Policy Brief

Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women: Engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls

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MenEngage Alliance strongly condemns all forms of violence against all women and girls.
In every society, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture. Violence against women and girls violates women’s and girls’ human rights and fundamental freedoms. Violence against women and girls is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. The long-standing failure to protect and promote those rights and freedoms in the case of violence against women is a matter of concern to the international community and should be addressed as a highest priority. UN Member States should prioritize knowledge about its causes and consequences, as well as its incidence and measures to combat it.

Why engage men and boys in efforts to eliminate violence against all women and girls.
We need to address the role that men of all ages can play in preventing and reducing gender based violence and examine the root causes of violence towards women, including the socialization of men, power, patriarchy and masculinities.

✔ Work with men and boys can have a positive, transformative impact for the lives of women and girls. There is a much broader spectrum of roles for men and boys to play than perpetrator or potential perpetrator of gender-based violence. These roles not only prevent and reduce violence against women and girls, but also improve the lives of men and boys by freeing them from these harmful and limiting aspects of masculinities.

✔ Work with men and boys is necessary. As major perpetrators, the target audience for primary prevention, holders of the social norms and influencers on other men, men need to be engaged to reduce and prevent gender-based violence.

✔ Work with men and boys can be effective. As the evidence base grows, evaluation data appears, lessons are learned, and best practices are shared, we believe this may be a missing element to compliment the ground-breaking work by women’s rights organizations.

Call to Action
We call for a review of promising practices and lessons learned from existing strategies aimed at engaging men and boys in gender equality, particularly efforts to transform harmful gender stereotypes, masculinities and negative social norms, attitudes and behaviours that underlie and perpetuate violence against women and girls, and to make recommendations for further action by States and the international community towards the full implementation of human rights obligations in this regard.
Preamble

MenEngage Alliance encourages Member States to take into consideration the following points, which we believe should frame the discourse on engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls:

Work with men and boys must be done in manners fully accountable to women and girls, and other marginalized groups. Work on engaging men and boys and transforming masculinities is not an end in itself, rather one strategy to achieve the goal of women’s rights and gender justice for all. Interventions should be carried out in close collaboration with women and women’s rights organizations.

Existing human rights instruments dealing with violence against women and girls focus on legal and health services for survivors of violence, and rightfully so. Support measures and reparation to survivors of violence against women should never be compromised. And there is urgent need to actively support women’s autonomy, leadership and decision making in the struggle to end gender based violence against women and girls. The existing recognition of the need to address the root causes of such violence, needs to be maintained. There is urgent need to hold states to account and speed up the implementation of existing human rights instruments dealing with violence against all women and girls.

Among the existing human rights instruments there is a considerable blind-spot in transforming masculinities that underpin violence against women and girls, and fully addressing the roles of men and boys as perpetrators of violence against women, as well as potential allies for change alongside women and girls. Despite the emphasis placed on addressing the root causes of violence there is a lack of recognition of the need to specifically address the gender stereotypes and social norms relating to masculinities that can cause gender based violence against women, and the potential of policies and programmes that target men and boys in their various roles to hold them to account and challenge these norms and attitudes, and mobilize men and boys as allies.

Going beyond merely engaging men and boys, we advocate for gender transformative approaches which seek to dismantle harmful attitudes, customs, practices, stereotypes, inequalities in power and privileges, in particular related to masculinities and manhood, which perpetuate discriminations toward women and girls. Men and boys play a key role in upholding and exercising these harmful norms, making them important actors in gender transformative interventions. In reference to all strategies, programing, education, policy reform and campaigns we recommend gender transformative language with a focus on addresses root causes and dismantling harmful norms.

The time has come to make primary prevention a part of national and international policies and human rights instruments. A number of international instruments have acknowledged the need to engage men and boys in the elimination of violence and discrimination against women and girls, such as Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (in particular paragraph 20), the Beijing Platform for Action (including recently agreed conclusions of CSW60 and CSW61 as well as CSW48), the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (including CRC General Comment 15). However, existing international instruments on violence against women have yet to make explicit calls for scaling up and implementing universal primary prevention programs to end men’s and boys’ use of violence against women and girls.

For the engagement of men and boys to be successful in contributing to women’s rights and gender justice for all, implementation and monitoring are required. This requires allocating adequate resources, without taking away resources for working with women and girls.
The engagement of the roles of civil society groups and organizations, such as feminist groups and youth groups in carrying out the work of engaging men and boys is necessary. Noting that UN Women’s HeForShe, while informed by CSO examples and in some contexts implemented by CSOs, is a UN-agency initiative. CSO-led initiatives provide the primary community of practice for engaging men and boys, such as MenEngage Alliance (700+ CSO and NGO members worldwide across six regional networks and 34 country networks), White Ribbon Campaign (a global movement of men and boys working to end male violence against women and girls, implemented in over 60 countries across five continents) and the MenCare Campaign (a global fatherhood campaign active in more than 40 countries on five continents).
Eliminating violence against all women and girls and engaging men and boys

The links

MenEngage Alliance encourages Member States to take into consideration the following points, which we strongly believe will strengthen normative measures to address prevention and accelerate the elimination of violence against women and girls:

In order to prevent and respond to violence against all women and girls, its root causes must be tackled. This should include, but not be limited to, engaging men and boys, to challenge the underlying attitudes and social norms that lead them to commit violence. Existing frameworks largely fail to recognize the need to specifically address the social norms relating to masculinities that cause violence against women and girls, and the potential of policies and programs that target men and boys in their various roles to challenge these norms and attitudes.

Rigid gender norms and harmful perceptions of what it means to be a man or a woman, encourage men’s use of GBV, granting them the power to dictate the terms of sex and control over resources. As a result, women are still too often in a submissive position, lack political and economic power and suffer from violence. The rigid gender norms and harmful practices that determine individuals’ behavior, causing GBV and gender injustice, are upheld and reinforced by communities, civil society and institutions alike.

Men’s use of violence against women and girls is not random.¹ There are clear factors that drive men’s use of VAW and factors that support women’s vulnerability to VAW, such as witnessing or experiencing violence as a child, norms and attitudes that support VAW, a lack of accountability and context of impunity, and economic stress. These factors can be exacerbated in certain contexts, such as those with pervasive gender inequalities and patriarchal family structures; settings with unenforced or limited laws preventing VAW and areas of (post-) conflict. The necessary fundamental transformation of harmful social norms to prevent VAW and promote gender justice can only be realized if international, regional and national human rights norms and standards on VAW recognize the root causes of violence and addresses the individual/relationship, community, civil society, institutional and governmental levels simultaneously and in a mutually reinforcing manner.

Well-designed gender-transformative programs with men and boys that change underlying destructive gender norms are effective in reducing violence against women and girls². These programs seek to reshape gender relations to be more equitable, and free both women and men from the impact of destructive gender and sexual norms. However, programmes remain mostly NGO led, small scale, short term and have failed to reach large numbers of men and boys. In order for work with men and boys to have the desired impact a more concerted effort is needed to take these programs to scale and institutionalize them. This should involve a multi-sectoral approach and committed partnerships between governments and CSOs, the health, education and justice sectors, the media and the private sector.

Strategies for transforming masculinities
Engaging men & boys in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls

To ensure they are scalable and sustainable, strategies for engaging men and boys should include interventions and transformations at different levels, based on a socio-ecological model: Interventions that aim to change men’s individual behaviour and behaviour within relationships, together with women and girls; interventions targeted at communities that aim to transform dominant social norms regarding gender and violence; interventions that aim to embed positive gender norms into institutions such as the health and education systems, the police and law enforcement, etc.; and government policies and laws that engage men and boys in gender-based violence prevention.

Holding men and boys accountable for the violence they have carried out must be part of comprehensive national strategies to end and prevent violence against all women and girls. Programs for men who have used violence against women can be part of comprehensive community support for women survivors of violence. When such programs are part of an effective justice system, connected to the community, and combined with adequate support and protection of women survivors of violence, they can be an important part of preventing future violence. Furthermore, community approaches to hold men accountable for violence against women – in which survivors have the chance to hear and ask for justice from men who have used violence – can be important elements in changing community norms and helping communities and individuals recover from violence.

Holding institutions accountable across all the sectors, whose leadership is mostly men, for the adoption of practices, programs, education and policies which seek to transform harmful attitudes, practices, norms and power dynamics which sustain structural violence towards women and girls. Holding the State accountable for the adoption, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of comprehensive national strategies to end and prevent violence against all women and girls, implementing primary and secondary prevention programs to prevent and respond to violence against women. Holding the International community and Human Rights Instruments accountable for making an explicit call for scaling-up and implementing universal primary prevention programs to end men’s and boys’ use of violence against women and girls.

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Well-designed group education processes can lead to attitude changes, and in some cases, behavior changes associated with VAW4. A significant proportion of men who use sexual violence do so for the first time as adolescents. Thus it is key to reach boys (age 10+) and young men when their attitudes and beliefs about gender stereotypes are developing and before the first perpetration of violence. Training teachers and community-based workers to facilitate group education and school-based campaigns on VAW, and implementing gender-sensitive school curricula can be effective in preventing violence.

Universal comprehensive sexuality education, with specific reference to gender and the roles and responsibilities of boys and young men, can prove effective in raising awareness of and preventing violence. Comprehensive sexuality education increases awareness about safe sex, sexuality, and healthy non-violent relationships. It can empower young women and men to negotiate the terms of sexual activity, understand the importance of consent, and learn how to resist peer pressure to engage in or accept VAW.

Engaging men as positive role-models and caregivers is a key strategy for ending cycles of violence. Programs with fathers and caregivers that emphasize alternatives to physical punishment, promote healthy and egalitarian relationships with mothers, and promote gender-equal child-rearing have shown promise in ending violence against women and children.

Men can also play positive roles in changing attitudes towards survivors of gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict settings. Perpetrators need to be held accountable, and efforts should be put in transforming their societies by changing gender norms and the behavior of men based on non-violence, care and equality. Given the high exposure to multiple forms of violence during conflict, psycho-social support that enables men, women, boys and girls to overcome their traumas can prove effective in preventing future violence.

Boys who experience, and/or witness violence against their mothers, are 2.5-3 times more likely to use violence against partners when they become adults5. Despite this, few children exposed to violence have access to ameliorative psychosocial support, and such services are seldom available in schools or in communities. Secondary prevention approaches, such as group counselling and education, through which young people who have witnessed violence at home can receive support are key to breaking cycles of violence and should be made available in all schools and community settings.

Many and perhaps most men around the world believe that violence against women is a violation of rights, but most men are silent when men they know carry out such violence6. This affirms the importance of bystander interventions and community accountability approaches in which men and boys who already oppose violence against women are encouraged and supported to speak out when they see other men use violence. In numerous head-to-head evaluation studies, such approaches - whether implemented in schools, communities, the workplace, or via sports – have shown effectiveness in changing men’s attitudes and enhancing existing community norms that affirm the unacceptability of VAW7.

While empowering women is essential, if programs only empower women, they can lead to backlash and increased violence by men8. On the other hand, several studies affirm positive changes in couple conflict as a result of efforts to engage men to support women’s economic empowerment. Few efforts, however, have been made to engage men as allies in women’s economic and social empowerment and to explore and promote cooperation between couples.

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Transform and end patriarchy: We seek to engage men and boys, along with women, girls and people of diverse gender identities, to redress structural power imbalances and inequalities, male domination and their manifestations upheld by systemic male supremacy ideologies, and to reform such dualistic and sexist gender orders.

Transform masculinities: We seek to destabilize stereotypical male gender roles and hegemonic expressions of manhood, and support manifestations of non-violent, equitable and inclusive notions of manhood, by changing social norms that shape boys’ and men’s behavior.

Engaging men and boys: We seek to work with men and boys to encourage their active involvement in ending gender inequalities, advancing women’s rights and transforming masculinities as allies with women, girls and people of diverse gender identities. Recognizing that some men and boys question the harmful notions of manhood and the privileges that society grants them, we provide them with ways to take transformative action. We work with men in power in all spheres of society to promote progressive policies and institutional practices in favor of women’s rights and gender justice.

Gender transformative approaches: Policies, processes and strategies that seek to critically reflect on and transform social norms and institutional practices that create and reinforce gender inequalities. Gender transformative approaches do not view the engagement of men and boys as an end in itself, rather as a means to transform social norms and gender power relations at their roots. Gender transformative approaches are part of a ‘gender integration continuum’ that classifies interventions as gender exploitative, gender neutral, gender sensitive or gender transformative. MenEngage seeks to support the increased uptake of gender transformative approaches with men and boys through the work of the Alliance.

Intersectionality: We acknowledge that oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another. This interplay of multiple identities can increase vulnerability and inequalities in privilege and power, and further entrench inequalities and injustice. We seek to contribute to an intersectional understanding of men and boys’ roles and responsibilities, and enhance an intersectional perspective in the work of the Alliance and its members.

Feminist approach: We acknowledge that we build on the heritage of feminist women’s rights organizations and movements and ground our work firmly in feminist principles. We seek to strengthen our work by embracing a women’s rights perspective and feminist analysis, including placing inequalities in privilege and power that result from patriarchy at the heart of our work with men and boys. We commit to listening to and being accountable to women’s rights voices; and to institutionalizing democratic/inclusive decision making processes within the Alliance.

Enabling spaces for dialogue and joint action: MenEngage Alliance, being informed by a feminist approach, engage in strengthening partnerships, networks and alliances as a political act to change and a tool for empowerment within movement building. We work ‘glocal’: where ideas from the local to the global are jointly identified, shared, negotiated, changed, and disseminated.

Partnerships: We seek to foster concrete and equal associations and collaborations with various actors and agencies in the field of women’s rights, gender and social justice, climate justice, child rights, youth empowerment and rights, sexual and reproductive health rights, civil and political rights, indigenous population rights, and human right
Promising Practices
Engaging men & boys in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls

Engaging Men and Boys to Reduce and Prevent Gender-Based Violence, by White Ribbon Campaign:

10 Point Call to Action on engaging men & boys in eliminating violence towards women, by MenEngage Alliance:

“Programs rated as being gender-transformative had a higher rate of effectiveness. Among the 27 programs that were assessed as being gender-transformative, 41% were assessed as being effective versus 29% of the 58 programs as a whole”.

World Health Organization (2007)

“The interventions have been successful with marked attitudinal change and less likelihood of GBV among participants”.

SIDA (2015)

Increasing Development of Men & Boys in Gender Equality: Development Trends: SIDA 2015
http://www.sida.se/contentassets/91a4a12e753a4fc88f6d1e91bf78e7cf/fbfae07d-ea8b-4550-84e5-aa476fdd00a6.pdf

International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), by Promundo:

Men, Masculinities, Changing Power. A discussion paper on engaging men in gender equality from Beijing 1995 to 2015, by MenEngage Alliance, UN Women and UNFPA:

State Of The World’s Fathers, a MenCare Advocacy Publication, 2015:

Engaging men and boys in changing gender-based inequity in health: Evidence from programme interventions, by WHO:
http://www.who.int/gender/documents/Engaging_men_boys.pdf

“Promising results of MenEngage Africa’s policy audits and associated advocacy efforts highlights the value of focusing a masculinities ‘lens’ at the policy level as a contribution to improve policy implementation on GBV and WE more broadly”.

USAID (2015)
Accountability Standards and Guidelines, by MenEngage Alliance

Working with Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women and Girls:
USAID 2015:

“Higher levels of education and childhood experiences of having fathers who engaged in care-work are positively correlated to male gender equitable attitudes and practices”.
Promundo (2015)

Engaging Men, Changing Gender Norms:
Directions for Gender-Transformative Action, by MenEngage Alliance and UNFPA

“Successful initiatives have developed strategies to challenge, negotiate and shift power around gender norms. Concepts around intersectionality should be made practical and concrete for programming”.
EMERGE (2016)

Men and Boys for Gender Justice: Delhi Declaration and Call to Action, by MenEngage Alliance (available in 13 languages)
http://menengage.org/resources/delhi-declaration-call-action/

Critical Dialogue on Engaging Boys and Men in Gender Equality: Accountability & Partnerships, by MenEngage Alliance:

EMERGE Polic Brief: Evidence on Routes to Gender Equality
Institute of Development Student, UK Aid 2016:
https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/9709/FINAL%20DESIGNED%20VERSION.pdf?sequence=1

Reflections on the 2015 Barbershop Conference, by MenEngage Alliance
http://menengage.org/resources/hurray-barbershop-conference-men-gender-equality-will-include-women/

Partners for Prevention: The Gender-based Violence Prevention and Masculinities Research Project, Collaborative Research Project for Asia and the Pacific, by UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV regional program.
About MenEngage Alliance

MenEngage Alliance is an international network of 700+ civil society organizations (CSOs) across 68 countries in 6 regions, working with men and boys to promote health and well-being, reduce gender-based violence and discrimination, and realize gender justice for all, by challenging structural barriers to women’s rights and gender equality. In partnership with women’s rights and gender justice activists and organizations, the Alliance seeks to add value to existing initiatives, by bringing forward the relevance of transforming masculinities resulting from patriarchal structures, and engaging men and boys in this work. The Alliance plays a pivotal role in shaping the discourse and agenda of the “men and masculinities” work within the health, women’s rights and gender justice field. In particular in the areas of GBV prevention, advancing SRHR for all, redistributing unpaid care-work, and transforming masculinities in peace and security.

MenEngage’s work with men and boys stems from and honors the pioneering work and ongoing leadership of women’s rights organizations and movements. The Alliance is convinced that accountability to the women’s movement and to other historically-oppressed social groups is central to our work and we are committed to working as allies, and to foster healthy relationships, with women and women’s rights organizations, movements and networks to achieve equity and equality for all women and girl.

Vision

A world where all people are equal and free from discrimination, and in which gender justice and human rights are promoted and protected.

Mission

The MenEngage Global Alliance works to transform unequal power relations and patriarchal systems by:

- Transforming masculinities
- Working with men and boys through intersectional feminist approaches
- Building inclusive Alliances from local to regional to global levels
- Fostering joint actions in partnership with women’s rights, gender- and other social justice movements.

Our Beliefs

We focus on gender-transformative approaches that address root causes of gender inequalities, working towards transforming the social systems that perpetuate stereotypes, unequal power, and privilege. We believe that within the larger framing of attaining gender justice for all women and girls, the work of engaging men and boys plays and important role as a supplemental strategy in the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.
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