We Love Reading Seminar: The Journey of Changemakers

Does We Love Reading Program (WLR) Impact Women’s Empowerment, Motivation to Lead, Wellbeing, Life Satisfaction, Social Networks, Relational Importance and Children’s Attitudes towards Reading?

Executive summary
This policy brief will discuss We Love Reading Program’s impact on participating women and children, assessed through three research studies conducted collaboratively in 2022. It explains the call for social transformation focusing on women as the agent of change, by leading read-aloud sessions in their neighborhoods for children in their circle of influence.

Additionally, this policy brief will explore the potential implications of implementing such community-based programs and provide recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to consider.

Studies & areas of impact
Study No. 1: Long-term Evaluation of We Love Reading Program on Children.
Area of impact: children’s attitudes towards reading.

Study No. 2: Theory of Change and Social Impact Measurements of We Love Reading Program.
Area of impact: motivation to lead among women (WLR Ambassadors) and relational importance with children.

Study No. 3: Social Networks, Empowerment, and Wellbeing: An Intervention Study with Syrian and Jordanian Women
Area of impact: social Networks, empowerment, life-satisfaction and wellbeing.

About We Love Reading Program
We Love Reading is a research-based program founded by Dr. Rana Dajani in 2006 to foster the love of reading for pleasure among children and create changemakers around the world. The We Love Reading (WLR) program trains local volunteers, known as WLR Ambassadors, to hold read-aloud sessions in public spaces within their neighborhoods, using the native language of the children. We Love Reading aims to catalyze long-term cultural change through reading and skill development.

We Love Reading programs help thousands of local women build new capabilities and enable them to act creatively for themselves and their communities. WLR’s reading method inspires children to think independently and enhances their cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Recommendations
• Adopting non-formal education programs such as WLR to improve reading attitudes among refugee and local children can help bridge gaps and enhance literacy outcomes in the long run.

• Structuring community-based programs in a way that fosters positive human interaction, stronger social ties and a greater sense of relational importance can motivate individuals to contribute to the growth of others as non-prototypical leaders as well as enhancing their wellbeing and life-satisfaction levels.

• Conducting further research and evaluations to better understand the impact of the program, and to identify areas for further improvement and innovation.

• Establishing partnerships with the government, civil society, and private sector in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of community-based lifelong learning programs. Such partnerships would enable the expansion of support for these programs and help achieve SDGs.
Main question
Does We Love Reading improve children’s literacy and attitudes toward reading?

Background
Community-led, shared book-reading interventions have been shown to improve early childhood development and reduce inequity. There is limited research on their impact on refugees, but shared book-reading programs may be helpful in addressing some of the many educational challenges that Syrian refugee children in Jordan face.

How the research was conducted
To assess this, we evaluated We Love Reading, a locally developed and implemented program in Jordan. We used a randomized controlled trial, where half of the participants took part in We Love Reading sessions for 12 weeks, and the other half did not. 322 Syrian refugee mothers and their (8-4) year-old children living in Amman and Zaatari camp took part in the study. We collected data at three time-points immediately before the intervention (T1), after 4 months (T2) and one year later (T3).

Key findings: We Love Reading and attitudes towards reading.
As seen in the figure below, and using the measure (PPCATR), children who took part in We Love Reading had more positive attitudes toward reading at T2. There were no impacts on child literacy.

At T3 (One-year long term evaluation) mothers of children who took part in WLR in 2021 continue to report higher levels of child attitudes toward reading a year later than mothers of children in the control group.

Implications
Literacy levels among participating children are very low. Literacy is important to many aspects of children’s development and functioning; it is critical to address these low literacy rates, to enable the prosperity and future positive functioning of Syrian refugees in Jordan. We Love Reading shows promise in improving children’s attitudes toward reading. Better attitudes toward reading may have many positive knock-on effects on children.

For more information, please go to: https://osf.io/gcvScz/
Main question
Does We Love Reading Program impact relational importance with children and motivation to lead?

Background
We Love Reading (WLR) is a community-based intervention that combines intellectual stimulation and relational interaction with children through reading aloud to them. The role of a WLR ambassador can be a form of leadership in influencing children. Therefore, these WLR ambassadors can undergo an intensive change-maker journey that gives them an opportunity to develop their “possible self as a leader” internalizing a leader identity driven by motivation to lead.

How the research was conducted
To assess this, we used a randomized controlled trial, where almost half of the participating women took WLR Ambassadors training and the other half didn’t.

215 Syrian and Jordanian women living in Amman took part in the study. We collected data at two time-points immediately before the intervention (T1), after 4 months (T2).

Key findings: We Love Reading and relational importance
In the following Figure, at time 2, participants in the treatment group (WLR Ambassadors) had higher perceived relational importance with children than the participants in the control group. The findings showed that the reading intervention for children created an opportunity and an environment for relations to be developed between the WLR Ambassadors and the children.

Key findings: Relational Importance and motivation to lead (MTL)
The Figure below shows that motivation to lead (MTLS) completely mediated the relationship between relational importance and leader identity. The mediation effect indicates that the reading ambassadors’s self-perceived sense of motivation to lead was the driving force behind their leadership identification. This finding is significant as it sheds light on the leadership development of non-prototypical leaders.

Implications
The development of a higher sense of relational importance among WLR Ambassadors aligns with the mentoring literature, which suggests that positive human relations can be fostered through mentoring programs (Lyons & Perrewe, 2014; Lund et al., 2019). Individuals who play supportive roles, contribute to the growth of others and witnessing this growth may develop a sense of leadership, positive relationships and a further motivation to intensify their supporting role to other individuals.

Lund et al. (2019) discussed how developing a relational schema can influence social cognition, ultimately intensifying motivation to lead in supporting and developing the growth of others.

Study team: S. Chui, R. Dajani.
For more information, please go to: https://osf.io/38uxa/
Main question
Are social networks associated with measures of empowerment, leadership, life satisfaction, and wellbeing? Does We Love Reading improve these outcomes for women?

Background
Social networks characterize a set of interactions and relationships between people. They are often crucial to socioeconomic advancement. However, intervention research has not rigorously tested whether they matter to women’s psychological empowerment and life satisfaction, especially in low-resource Middle-Eastern communities.

How the research was conducted
In 2023-2022 we documented the social networks of 215 women in Amman (106 Syrian refugees, 109 Jordanians). Using mixed methods we conducted a randomized controlled trial, in which half the women participated in We Love Reading training, while the other half did not. We collected data before (baseline) and 4 months after (endline) the WLR training.

Key findings at baseline
Women listed between 0 and 13 close peers. Networks were, on average, smaller for Syrians (3.72 peers) than Jordanians (4.98 peers). They were homogeneous by nationality: the peers of Syrians were %89 Syrians; those of Jordanians were %94 Jordanian.

Network size was positively associated with measures of psychological empowerment, motivation to lead, and perceived social support. Women drew upon volunteer work to potentially diversify personal networks outside the home. They felt less empowered with smaller and predominantly kin-based networks.

Key findings at endline
Preliminary analyses show that women’s sense of life satisfaction increased for women with larger network sizes (as shown in the graph below). Levels of life satisfaction and leadership motivation were both higher for women with more highly-educated peers.

With respect to the intervention, the life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing of women showed an increase in the We Love Reading group, from baseline to endline. Preliminary analyses at the Endline results show that volunteering work diversified women’s personal networks outside the home.

Implications
The We Love Reading program shows promise to improve life satisfaction and wellbeing among women. We are continuing to study social networks, life satisfaction, and We Love Reading impacts with a 3rd round of data collection.

This study shows that building opportunities for women to socially interact and expand social ties helps to enhance their life satisfaction. This evidence matters to development initiatives seeking to foster women’s empowerment, wellbeing, and social inclusion. Also, expanding opportunities for volunteer work is one way of empowering poor women to work, learn, and socially interact.

For more information, please go to: https://osf.io/38uxa/