

# Understanding the influence of Projet Jeune Leader on former participants of its program: A qualitative and retrospective study

## Executive Summary

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**The purpose of this study was to understand the extent to which Projet Jeune Leader's (PJL) holistic, school-based comprehensive sexuality education program influenced the lives and behaviors of participants.** To answer this question, individual interviews were conducted with young adults who had received PJL programming in middle school at least two years ago. Former participants revealed that PJL positively influenced their transition to adulthood; they shared that PJL's program discouraged them from engaging in risky sexual behaviors, encouraged them to avoid using alcohol and drug, and motivated them to continue their education. Former participants also reported gaining new social-emotional skills, particularly self-esteem.

## Purpose

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This evaluation was developed to address two priorities for PJL. The first purpose was to allow participants to explain—in detail and in their own words—**the degree of impact (or lack of impact) that PJL has had on their lives and provide context to their experiences.** These conversations could highlight unexpected outcomes of PJL's programming that are difficult (or impossible) to assess through quantitative evaluations.

Secondly, the study would allow PJL to explore, for the first time, **the impacts of its program over the medium term** by collecting testimonials from former participants two or more years after their participation in the program. Past evaluations of PJL have focused on middle school students at the time of participation, as has most research on this topic in low-income countries.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fish, H., Manlove, J., Moore, K. A., & Mass, E. (December 2014). What works for adolescent sexual and reproductive health: Lessons from experimental evaluations of programs and interventions. Publication # 2014-64. Child Trends, Inc.

# Methods

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## Participants

Participants in the study were recruited via Facebook; advertisements were posted in Facebook groups frequented by a large number of youth in Fianarantsoa.<sup>2</sup> Audiences were also invited to share the announcement with their peers. A total of 34 young adults (18 males and 16 females) living in Fianarantsoa with an average age of 19.8 years participated in the study. They were former students of six public middle schools in the Fianarantsoa I school district.<sup>3</sup> 76% of them had received the PJJ program for at least two years in middle school (the others, one year) and 91% had received it three years ago (the others, two years ago).

## Semi-Structured Interviews

Each interview was conducted in Malagasy by a member of PJJ's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team of the same gender as the interviewee. All participants provided written consent or assent to participate in the study and each received 10,000 Ariary for their time.<sup>4</sup> Interviews lasted between 20 and 70 minutes. To protect the confidentiality of participants, the PJJ M&E team removed identifying information from the participants—except for their gender—by assigning a numerical code to each participant.

The PJJ interviewer conducted a semi-structured interview following an interview guide containing 13 open-ended questions and optional probing questions for each. These questions had all been pre-tested. Questions were primarily aimed at understanding the **relevance and degree of impact** of the PJJ program on former participants. Questions were also asked to explore their **experiences** with the PJJ program.

The interviews were transcribed, maintaining the accuracy of participants' words, expressions, and dialect. The PJJ M&E team then analyzed the data using Grounded Theory to draw out key themes from the testimonies, grouping and structuring them in order to understand pathways of influence of the PJJ program on the impacts shared by the participants.

### Example questions

- *"Are there things you have learned from the 'Jeune Leaders'<sup>5</sup> that you use on a daily basis?"*
- *"Some people say that PJJ has had an impact on them, and some people don't. Do you think that PJJ's activities have had an impact on your life?"*
- *"What three words come to mind when you think of the 'Jeune Leaders'?"*
- *"What was your relationship with the 'Jeune Leaders'?"*

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<sup>2</sup> The study was conducted at the peak of the coronavirus pandemic in Madagascar; for this reason, in-person publicity in spaces normally frequented by youth was not an option.

<sup>3</sup> These six middle schools were the only ones that had former students who were eligible for the study criteria.

<sup>4</sup> Among the 34 participants, 2 were minors. Their parents consented to their participation in the study.

<sup>5</sup> PJJ Educators

# Results

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## Relevance of PJJ's Program

The data suggest that the PJJ program met the needs of interviewees in early adolescence because it **arrived at a timely life period** (*"In regards to puberty, it was during 5th grade that I received information about puberty for the first time, but only small pieces of information and not detailed, I was still young then, too [...]"*; *"I hadn't had my period yet at that time, so that's why I was interested"*) and it **complements other sources of information about sexual and reproductive health**. As two interviewees explained, *"Compared to the science class... well, our science teacher at the time, I don't know why, but I know he had knowledge on these topics but he didn't dare to directly convey what needed to be conveyed to the students, so students didn't understand what he was trying to say"; "About [retracted name of an international non-governmental organization], yeah, there was a time when they came to my high school... from my point of view, since the [retracted name] staff didn't come to the high school many times, it was with the 'Jeunes Leaders' that I spent a lot of time talking about these themes since [retracted name] only spends a small amount of time... [retracted name] doesn't go into detail things about love."*

## Appreciation for the Program

The majority of interviewees had a positive experience with the PJJ program in middle school, particularly through their interactions with the PJJ Educators ('Jeune Leaders'). Most interviewees described the Educators as "cool," "smiling," "nice," "funny," and noted their **young age as an important attribute**. *"I always thought of them as my big brother and sister, I talked to them frankly"; "For me, Projet Jeune Leader is an organization of young leaders who behave like our elders and we are their little sisters, so if you have a problem but you don't dare to talk to your mom or dad, we can confide in them."* For those interviewees who shared negative feedback about the PJJ Educators, the four unappreciated behaviors that were raised were: rigidity, lack of punctuality, preferential behavior towards students participating in after-school clubs, and incomplete advice.

Past participants also appreciated the **accessibility** of the PJJ Educators. *"...so, when there is a problem, the problem is solved quickly with the presence of the Jeune Leaders since they are effective in providing a solution."* They also appreciated the Educators' participatory and creative teaching skills: *"When explaining the lesson, he used funny examples, and it helped me a lot to memorize the lesson."*

## Impacts of the Program on Behavioral Change

Past participants linked their participation in the PJJ program to the adoption of healthy behaviors in the following areas:

### Postponing first sexual intercourse.

Some past participants shared that they had decided to **delay having sex for the first time as a result of the information they received** from the PJJ Educators about body development and relationships, and skills they received about decision making. As one interviewee shared, *"How I used this knowledge is that, even though I had a girlfriend, I did not have sex yet."* However, other former

participants shared that they had difficulty convincing their partners about delaying sexual intercourse, especially partners who had not gone through the PJJL program. As this interviewee put it: *"In reality, it wasn't very easy to convince my partner not to have sex, or to use condoms because I don't know if he benefited from Projet Jeune Leader like I did or not, but I convinced him that we can't have sex, and then he was in a bad mood, and then we broke up and later, when I started working, that's when I started having sex."*

### Adopting safer sexual behaviors.

PJJL Educators' messages about the dangers of early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections encouraged participants to **adopt safer sexual behaviors**. The two behaviors most frequently cited by interviewees on this topic were **condom use** (*"If my relationship isn't really serious yet and I'm not ready to have a child yet, I always use condoms, but if I am ready for example to marry her and we really want to have children, that's when I won't use them anymore. In addition, not all sexually transmitted diseases are visible as the Jeune Leader said, and that is why I always use condoms during sex"*) and **fidelity** (*"Before I went through Projet Jeune Leader's program, I dated multiple partners and had sex with them, but as soon as I went through the program, I changed and stayed faithful to one person"*).

### Reducing or avoiding the use of alcohol and drugs.

Several interviewees explained that **PJJL made them aware of the dangers of alcohol and drugs and consequently did not use them**: *"The PJJL program improved my behaviors since I was not influenced by my friends about drug use."* *"The example that Jeune Leader Chrys shared about cigarettes still remains in my memory. He said that if we smoke one cigarette, our life span decreases by one day, and cigarettes are big expenses. If for example we smoke one pack a day, in one year its price would be equivalent to the price of a scooter, and this is quite true."* Some of the former participants also **spread the messages they acquired on this subject to their peers**: *"When I studied in high school, I had the courage to advise my friends on the right paths they should follow and to behave as a leader, for example I encourage them not to use drugs anymore"; "For example, on drug addiction, this theme is still engraved in my head and I educate my little brothers and sisters as well as the community on this issue".*

### Staying in school.

Interviewees shared that they **decided to continue their studies** because of the support they received from the PJJL Educators during difficult times. *"For example, there was a time when I was discouraged to continue my studies, I thought about not continuing my studies, and then they [the PJJL Educators] advised me that with a valiant heart, nothing is impossible, and they told me to continue and they encouraged me. I continued my studies."* *"It is very likely [if PJJL was not there] that my life would not be the same, that I would not have reached this level in school. It is likely that I would have stopped in the middle and gotten a girl pregnant and landed in jail or forced to marry her"; "I see that most of my peers who did not go through the PJJL course are currently having children, but we who have gone through the PJJL course, we are able to continue our studies."* Former participants also explained that the sports and recreational activities and the participatory classes conducted by the PJJL Educators created a **more attractive and motivating school environment**. *"There are young people who do not like their school and thanks to Projet Jeune Leader, their engagement has increased, they have even become proud of their school because they see that the PJJL program is a great asset compared to others."*

## Impact on Social-emotional Skills

Former participants shared that they gained new social-emotional skills through their participation in the PJL program. **Self-esteem** was repeatedly cited as a skill learned and applied by former participants. *"Before I wasn't open to everyone, I was really quiet, and PJL program changed me"; "When I was in 6th grade and 7th grade I was really shy, but I changed since the second quarter of 7th grade because I was always designated by the Jeune Leaders to participate in activities" ; "The self-confidence theme that the Jeune Leader taught increased my level of self-confidence especially during exams, I was confident about what I was writing and I was no longer tempted to ask others or to cheat"; "For example at home, before I was closed off, I was shy, then when I followed the advice of the Jeune Leaders, I started to open up to everyone, to talk with other students, and everyone was surprised and told me that : [name redacted] has changed."*

Other social-emotional skills—**group work, good listening, decision making, assertive communication, and leadership**—were also mentioned, but their application in the daily lives of former participants was less clear. *"Passive and aggressive communication... We learned about the right way to communicate, for example, when someone speaks aggressively, it can hurt others, so you have to speak calmly even if you are angry"; "The Jeunes Leaders told me that I always have to analyze my relationship with someone before making a decision, like if my partner ever asks me for sex too soon, I have to ask myself if it is really love."*

## Discussion

This qualitative evaluation identified, for the first time, the medium-term outcomes of PJL's program on former participants. **Consistent with the desired effects of comprehensive sexuality education, former participants testified that the PJL program influenced them to engage in safer sexual behaviors through adolescence.** Former participants also shared that they gained social-emotional skills through the PJL program that helped them make responsible and healthy decisions as adults.

Indeed, when asked at the end of the interview about PJL's primary goal, several former participants believe that PJL seeks to build "responsible" and "model" youth in all areas of life. *"As far as I know, Projet Jeune Leader is about educating young people to become civilized people, so that they take responsibility in life, that is, during their youth, and to become role models especially during this period."*

This evaluation also revealed promising outcomes of the PJL program—such as motivation to stay in school—that are beyond the realm of health. This **multidimensional impact**—combined with the reflections that youth participants found the PJL program engaging and relevant—deserves further study to demonstrate the **importance of comprehensive sexuality education for Madagascar's development.**

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