



## Masculinity and Gender-Based Violence

**Violence.....**

***It is the individual Man, raising his fist against his wife.***

***It is the gang of boys, cheering on the fight in the middle of a tight circle.***

***It is the young man on a date, acting without regard for the desires of the young woman he is with.***

***It is the man pushed by rage and fear, driving his car to his death.***

***It is the physical or verbal attack, on another man, because of his sexual orientation or religion or skin colour.***

***It is the gangs of men – we call them armies – who have been commanded to view each other as less than human, and to view citizens as something even less.***

***It is violence on the playing field.***

***It is, perhaps metaphorically, perhaps not, our relationship to our natural environment.***

***It is men's violence in a myriad of forms.***

**By Michael Kaufman, founder White Ribbon Campaign**

### Gender-Based Violence Against Women

Violence against women is an ancient and universal problem occurring in every culture and social group. Power inequalities between women and men and the masculine culture are the major sources of this violence. In order to stop violence against women, it is increasingly recognized that the focus of attention also needs to be directed toward men.

In 1993 the United Nations offered the first official definition of such violence when the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Article 1 of the declaration defines violence against women as:

***“any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” (Economic and Social Council 1992)***

This includes physical, sexual and psychological violence such as domestic violence; burning or acid throwing; sexual abuse, including rape and incest by family members;

female genital mutilation; female feticide and infanticide; sexual slavery; forced pregnancy; honour killings; dowry-related violence; violence in armed conflict such as murder; and emotional abuse such as coercion and abusive language. Abduction of women and girls for prostitution, and forced marriage are additional examples of violence against women. Such violence not only occurs in the family and in the general community, but is sometimes also condoned or perpetuated by the state through policies or the actions of agents of the state such as the police, military or immigration authorities, the majority of whom are men.

All of these forms of violence are associated with power inequalities: between women and men or between children and their caregivers, as well as with growing economic inequalities within and between countries. However, the primary inequality that gives rise to gender-based violence is the power inequality between women and men.

In 1995, “eliminating all kinds of violence against women” was one of the key objectives of the Platform for Action adopted by the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. No less than three of the twelve strategic objectives in the Beijing Platform for Action (Violence Against Women, Women and Armed Conflict, The Girl-Child) are directly related to the elimination of open, physical violence against women and girls. The need to recognize and eliminate economic, structural, social and cultural violence against women threads through the entire Platform for Action.

## **Facts about Violence Against Women**

- Around the world, at least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused by a man in her lifetime.
- More than 20 percent of women are reported to have been abused by men with whom they live.
- Among women aged 15-44 years, gender-based violence accounts for more death and disability among women than the combined effects of cancer, malaria, traffic injuries and war.
- Trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation by men is most common among poor women and girls.
- Women who are victims of domestic violence are 12 times more likely to attempt suicide than those who do not experience such violence.
- During war and civil conflict, women and girls are often targeted for special forms of violence by men as a way of attacking the morale of the enemy, both women and men. For example, in Rwanda, systematic and planned rape was used as a weapon of war and genocide against women and their families. In 1994, almost every adolescent girl who survived the genocide had been raped. In East Timor, it has been estimated that at least 1000 women were raped during the post-referendum conflict of 1999. Such violence often redounds doubly against women, first through the direct experience of violence and its aftermath and secondly through the reactions of their families, particularly the men, to their status as survivors or sexual crime.
- It is estimated that 85 to 114 million women and girls in Africa, Middle East and Asia, have undergone female genital mutilation.

## What is Gender-based Violence?

Gender-based violence can be defined as:

*“violence involving men and women, in which the female is usually the victim and which arises from unequal power relationships between men and women”.*

Violence against women and girls is often referred to as “gender-based violence” because it evolves in part from women’s subordinate gender status in society. In most cultures, traditional beliefs, norms and social institutions legitimize and therefore perpetuate violence against women.

The use of the term “gender-based violence” provides a new context in which to examine and understand the long-standing phenomenon of violence against women. It shifts the focus from women as victims to gender and the unequal power relationships between women and men created and maintained by gender stereotypes as the basic underlying cause of violence against women.

## Masculinity and Gender-based Violence

Instead of just focusing on each case of violence or on individual men’s acts of violence against women, the entire culture that creates current male roles and identities – defined as ‘masculinity’ – needs to be analysed and challenged.

This means recognizing the various pressures placed upon men that may result in violent reactions, as well as the need for men to take responsibility for their actions.

Predominantly, gender power relations have left a legacy whereby women are more likely to be disadvantaged relative to men, have less access to resources, benefits, information and decision making, and to have fewer rights both within the household and in the public sphere. In the past, these concerns and the struggle for gender equality

### Can men change?

Yes and no, suggests research by Care International in Vietnam. When men are equipped with the right kind of knowledge and skills they will improve their behaviour. However, the deeper-rooted gendered inequalities that shape sexual encounters are more difficult to transform.

**‘Men In The Know’**, a Care International in Vietnam project, developed sexuality training for men to promote safer sex within relationships and a trial of the training package with 2000 men.

A participatory workshop focussed on two broad areas:

- a) imparting knowledge on the physiology of sex and
- b) challenging socio-cultural factors that shape sexual encounters.

A pilot component was also directed at men who visit sex workers. It tested the effectiveness of a new approach, social marketing, in bringing about behavioural change through the communication techniques commonly used in commercial marketing.

Men responded very positively, pleased that they could now make responsible decisions. Partners were equally enthusiastic. However, men still decided when and where sex would happen, although as a result of the workshop, men were perhaps more considerate towards their partners.

have often been narrowly perceived as “women’s issues,” and gender programmes have been designed to focus only on women.

However, over the last decade there has been increasing recognition of the need for men to become involved in the movement toward gender equality. Conceptually, the shift in emphasis from “Women in Development” (WID) to “Gender and Development” (GAD) invites a focus on relationships between women and men, and among groups of women and groups of men, and to equity and equality within these relations.

One way to begin discussions concerning the role of men, their responsibilities, and their potential to contribute to gender equality is through an exploration of the meanings and uses of masculinity.

## **Masculinity**

Masculinity – or masculinities, as there are different forms of masculinity that are manifest in various ways – is a complex phenomenon. Masculinity is often associated with characteristics such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, dominance, strength, courage and control. These characteristics result from a combination of biological, cultural and social influences, and relate to our understanding of power in society as a whole. Although it is difficult to determine the extent to which each of these factors has influenced current gender inequalities and causes of gender based violence, an understanding of all three provides a framework within which to challenge and change the status quo.

By focusing on masculinity, the concept of gender becomes visible to and relevant for men. It makes men more conscious of gender as something that affects their own lives as well as those of women, and is a first step towards challenging gender inequalities and eliminating violence against women.

Men’s violence is a key determinant of the inequities and inequalities of gender relations that both disempower and impoverish women. Violence is a fundamental dimension of human poverty. Yet, men’s ‘natural aggression’ is often invoked as a defining characteristic of an essential gender difference and as an explanation for gendered hierarchical arrangements in the political and economic contexts of richer and poorer countries alike.

It is suggested that changes in the economy, social structures, and household composition are resulting in ‘crises of masculinity’ in many parts of the world. The ‘demasculinizing’ effects of poverty and of economic and social change may be eroding men’s traditional roles as providers and limiting the availability of alternative, meaningful roles for men in families and communities. Men may consequently seek affirmation of their masculinity in other ways; for example through irresponsible sexual behavior or domestic violence.

The global economy and rising long-term male unemployment has changed men’s roles and challenged their identity as breadwinners. Parallel changes in women’s roles - increasing participation in the public arena and in paid work, and recognition of women’s human rights - are also challenging the traditional division of labour and models of femininity. Since femininity and masculinity are determined in tandem and to some extent in opposition, such changes in women’s roles also challenge concepts of masculinity.

By moving from biological determinist to cultural constructionist accounts of masculinity, a number of men's anti-violence programmes have been able to work with violent men to help them understand the ways that structural pressures, cultural messages and/or parenting practices, have contributed to their socialization into violence.

Placing men's violence in a historical and cultural context helps overcome the naturalizing of men's violence, or what might be called the 'masculinizing of violence'. It highlights the role that the ways in which we think about and discuss masculinity play in exploiting what is claimed to be men's 'natural' aggression and militarism for specific political purposes.

## Perceptions of masculinity and femininity are formed in early childhood

As early as two years of age, children understand their gender identity. From about three years of age, children begin to avoid actions and activities they believe to be inappropriate for their sex simply because it is appropriate for the other. It is therefore important to address the issue of gender equity at an early stage in children's lives in order to address emerging gender inequalities.

To end violence against girls and women and promote their human rights, we need to

### Children explore gender

In the UK girls and boys are now growing up in a society with very different gender roles and attitudes than twenty years ago. Save the Children interviewed a cross-section of children in the UK - sixty-two five to eight years olds split fifty-fifty between the sexes, to find out how children view their male and female role models.

Children's perceptions have moved on from traditional notions of what masculinity and femininity mean but are still receiving mixed messages about what men and women actually do. Further findings suggest that children:

- initially see anatomy as the main difference between men and women but then focus on behaviour
- see many jobs and roles as equally appropriate for men and women

The children's perceptions of roles outside the family seemed to be more developed than roles within the home. The most consistent stereotypes were brought up when they were asked, 'what do the men you know like to do most?', they responded: play sport, watch videos, play computer games, drive cars and that men try to avoid housework in order to do what they enjoy most.

bring up boys and girls to honor both the "masculine" and "feminine" values that are within themselves and society.

Research suggests that when fathers and other male family members offer a positive role, boys develop a more flexible vision of manhood and are more respectful in their relationships with women. All members of the family have important roles in raising boys, including fathers and grandfathers. In many cultures, fathers have played a limited role in the upbringing of their children, particularly during infancy. Fortunately, this is changing with modernization and the increasing dominance of the nuclear family. Mothers often reinforce traditional ideas about manhood by

showing that they do not expect sons to do household chores or express their emotions.



The educational system and religious institutions also play key roles in gender socialization, and can act as agents of transformation. In schools, efforts to empower girls and to pay attention to the ways in which male socialization may steer boys away from intellectual pursuits are vital steps toward gender equality. In religious institutions, spiritual leaders can act as role models who value compassion and community building over more constraining gender roles.

### **Masculinity and HIV/AIDS**

Some of the characteristics associated with masculinity, such as aggressiveness, dominance and strength, translate into attitudes and behaviours that have become unhelpful or frankly lethal with the advent of AIDS.

Men's traditional role as economic providers – a major contribution to family welfare and survival – has traditionally meant that women are the ones expected to look after children and care for sick family members. With millions of women falling ill and dying of AIDS, and millions of children left orphaned, there is an urgent need for men to be more fully engaged in domestic tasks and the provision of care within the family.

Extra challenges for HIV prevention arise from traditional expectations that men should take risks, have frequent sexual intercourse (often with more than one partner) and exercise authority over women. Among other things, these expectations encourage men to force sex on unwilling partners, to reject condom use and the search for safety as “unmanly”, and to view drug-injecting as a risk worth taking.

Challenging such harmful concepts of masculinity and changing commonly held attitudes and behaviours must be part of the effort to curb the AIDS epidemic.

### **How is the Approach to Gender-based Violence Changing?**

- The topic is no longer merely about the victims, the women who have been and are being abused, but also about those who abuse.
- The issue is now discussed by men, who until recently have been reluctant to recognize the underlying violence that exists within masculine cultures.
- The topic now focuses not just on the individual man but also on masculinity, on being a man in general, and on male culture.
- It is now admitted that gender-based violence is an issue that concerns all men and not just those that behave violently; in this way the roots of male violence, which is the one of the foundations of patriarchy, can be explored.
- It is now recognized that, starting in childhood, a preconceived mould of masculinity is imposed upon boys and men, just as stereotypes of femininity are imposed on girls and women.
- The approach recognizes that violent men can be helped through therapy, and violence can be prevented; men can be empowered to define and live masculinity in new ways.
- Men are encouraged to view themselves as individual human beings and not just as representatives of masculine culture.
- As men change, entire cultures can begin to change, laying the foundations for a culture of peace, equality and a richer lifestyle.

## What Needs To Be Done To Challenge Gender-based Violence?

- Analyze the various forms of masculinity; reveal the violent forms, and work towards changing them.
- Reveal and question the values promoting or glamorising violence – competition, hardness, insensitivity, idolising winners in war, sports and business life.
- Analyze and question male roles and ideals, the concept of “male honour” prevailing in male cultures.
- Develop and value fatherhood; develop the skills and qualities of fatherhood among men and boys.
- Integrate a gender perspective into school education to create awareness of the different positions of boys and girls within the family, in culture and reproduction, and to promote their development into balanced personalities and into men and women in a relationship of equality and mutual respect.
- Develop legislation on violence against women to criminalize gender violence in all forms and provide women with protection when facing violence or being threatened by it.
- Increase the number of shelters for women and support the work of shelters and counselling services.
- Help men to abandon their violent behaviour by establishing support and therapy services and providing appropriate therapies.
- Encourage men to establish their own groups and voluntary activities to combat men’s violence against women, and support such movements.
- Increase the proportion of women in politics, foreign policy and international decision-making.
- Promote and further secure equality between women and men both through legislative and administrative means and through changing public opinion and shaping attitudes and values, thus building a culture of equality and peace.

## Further Information and Resources

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