including those that worked to shift norms away from harmful practices, such as child marriage, drug use, violence and unsafe sex, and toward healthier, safer norms and attitudes.

Less common, but still present in half of the programs, was an emphasis on supporting youth to make a Contribution through engagement in community and leadership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PYD Domains and Constructs</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social competency</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional competency</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive competency</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of self</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-determination and belief in future</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive behavior</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and participation</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive norms</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Environment – Recognition</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects that target all four domains</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Result 2: What Does The Evidence Say About The Effectiveness of PYD Programs in LMICs?

Only 74% of the 105 documents we reviewed had some type of evidence about the effectiveness of the programs in LMICs. Thirty-three percent of the cases employed a randomized-controlled trial evaluation design. Eighteen studies met the criteria for inclusion in the high-quality evaluation category. Eleven of these fell solely in the category of Global Health. Most of those programs (73%) were implemented in sub-Saharan Africa. What we learned from this review is that effective programs used a diverse set of activities, at different levels, including school-based and community mobilization approaches, both gender-segregated and combined gender approaches, and theater activities and peer
mentoring. While there is no single “correct” or “most effective” approach, we identified ten common features among PYD programs with evidence of effectiveness. These include programs that:

1. Utilize a systemic approach that targets both structural and individual factors.
2. Work in more than one setting or level, such as schools, community organizations, families.
3. Work with adults such as parents, teachers and service providers to foster a supportive environment for youth.
4. Teach new skills and engage youth in skill building activities.
5. Enlist youth to lead activities, providing opportunities for them to practice skills and develop agency, while making a contribution, including toward shifting norms and improving conditions in their communities.
6. Focus on shifting social norms away from unhealthy practices and toward healthier, safer norms and attitudes.
7. Target inequitable gender norms.
8. Use mentoring as a strategy, either with peers or adult mentors.
9. Provide safe gathering places for adolescents, particularly girls, where they can talk freely and receive educational and skill-based training.

The Stepping Stones program aimed to reduce HIV infection by targeting multiple PYD constructs. It was developed in the mid-1990s in Uganda and implemented in a number of countries in Africa, South America, and Asia (primarily with adults). It was rigorously evaluated with 15 to 26 year olds in South Africa (Jewkes, et al, 2008). Long-term follow-up data showed reduced incidence of HIV and HSV-2 infection, which appear to be the consequence of program impact on knowledge, attitudes and risky sexual behavior; all of which are PYD outcomes (Shek et al, 2008). Importantly, results are not limited to HIV-related risk. Self-reported partner violence and problematic drinking were also reduced among male participants. In less rigorous evaluations, there was evidence that the program increased earnings and decreased theft (Jewkes, 2010). The version of Stepping Stones evaluated in an RCT was delivered in single-sex groups and used peer education, media, organized social events, community meetings and several types of educational activities to increase knowledge, communication between partners and gender equality.

EVIDENCE FOR PYD PROGRAMS WORKING ACROSS SECTORS

Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programs (P.A.T.H.S.) was the only program we found with an experimental evaluation that used an explicit PYD framework and measured impact on PYD constructs in LMICs. The P.A.T.H.S. curriculum has been implemented in an RCT in secondary schools in Hong Kong and Macau. P.A.T.H.S. is a PYD program that aimed to influence a wide variety of outcomes across sectors (global health and economic growth, education and environment) and aimed to address fifteen constructs (Shek et al, 2008). Tier 1 of this program is designed to be administered to all students in a secondary school in three grade levels. Each year includes 10 to 20 hours of classroom activities targeting social, emotional, and cognitive skills to support good decision making. P.A.T.H.S. has a strong focus on training teachers to implement the program using a more youth focused, self-
Conclusions and Recommendations

PYD programming is being conducted all over the world. However, the sheer number of documents with PYD approaches in LMICs was less than 5% of the total number of documents originally identified as reporting PYD related outcomes. Furthermore, most of the PYD programs conducted in LMICs have not been designed using PYD theoretical constructs nor have they been rigorously evaluated. Although there are programs in most sectors, it is noteworthy to mention that the study did not find any program with outcomes related to climate and the environment or focused on LGBTI youth.

The most successful programs identified amongst those conducted in LMICs included strong implementation and evaluation designs and careful planning based on both theory and evidence. Therefore we recommend that the first step towards successful programing for PYD should involve a strong program design that includes answering a series of questions, such as:

- What do the youth in the target population need to achieve the desired outcome?
- What kinds of activities will be engaging and supportive for youth?
- Are material supports needed before non-material assets such as cognitive skills or emotional competency can be addressed?
- In what ways can youth be better engaged to participate in and contribute towards their community, regional or national development?

To ensure future evaluability, interventions should begin with evaluation in mind, and at the least, must be documented with logic models or theory of change, procedures, training manuals, standardized materials and ongoing monitoring. Determining what to measure will depend on the intended short- and long-term outcomes of the program. Short-term outcomes might include improvements in attitudes, skills, knowledge, and participation addressed directly by the intervention activities, while long-term outcomes could include behavior change and improvement of indicators related to the community or population-level health and wellbeing. Conducting a more rigorous outcome evaluation will depend on having selected the right measures. Programs that have promising non-experimental or non-quasi experimental evidence should be subjected to stronger research designs.

Effective PYD programs utilize a systemic approach that targets both structural and individual factors. These programs work in more than one setting or level and involve multiple actors in the families, schools or communities they work with. They teach new skills and engage youth in skill building activities in leadership positions. This provides youth with opportunities to practice skills and develop agency while making a contribution. In addition to their sector related outcomes, the programs also include a focus on shifting social norms away from unhealthy practices and toward healthier, safer norms and attitudes. This includes shifting inequitable gender norms. These programs also use peers or adults as mentors and provide safe gathering places for adolescents, particularly girls, where they can talk freely and receive educational and skill-based training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Use the existing evidence of effectiveness on PYD programming to support improving the content of programs that target youth in any sector. Implementers should incorporate the approach and features that work for the whole project cycle – from design to dissemination.
2. Address structural and individual factors for effective PYD programming during program design. The studies and theories backing PYD programming already offer enough evidence to support the need to address structural and individual factors. Many of the effective programs we identified are conducted in more than one setting and aim to shift social norms to ensure more sustainable change in addition to building skills.
3. Include the creation of safe and youth-friendly spaces for youth to get together and share what they are learning to help transform social norms. While this is a long term outcome, providing youth with safe spaces is important for many contexts, beyond just crime or conflict settings.
4. Understand shifting gender norms. Effective programs included shifting gender norms as a necessary intermediary outcome to achieve their sector-related goals. Gender integration is more than
just counting participants by sex. It includes analyzing how the program design and desired outcomes may be influenced by and may impact on the different roles and responsibilities that culture assigns men and women, boys and girls, particularly around power and decision making. It could also provide program participants opportunities and space to examine and challenge the gender and age-specific norms and dynamics of power and control within society.

5. Consider targeting strategies to meet the needs of LGBTI populations in PYD programming. Given none of the programs identified included programming supporting the inclusion of LGBTI populations and needs, funders and implementers need to include targeting as part of project conceptualization and design.

6. Engage youth and key stakeholders in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the program. Almost all the effective programs we found involve more than one actor in the communities where they plan to work. These actors are often involved in every component of the program, beginning with design.

7. Teach generalizable skills to youth. Support youth to apply these skills in different settings and use them to contribute to community development.

8. Use mentoring as a strategy, either with peers or adult mentors. This will provide youth with opportunities to practice communication skills and develop values that will enhance their contribution to society. Mentoring by adults should be accompanied by direct work with adult mentors to build their communication skills and reinforce shifting social norms.

9. Articulate the theory of change and measure the PYD outcomes of the intervention, in addition to more sector-specific outcomes.

10. Ensure fidelity of implementation when possible, and document changes in implementation as they arise. This will help future program designers and evaluators understand changes and when and why they occurred.

11. Conduct rigorous evaluations using random assignment when appropriate. When random assignment is not appropriate, design evaluations in the most rigorous ways possible, to expand the evidence base for what specific aspects of PYD are most effective.

12. Use PYD indicators to capture data about the changes in youth themselves and the societies in which they live. The variability in the quality and often lack of data related to PYD programs across LMICs highlights this need.

Taking these steps will increase the likelihood that investments in youth programming will meaningfully improve the lives of young people in LMICs, and by doing so improve the wellbeing of their communities, their families, and generations to come. They will further ensure that future reviews of the evidence benefit from what has already been implemented and evaluated.

Bibliography


USAID YouthPower Learning generates and disseminates knowledge about the implementation and impact of positive youth development (PYD) and cross-sectoral approaches in international development. The project leads research, evaluations, and events designed to build the evidence base. Concurrently, YouthPower Learning employs expertise in learning and knowledge sharing to promote engagement and inform the global community about how to successfully help transition young people into productive, healthy adults. YouthPower Learning supports the implementation of the 2012 USAID Youth in Development Policy to improve capacity and enable the aspirations of youth so that they can contribute to, and benefit from, more stable, democratic, and prosperous communities.

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