Policy Brief

Policy Recommendations

Towards the advancement of progressive legal frameworks inclusive of transforming masculinities and engaging men and boys in women’s rights and gender equality

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The following policy brief outlines the collective learnings from the worldwide MenEngage Alliance membership in regards to policy recommendations for the advancement of a progressive gender-transformative, feminist-informed, human rights-based framework for the engagement of men and boys which is fully accountable to all women, girls and people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and/or sex characteristics (SOGIESC) across key issues:

✔ Eliminating all forms of VAWG/GBV
✔ Unpaid Care & Women’s Economic Empowerment
✔ SRHR for all/SOGIESC
✔ Feminist Peace & Security and Non-violent masculinities

ELIMINATING ALL FORMS OF VAWG/GBV

In order to prevent and respond and eliminate all forms of discrimination and 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 and to perpetuate a culture of impunity in which they remain silent about their own or other men and boys’ violence. Existing frameworks largely fail to recognize the need to specifically address the social norms and stereotypes 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 and get reflected in the legal and policy mechanisms and infrastructures.

**Men’s use of violence against women and girls is not random.**¹ There are clear factors that drive men’s use of VAW&G and factors that support women’s vulnerability to violence and discrimination, such as witnessing or experiencing violence as a child, norms and attitudes that support VAW&G, 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&G and areas of (post-) conflict. The necessary fundamental transformation of harmful social norms to prevent VAW&G and promote gender equality and justice can only be realized if international, regional and national human rights norms and standards on VAW&G 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 to engage men and boys that change underlying destructive gender norms are effective in reducing violence against women and girls².

**Policy Recommendations**

- Design and implement, policies and programs that seek to address the root causes of all forms of discrimination and violence including social norms, stereotypes, beliefs and attitudes towards power and privileges, stemming from structural injustices and patriarchal power structures.

- Providing context around the social systems at large as an overall framework for ending all violence towards all women and girls. This violence is manifested in many ways including sexual violence, institutional violence, economic violence, homophobic/transphobic and biphobic violence and violence between men and boys, but by providing a model for combating the root causes, we avoid separating these approaches into silos.

- Carry out evaluations and audits on laws related to ending GBV, domestic violence and violence against all women and girls that are not properly implemented and develop interventions that tackle the barriers to their implementation, including social norms. Encourage governments to see their role in social norms transformation, not just in the implementation of policies and laws.

- 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.

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● 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 and girls and people of diverse identities can be part of comprehensive community support for women and girls 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 and girls survivors of violence, they can be an important part of eliminating and preventing future violence³.

● Holding institutions accountable across all the sectors, whose leadership is generally 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 and girls.

● 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 and others.

● Well-designed group education processes can lead to attitude changes, and in some cases, behavior changes associated with VAW&G⁴. A significant proportion of men and boys who use sexual violence do so for the first time as adolescents. Thus, it is key to reach boys 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&G, and implementing gender-sensitive school curricula can be effective in eliminating and preventing all forms of discrimination and 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 people 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&G.

● Engaging men and boys as positive role-models and caregivers is a key strategy for ending cycles of violence, discrimination and oppression. Programs with fathers and caregivers that emphasize

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alternatives to physical punishment, promote healthy and egalitarian relationships and promote gender-equal child-rearing have shown promise in ending violence against women and children.

● Men and boys can also play positive roles in changing attitudes towards survivors of sexual and 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 social and gender norms, stereotypes and the behavior of men and boys 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, and people of diverse identities to overcome their traumas can prove effective in preventing future violence.

● Boys and young men who experience, and/or witness violence against their mothers, are 2.5-3 times more likely to use violence against partners when they become adults. 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 and boys around the world believe that violence against women and girls is a violation of rights, but most men and boys are silent when men and boys they know carry out such violence. This affirms the importance of bystander interventions and community accountability approaches in which men and boys who already oppose violence against women and girls and people of other identities are encouraged and supported to speak out when they see other men and boys use violence. In numerous impact 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 VAW.

● While empowering women and girls is essential, if programs only empower women and girls, they can lead to backlash and increased violence by men and boys. 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.

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Feminist economists and social policy scholars have produced rigorous evidence for decades confirming that, across the world, burdensome aspects of care work fall disproportionately on women and girls. This comes as no surprise. However, the scale of that inequality is staggering.

Throughout the world, women and girls continue to spend two to 10 times more time than men and boys on unpaid care work, including domestic work, water and firewood collection, and caring for children and those who are ill or old\textsuperscript{9}. Even in countries like Sweden and The Netherlands, known for being relatively gender-equal, women still do 20\% to 60\% more unpaid care work than men\textsuperscript{10}. Women make up 40\% of the global formal workforce yet, on average, earn 24\% less than men\textsuperscript{11}. This unequal division of care work acts as one of the primary barriers to women’s economic empowerment (and empowerment in general) and relates to several key women’s rights violations worldwide.

Achieving gender equality will mean that men and boys take on their equal share of the world’s paid and unpaid care work. This will require that boys and men, from early childhood, are socialized in ways that seek to transform the gendered division of care work specifically, and the gendered division of labor in general. In order to advance women’s economic empowerment and gender justice, it is essential to examine and challenge the stereotypical notions of masculinities that are currently inhibiting men’s and boys’ care work, and to engage men and boys to take up their share of caring and domestic work.

Increasingly, more women and girls are entering the labor market worldwide than ever before, compelling the increased need for men and boys need to uptake their fair share of not just paid and unpaid care work, but of the household workload as well. Women continue the work “double shift” to varying degrees in every context globally, and this necessitates a fundamental shift in the cultural norms and stereotypes around men’s roles and responsibilities as equitable partners in the private domain.

Research has shown that positive male parental involvement leads to improved maternal and child health, as well as stronger and more equitable partner relations, and increases the likelihood that sons will grow up to be more gender-equitable and involved fathers, and that daughters will be empowered\textsuperscript{12}. In addition, male engagement in caring has benefits for men themselves, and research


from the State of the World’s Fathers reports shows that men who are more active in caring roles are healthier, happier and less violent.\(^{13}\)

To achieve the necessary transformative impact, work with individual men and boys must be accompanied by efforts to challenge both the personal and structural barriers to the equitable division and fair share of caring. These include factors that inhibit women and girls from developing paid careers at the same pace and quality as men can – the infamous ‘sticky floors’ and ‘glass ceilings’ – which often result in women doing more unpaid care.

Insufficient public services, infrastructure and social protection policies are leading causes of the unequal division of paid and unpaid labor. Progressive policies, such as (paid) parental leave, can help even out this division, and when these include paternity leave, they encourage men’s caring, help transform deeply rooted societal attitudes to caring and promote greater equality in the household, workplace and society as a whole.

Existing workplace cultures, driven by the global capitalist economy\(^{14}\), lead to a system that values growth and production more than caring for people and the environment. There is an urgent need to sensitize and mobilize men and boys as critical citizens and advocates, alongside women and girls and people of diverse gender identities, in order to transform the systems and institutions around them and support policy change, including on unpaid care.

Policy Recommendations

- **Work through the health system to change social norms around caregiving**, for example by involving men more in pre and post-natal care, and using these visits as an entry point into fatherhood and parenting programs etc.

- Increasing the government uptake of **programs and campaigns that seek to transform social norms and stereotypes around caring**, including through institutionalizing such initiatives within education, healthcare, and social protection systems.

- At the state level, implement progressive laws supportive of men’s caregiving, including **paid, non-transferable parental leave**, that is adequate in length and includes childcare provisions.

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● Introduce **caring as a key competency in education systems** and promote diverse job skills for all, as well as transform the stereotypical gendered division of labor.

● Work with the media to promote **non-stereotypical, caring, non-violent depictions of men and boys**.

● Promoting public services and social protection policies that **support families, including acknowledging diversities**, and enable the redistribution of care work within households;

● Redistributing care work from poorer households to the state by financing, providing and regulating care and social protection services;

● Promoting family-friendly, **taking into cognisance of diverse family structures**, policies in the private sector, including parental leave, childcare and flexible working arrangements.

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**SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR) FOR ALL**

Around the world women, girls and people of diverse SOGIESCs continue to lack access to sexual and reproductive health services and are denied their sexual and reproductive rights; including over 47,000 women dying from unsafe abortion\(^\text{15}\) each year, 214 million women in developing countries who continue to have unmet needs for modern contraceptives\(^\text{16}\), more than 290,000 women dying from unintended pregnancy related causes in developing countries each year\(^\text{17}\), and 19 percent of girls in developing countries become pregnant before they turn 18\(^\text{18}\).

Control of women’s sexuality and reproduction is a key element of patriarchy and a uniform feature of societies’ across the globe. The social control of women’s reproduction, often reinforced by laws and policies include control of women’s fertility for population control purposes, control of women’s ability to seek and get abortion for unwanted pregnancies, the lack of comprehensive sexuality education and autonomy for preventing early and repeated pregnancy and for even leaving abusive relationships. We also believe that men and boys have particular SRHR needs, which are often neglected by their own poor health seeking behavior in general. **There is a need to better understand the linkages between men’s roles, norms around masculinities, gender and SRHR.** Importantly, **men and boys are, and need to be, allies and activists for the realization of full SRHR for all.**

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\(^{16}\) Ibid., 12 (WHO)


As well, violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identities continues to exist all over the world at alarming rates. Human Rights Council Resolution 38/43, detailing the findings of the Independent expert on SOGI states that:

_Several comprehensive reviews have shown that lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender non-conforming persons are at heightened risk of physical and sexual violence_19 _and that in most of those cases, sexual orientation or gender identity played a key role in the perpetration of the abuse._20 The data available show that they face the near-certainty of suffering violence during their lives, and that as a general rule they live every day in the awareness and fear of it.

The shrinking of civil society spaces and resources has increased in recent years, which disempower CSOs and feminist and SOGIESCs groups from carrying out their critical function of serving as watchdogs for State actions as well as an increased criminalization of dissent, with women’s human rights defenders21, LGBTQIA activists22, SRHR activists and their organizations being subjected to targeted attacks23 and having seen their access to direct funding decrease.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights issues, are often narrowly and mistakenly understood as a women’s issue, and women, girls and SOGIESC persons bear the primary responsibility for solving them. We strongly believe that men and boys must work alongside women, girls and people of diverse gender identities to ensure the full realization so SRHR for all, challenging the laws and policies which sustain these violations of these human rights and supporting the leadership of women, girls and people of diverse SOGIESCs, in advocating for their SRHR rights.

Men’s roles within relationships also matter for women’s SRHR. Research24 highlights that across several countries’ large percentages of women and girls assert that they involved a male partner in a decision to

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22 OHCHR (2015), Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General, Follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, Human Rights Council-Twenty-ninth Session, 4 May 2015:

23 Women’s Rights and Gender Section, OHCHR (2014), One Pager on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders

24 Results for the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES Survey) in various countries: https://promundoglobal.org/programs/international-men-and-gender-equality-survey-images/
have an abortion. We know that gender norms often limit girls’ and women’s access to SRHR services, including safe abortion. Men’s lives are also affected by abortion, yet men rarely speak up in large part due to gender norms around masculinities, tell their stories or voice their support for safe and legal abortion. We believe we must work to make sure that boys’ and men’s involvement in SRHR is always positive and centered on respecting girls’ and women’s full bodily autonomy.

Furthermore, we know that harmful social norms related to masculinity act as barriers to the realization of SRHR, and are key drivers of discrimination, stigma and violence towards women, girls and people of diverse gender identities. Increasingly, the critical roles of men and boys in achieving SRHR are being recognized. Research\(^{25}\) confirms that better outcomes for women and girls’ health are achieved when men and boys are engaged as accountable counterparts and allies. Many of the recent steps towards limiting women’s access to safe and legal abortion have been made by heads of state and policy-makers, most of whom are men. We therefore urge men and boys at all levels of society, to speak out and challenge other men and boys who seek to limit girls’, women’s and people of diverse SOGIESCs rights’ to bodily autonomy.

Additionally, many men neglect their own SRHR needs and those of their partners and their families. Men’s lower use of SRH services, such as HIV testing and treatment, is a result of rigid gender norms as well as structural barriers, such as clinics that are ill-prepared to address male-specific health issues. As a result, not only are women and girls left to bear much of the burden of their own and their families’ SRHR, but men’s lack of involvement places expensive and unnecessary burdens on health-care systems. Interventions with men and boys around SRHR have been effective at increasing men’s use of services, as well as their support and respect for their partner’s SRHR. This involvement, in turn, improves the health of women, children and men themselves.

Policy Recommendations

- Implement **Comprehensive Sexuality Education** in schools, that provides accurate information in addition to a focus on gender, diversities of sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions as well as sexual characteristics, masculinities and healthy relationships.

- **Target men and young men in maternal health programs**, as an entry point to encourage them to be more involved in their partner’s health as well as their own.

● Ensure access to informational educational communication materials for men and boys, including men and boys of diverse sexual identities, to be able to make informed decision on whom they love, their sexual reproductive health and their sexual rights, free from coercion, violence, stigma or discrimination.

● Create supportive and safe environments for persons of diverse SOGIESC to freely choose whom they love or whom they have sex with it without fear of stigma, discrimination and violence.

● Create youth-friendly health services, and spaces for peer-to-peer conversations and learning between and among boys and girls in order to break taboos around sexuality.

● Work alongside women and girls to ensure access to safe and legal abortion, and support women before, during and after an abortion;

● Compel men and boys to take more responsibility for contraceptive use, and to advocate for accessible education and services to enable them to do so;

● Promote a wider understanding and acceptance of sexual diversity and rights and the links between harmful expressions of masculinities and their ties to violence and discrimination towards people of diverse SOGIESCs

● Call attention to appropriate SRH services for boys and men, in order to co-share SRHR responsibilities

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ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN PEACE & ACTIVE NON-VIOLENCE

Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 there has been significant progress on attention for women’s needs and participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Through the participation of women in formal peace processes has been inching up, a study of 31 major peace processes between 1992 and 2011 revealed that only 9 percent of negotiators were women26. Furthermore, the current implementation of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda is often translated as “making war safer for women and girls” rather than being about preventing crises, conflict and war. The agenda thus largely fails to challenge the underlying gender norms that fuel violent conflict.

Research tells us that socially-constructed gender norms which associate masculinity with power, violence and control, play an important role in driving conflict and insecurity worldwide27. It appears to be crucial therefore to engage men and boys in gender norms transformation in order to reduce their susceptibility to violence and extremism and prevent conflict worldwide. Furthermore, the institutions of war and the people who hold power are highly masculinized: war is built on the mobilization of men’s

26 Castillo Diaz and Tordjman (2012), Women’s Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence, UN Women

bodies to fight. Men and boys, together with women and girls, need to be supported to better understand these dynamics and be resilient to political strategies that harm them.

In 2015 the total global cost of violence and conflict around the world was US $13.6 trillion, more than US $1,800 per person on the planet\(^\text{28}\). There is an urgent need, and opportunity, for this money to be redirected towards investments in gender equality, health and poverty reduction. Gaining deeper understanding into the drivers of conflict, and the roles that men and masculinities play in creating, reinforcing and escalating violent hostilities, is imperative to finding pathways for change toward more peaceful, just and harmonious societies.

Simultaneously, exploring the varied perceptions and experiences of men and boys, and how they can positively contribute to peace and security efforts, is a crucial step in the inclusion of ‘men and masculinities lens’ in shaping gender-sensitive peace and security policies and achieving the transformative potential of UNSCR 1325.

In order to challenge militarism, prevent conflict and achieve gender equality, it is necessary to destabilize stereotypical male gender roles and hegemonic expressions of manhood, and support “alternatives”: manifestations of non-violent, equitable and inclusive notions of manhood, by changing social norms that shape boys’ and men’s behavior.

In order to challenge militarism, men and boys can be engaged through educational and leadership training that challenges militarized masculinities and violence as a dominant narrative and promotes opportunities for alternatives through non-violence, as well as programs that engage men and boys to strengthen gender equality and women’s participation in peace and security processes and to prevent and respond to human rights violations in conflict situations, including sexual violence.

**Policy Recommendations**

- Provide psychosocial support to boys and men in conflict and post-conflict situations, particularly ex-combatants, in order to deconstruct ideals of masculinities that encourage them to use violence and train them on active non-violence and alternative masculinities.

- **Identify and work with male allies in political systems** to support the increased participation of women in political and peacebuilding processes.

- **Address militarism as a cause and consequence of patriarchy** and work to redefine security and protection towards a human security model.

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\(^{28}\) UN Women (2016), *Facts and Figures: Peace and Security & UN Secretary-General’s remarks* at the Peacebuilding Fund Pledging Conference (2016)
● Carry out **gender audits of military, law enforcement, and the justice and security sectors** to assess whether they perpetuate violence or progress toward respecting human rights, and to provide recommendations accordingly.

● **Address risks of imperialism and militarism:** Violence by men and ‘masculine and patriarchal’ state must be understood within the context of colonial violence, including in the name of development. Systemic change requires addressing the links between harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse within international institutions, as well as the colonial legacies outside of those systems (i.e., illicit arms flows, environmental degradation, etc.).

● **Identify strategic groups:** Interventions should be focused on key populations (i.e., family, faith leaders, media, government, military) and target institutional spaces in which men hold powerful positions and set standards of masculinity, or strategic pathways that lead to these spaces (i.e., men and boys before they join the military or police).

● **Address risks to men and male-identified people:** Interventions should recognize that men and boys who participate in gender equality and nonviolence trainings may risk ostracization for being “feminized” or colonized by “Western” ideas. As part of contextualizing interventions, trainings should be grounded in local history and context.

● **Address risks to women and female-identified people:** Recognize that women who work with male “allies” risk undermining women’s political agenda for equality and peace if patriarchal violence is simply replaced by benign patriarchy. Initiatives must ensure that men learn more than just the language of gender equality and actually challenge unequal power relations, including by learning to step back and support women’s leadership, rather than continue to dominate spaces under the flag of being a “gender champion.”.