

# MenEngage Alliance Call for Action at the Commission on the Status of Women 2013

## Making Primary Prevention from Gender-Based Violence a Global Right



The MenEngage Alliance is a global network of more than 300 NGOs and UN partners working to engage men and boys in gender equality and in violence prevention. On the occasion of the 57th Session of the CSW – focusing on the prevention of violence against women - the MenEngage Alliance calls on the UN and state parties to take primary prevention seriously by immediately scaling up evidence-informed, rights-focused prevention efforts, including those to engage men and boys.

The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform of Action and the Agreed Conclusions of the 48th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) all make explicit calls for **prevention** to end violence against women. The Cairo Platform of Action at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the Agreed Conclusions of the 48th Session of CSW make specific references to engaging men and boys in ending violence against women, as do numerous UN agency plans of action. The World Health Organization has repeatedly endorsed gender equality work as an important strategy and provided guidance on how to implement it.<sup>i</sup> **However, existing UN agreements 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.**

With the growing array of interventions and strong evidence that interventions with men and boys can work to change the norms and other factors associated with men’s use of violence against women (VAW), the time has come to make primary prevention a part of national and international policies and platforms. Most primary prevention efforts working with men and boys to end VAW to date have been small-scale, reaching

several hundred beneficiaries, or at most several thousand. The challenge and urgency for each of these approaches is that they garner adequate funding and global attention, while ensuring that they hold perpetrators accountable, and do not inhibit or diminish funding for the protection of survivors of violence or efforts to empower women (including political and economic empowerment). ***It is time for approaches that have been shown to lead to changes in men’s use of violence against women be taken to scale via large-scale public institutions and with adequate attention to quality, rigor, and protection of women’s rights.***

Multiple household surveys carried out in nearly all regions of the world have found that the strongest factors associated with men’s use of violence against women are the internalization of societal norms that support men’s collective dominance over women, and exposure to domestic violence and harsh physical punishment in the home.<sup>ii</sup> These findings suggest that engaging men and boys to end VAW requires attention to the ways that boys and men experience and witness violence as children in their homes and in other settings, and to identify ways that primary prevention can break cycles of violence by interrupting violence as experienced and witnessed by boys and by changing the norms and power imbalances that support men’s use of VAW.

# This call to action outlines 10 concrete steps that the UN and national governments can and should take immediately to engage men and boys in preventing violence against women.

## 1) Create and universally implement school-based, gender equality curricula that include discussions of gender-based violence.

Well-designed group education processes have repeatedly led to attitude changes, and in some cases, behavior changes associated with VAW. Training teachers and community-based workers to facilitate group education and school-based campaigns on gender-based violence should be universally adopted by schools, and can be combined with sexuality education. Civil society should be engaged in developing these curricula, and minimum standards must be created and disseminated for implementation. Available evidence affirms that 10-16 sessions of participatory group education with well-trained facilitators that include discussions of violence against women can lead to attitude and behavior change.<sup>iii</sup> Recent experiences have also affirmed that such approaches can be effectively implemented in schools.<sup>iv</sup> Such approaches should be rolled-out at the national level with monitoring and input by civil society and with adequate resources for evaluation.

## 2) Scale up national level awareness and public education efforts to educate men and women about existing laws on VAW and to defuse men's resistance to women's rights by explaining why gender equality is also in men's interest.

Men react in complex and uneven ways to national and international legal and policy efforts to end violence against women. Household surveys have found that men are nearly universally aware of laws on VAW, but many show backlash to those laws or do not adequately understand them.<sup>v</sup> National governments and civil society organizations must carry out public education campaigns on laws pertaining to VAW and community-based and national-level advocacy to ensure adequate implementation of existing laws and to engage men to support such laws.

## 3) Scale up bystander intervention approaches that seek to change social norms and create individual and community accountability.

Research finds that many and perhaps most men around the world believe that violence against women is a violation of rights, but most men are silent when they know carry out such violence.<sup>vi</sup> This affirms the importance of bystander intervention and community accountability approaches in which men and boys who already

oppose VAW are encouraged and supported to speak out when they see other men use VAW. 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.<sup>vii</sup>

## 4) Scale up high quality, evidence-informed mass media and communications strategies that engage men and boys as part of the solution in ending VAW.

National governments should work with broadcasters and commercial media to implement well-designed mass and community media campaigns on engaging men in VAW prevention that: (a) show men and boys as part of the solution in ending VAW; (b) present concrete actions that men and boys can carry out to end VAW; and (c) are combined with community-level education and advocacy.

## 5) Test and scale up secondary prevention approaches that offer specific support for men and boys who have witnessed or experienced violence during childhood.

Research has repeatedly shown that the strongest single factor associated with men's use of violence against female partners is witnessing domestic violence in their families of origin.<sup>viii</sup> Despite this, few children exposed to violence have access to ameliorative psychosocial support, and such services are seldom available in schools or in communities. The effectiveness of such programs has seldom been evaluated and they are rarely implemented at large scale. Group counseling, group support and group 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.

## 6) Implement VAW prevention together with policies to decrease alcohol consumption.

Research has repeatedly shown that decreasing excessive alcohol use is a key strategy in some settings to reduce men's use of VAW and decrease other high risk behaviors, including those related to HIV. Across the world, men are likely to drink more heavily than women and more likely to be habitually heavy drinkers,<sup>ix</sup> in part because of the strong association, fostered by the alcohol and advertising industries, between alcohol consumption and manhood.<sup>x</sup>

While alcohol abuse does not cause men's violence against women, it can be a contributing factor. Indeed, alcohol consumption and

over-consumption are associated with harmful behaviors including domestic violence, unsafe sex and road traffic accidents.<sup>xi</sup> A range of policies have demonstrated success in reducing harmful drinking, including alcohol taxes;<sup>xii</sup> raising the minimum legal drinking age;<sup>xiii</sup> reducing legal blood alcohol concentration limits for drivers; installing breath-testing checkpoints; banning alcohol advertising;<sup>xiv</sup> reducing the availability of alcohol;<sup>xv</sup> training those who serve alcoholic drinks to detect and manage excessive alcohol use;<sup>xvi</sup> community mobilization to educate the broader community about the health consequences of alcohol, and to demand that local authorities and government implement liquor laws and policies;<sup>xvii</sup> as well as efforts to shift gender norms that encourage men in particular to take risks with their health.<sup>xviii</sup>

## **7) Restrict access to guns.**

Another important example of efforts to change men's violent behavior concerns guns. Internationally, small arms and light weapons play significant roles in maintaining and reinforcing gender-specific imbalances of violence and power between women and men.<sup>xix</sup> Gun use is dominated by men, and men's gun violence in a variety of contexts is sustained by widespread cultural constructions of masculinity as aggressive, by cultures in which guns are symbols of male status and the means to manhood, and by male-dominated nation states and the tenets of militarism.<sup>xx</sup> Across the world, guns dramatically increase the lethality of men's violence against both women and other men.<sup>xxi</sup> Decreasing access to small arms and light weapons is an important strategy for decreasing men's use of violence, including against women. As part of this, strategies for gun control and disarmament must 'demobilize' the militarized and disempower violent conceptions of masculinity that sustain arms violence and undermine weapons collection processes.<sup>xxii</sup>

## **8) Engage men in VAW prevention in tandem with women's economic empowerment, including micro-credit programs and income support programs.**

Economic empowerment and microcredit programs reach at least 100-125 million individuals worldwide, more than 90% women; such programs could be a tremendous point of entry for engaging men. Recent studies have found that VAW can sometimes increase in the short-term when women's income increases; at the same time studies are finding that men can be engaged in VAW prevention programs alongside economic empowerment initiatives targeting women, for example by building group education, community activism and campaigns related to ending VAW around such initiatives.<sup>xxiii</sup>

## **9) Engage men as fathers and in parent training.**

Some 80% of the world's adult men will be or are fathers. Given the key role that men's witnessing of violence by their fathers or other men against their mothers in childhood plays in perpetuating cycles of violence, engaging men as involved, non-violent

caregivers (and engaging both men and women as non-violent parents) is a key strategy for ending these cycles of violence. Parent training programs that emphasize alternatives to physical punishment, and that engage parents from the pre-natal period onward show tremendous promise in ending violence and engaging thousands if not millions of men. The MenCare campaign was recently launched in collaboration with MenEngage to encourage men to become more active in the lives of their children, including by establishing respectful, egalitarian relationships with the mothers of their children (see [www.men-care.org](http://www.men-care.org) for additional information on the campaign).

## **10) Support research and evaluation on integrating programs for men who have used intimate partner violence as part of comprehensive community support for women survivors of violence.**

Holding men accountable for the VAW they have carried out must be part of comprehensive national strategies to end and prevent VAW. In recent years, programs for men who have used VAW (also known as batterer intervention programs) have been widely implemented. There are challenges in implementation and much more evaluation of such approaches is needed; there is a particular need to develop the evidence base for programs in the Global South, as the majority of evidence and program models come from the Global North.<sup>xxiv</sup> However, limited research affirms that 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 VAW.<sup>xxv</sup> Furthermore, community approaches to hold men accountable for VAW – 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.

## **Final Comments**

The challenge in all of these approaches is to adequately fund them, and to ensure that they do not take away from the funding for protection of survivors of violence and efforts to empower women (including political and economic empowerment). The recommendations here should not be seen as standing alone or as advocating for actions with men and boys as separate from those efforts to empower women and girls. The MenEngage Alliance believes that all 10 of these recommendations can and should be implemented in partnership with women's rights groups, with women and girls, with communities, as well as with the men and boys who already speak out on and seek to end violence against women and girls.

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## End Notes

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