

# GBV AoR HELPDESK

Research, Evidence and Learning Digest

Gender-Based  
Violence AoR



## Working with Men and Boys to Promote Gender Equality and Prevent Gender-based Violence

This evidence digest will explore emerging research on the nature and effectiveness of efforts to work with men and boys to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls in emergencies, with a focus on 1) what we know about this programming; and 2) what evidence says about how best to engage men and boys, and what practices to avoid. Links to relevant research, guidelines, tools and resources follow at the end.

### Overview of the Evidence

Working with men and boys is essential to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls (also referred to as violence against women and girls, or VAWG). Interventions that target men and boys as allies and agents of change have rapidly proliferated over the past 15-20 years. Some interventions work with men and/or boys exclusively, others target males and females in separate but related activities, and yet others work with males and females together.

Unlike perpetrator programmes that typically work with 'adjudicated perpetrators'—that is, men who have been found guilty of intimate partner violence (IPV) and mandated by a court for treatment<sup>1</sup>--interventions on engaging men and boys as allies are most often community-based and do not focus

specifically on identified perpetrators, but rather seek to shift social norms in order to prevent men's violence against women even before it occurs. However, the likelihood of perpetrators being among those who participate in these 'primary prevention' programmes is relatively high given the prevalence of IPV around the world.

Few interventions – and evaluations – that focus on engaging men and boys in primary prevention of GBV have been implemented in emergency settings. There is more evidence on the effectiveness of male engagement approaches – and primary prevention work more broadly – from non-emergency settings.

Whether in emergency or development settings, programmes implemented under the umbrella of 'work with men and boys' are diverse in their objectives, approaches, and activities--describing everything from a

<sup>1</sup> Notably, there is very little evidence of reduction in further perpetration of men's violence against women and girls through perpetrator programmes. Most of these types of interventions have been undertaken and evaluated in the Global North. For an analysis of these programmes in the United

States, for example, see, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309141618\\_Domestic\\_Violence\\_Perpetrator\\_Programs\\_A\\_Proposal\\_for\\_Evidence-Based\\_Standards\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309141618_Domestic_Violence_Perpetrator_Programs_A_Proposal_for_Evidence-Based_Standards_in_the_United_States).

lecture or drama performed in primarily male-dominated community spaces to intensive dialogue, training or mentoring interventions conducted with males over weeks or months. (NB: Community mobilization approaches are often seen as being separate from 'male engagement' interventions; however, as community mobilization efforts typically work with male community members, they are considered here.)

This digest highlights the importance of, and draws on, practice-based evidence to inform recommendations and ways forward for male engagement approaches.

Overall, the evidence from both humanitarian and development contexts highlights the need to ensure accountability to women, girls and women's movements & organisations; work in explicitly gender-transformative ways (i.e., ways that support gender equality and women's empowerment); and engage both males and females in whole-of-community approaches.

### Summary of Reviews

[From Work with Men and Boys to Changes of Social Norms and Reduction of Inequities in Gender Relations: A Conceptual Shift in Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls](#) (Jewkes, R., Flood, M. & Lang, J., 2015)

This article summarises different kinds of programmes, the evidence base and gaps, and critiques of work on engaging men and boys in VAWG prevention. The authors note that different male engagement interventions have different theoretical foundations (e.g. in how social norms or gender-transformative work are defined and understood), and have varied objectives, including to stop violence, support gender equity for gender equality, raise awareness, and/or change gender norms. Popular male engagement approaches include:

- challenging understandings of masculinity, for example males as warriors or leaders, to build more non-violent and gender-equitable norms;

- using individuals or leaders from traditionally masculine professions and sports as role models to promote non-violent behaviours;
- encouraging men who are not themselves violent to intervene with other men who are sexist and aggressive (e.g. the Mentors in Violence Prevention intervention in the USA);
- face-to-face educational programmes with boys and young men (and sometimes women and girls) that promote critical reflection on gendered behaviours and norms (e.g. Gender Equity Movement in Schools adaptations in South Asia and Vietnam);
- social marketing strategies to shift attitudes on men's use of violence (e.g. Instituto Promundo's Programme H in Brazil, and subsequent iterations);
- engaging men through parenting and couples' programmes (e.g. the violence prevention component of the Men Care campaign in Indonesia).

The article also notes that evidence of the effectiveness of interventions is limited. Citing a comprehensive review of sixty-five programmes working with men and boys for the prevention of sexual violence against women and girls, only seven of the interventions reviewed had an effect on violence perpetration; five of these included both sexes in the intervention, and all seven involved long-term interventions that promoted respectful relationships. The article notes the importance of gender-transformative programming and working with both women and men.

Another systematic review assessed within this article noted that neither bystander interventions nor prevention strategies focused on social norms change in male-dominated or masculine workplaces or social contexts have shown evidence of positive impact. Many of these interventions limit themselves to attitude change, which cannot be assumed to result in behaviour change.

The authors also show that contextual factors are important in the success of male engagement programming, especially in conflict-affected settings, where norms around the use of violence may be particularly strong. Addressing trauma and understanding norms around the use of multiple forms of violence is likely to be important to the success of interventions.

In order to be successful, the article concludes that VAWG prevention work should:

- involve the empowerment of women at all levels (from individual to societal) and frame the transformation of masculinities as complementary to, and supportive of, this empowerment;
- focus on transforming masculinity, gender norms and systems of inequality;
- promote work with women and girls alongside men and boys ;
- be based on robust theories of change according to the risk factors in context, including through mapping of local versions of masculinities;
- include a coordinated focus on multiple risk factors and address structures of power and oppression across the community;
- prioritize longer-term approaches.

[Working with Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Approaches, Challenges, and Lessons.](#) (Grieg, A., 2015).

This report reviews published and grey literature on strategies for engaging men and boys in ending VAWG across five sectors: economic growth, trade and agriculture; education; governance, law enforcement and justice systems; conflict, post-conflict and humanitarian assistance; and social development.

In the economic growth, trade and agriculture category, the report notes mixed evidence generated by programmes aiming to improving gender equity within the household, which are often focused on decision-making and the gendered

breakdown of household labour. Some progress has been made in terms of husbands sharing decision-making and household tasks with their wives, but the impact on men's perpetration of violence is less clear. Other approaches--including training men to be positive role models or to mobilise men as active bystanders--are described as promising strategies which have not been sufficiently evaluated.

In the education sector, whole-school approaches working with schools and communities to develop and implement a vision for a safe school has little evidence in terms of reducing VAWG but does improve risk factors such as gender equitable attitudes among male teachers and students. Targeted curricula aimed at mixed-gender and male-only groups focused on self-reflection and challenging gender attitudes and norms shows some effectiveness in changing attitudes, and promise in terms of reducing VAWG, though this is not yet confirmed by rigorous studies. Similar approaches with adolescents outside of formal school settings show promise in changing attitudes, but the impact on boys' perpetration of violence against girls is unclear.

In governance, law enforcement and justice systems, the report highlights the role of advocacy to male politicians as a precursor to improving policy related to VAWG; however, whether or not the changes in policy were actually caused by the advocacy itself has not been established.

In the social development category, using group-based gender education and reflection approaches, and working with both women and men, have shown effectiveness in changing attitudes and in some cases in reducing risk of IPV. Emerging consensus is that both single-gender and mixed-gender discussions are necessary.

The report summarises challenges in the field, such as:

- engaging men in ways that truly challenge the underlying power structures that enable male violence;
- remaining accountable to the work and priorities of women and women's organisations;
- addressing limitations of approaches that 'individualise' violence, such as those using role models; and
- managing the tension between appealing to men's interests in taking on positive masculinities while at the same time supporting women's interests in empowerment.

The report also highlights several recommendations for future work, including the need for:

- a better understanding of men's different understandings of privilege and subordination;
- synchronising work on masculinities with women's empowerment interventions;
- grounding interventions in a social-ecological framework of violence and working simultaneously from individual through to community levels.

[Gender Transformative Approaches to Engaging Men in Gender-Based Violence Prevention: A Review and Conceptual Model](#), (Casey, E., Carlson, J., Two Bulls, S., & Yager, A., 2018)

This review examines existing approaches to engaging men in VAWG prevention, categorising such efforts into three domains: initial outreach and recruitment; programmes to promote gender-equitable attitudes; and social action aimed at eliminating VAWG. The authors note a proliferation of programmes and strategies aimed at involving men and boys in violence prevention over the past two decades-- either male-only or community-based approaches--that cover a broad range of activities and objectives, e.g. raising men's awareness of VAWG, promoting individual men's respectful relationships, and engaging men as agents of change within their communities.

The evidence base suggests an explicit focus on challenging gender norms and roles in a gender-transformative approach is showing the most promise; this approach is most evident in interventions that directly target individual attitude *and* behaviour change and is less evident across the broader spectrum of male engagement activities.

Under the heading of initial outreach to men, the review describes a variety of different but interrelated approaches to initial outreach to men and boys, noting that participants were most often engaged through existing networks and relationships that built on their local and cultural connections. The review suggests the importance of various and overlapping methods, potentially using sequenced approaches that build on existing connections. The review also notes that much work on initial outreach is not based on strong theoretical foundations – or at least these theoretical foundations are not described – and could benefit from additional attention to gender-transformative approaches, even at this initial stage. Though the evidence base for this domain does not allow for strong conclusions, the authors identify risks of initial outreach approaches that engage men by appealing to traditionally masculine ideas, e.g. as 'heads of households.'

Under the second domain of programmes to promote gender-equitable attitudes, the review assesses eight interventions. Three of these used a community mobilisation approach: SASA!; the Male Norms Initiative; and the Safe Homes and Respect for Everyone (SHARE) project. The other five interventions worked one-on-one or in small groups: the Men and Women in Partnership Initiative; the Stepping Stones Creating Futures intervention; the GBV/HIV Prevention Intervention; Partivartan, an adaptation of the Coaching Boys into Men initiative; and an online intervention with university students in the United States. Overall, six interventions showed no negative impact while also showing a statistically significant positive impact on gender-equitable attitudes,

men's involvement in care or domestic work, decreases in IPV or decreases in social acceptance of IPV (though measures differed across studies). The authors emphasize more work is required to understand how different intervention types (or combinations thereof) contribute to effectiveness.

Under the third domain of men's engagement in social action to eliminate VAWG, the authors note that such actions are often both the intended outcome of work with men and boys, as well as a strategy to engage other men into gender-justice work. Although most literature concerning this domain is descriptive rather than evaluative, the authors suggest that this domain has been under-assessed, and that the effectiveness of this work – and the effectiveness of work in the prior two domains in catalysing men to become gender justice activists – has not been sufficiently assessed.

Overall, the authors encourage the use of theory and practice that focuses on women's rights, women's empowerment and gender equality in social norms change with men and boys, arguing that such gender-transformative approaches can enhance the less-developed domains of initial outreach and engagement of men, as well as their engagement in social action. They conclude that:

- more research is needed into what is most effective under the gender-transformative umbrella;
- programming tailored to local context and culture is likely to be more effective; and
- cross-region information-sharing and collaboration is important.

Lastly, the authors emphasize that engaging men and boys is a means to an end in violence prevention work rather than an end itself.

[Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on engaging men and boys in promoting and achieving gender equality, in the context of](#)

[eliminating violence against women](#) (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018)

This report on promising practices and lessons learned in initiatives to engage men and boys is based on submissions by member states, national human rights institutions, United Nations entities, civil society organisations and others. It highlights a selection of interventions for engaging men and boys to prevent VAWG across member states, under the categories of a) combating harmful practices; b) education and awareness-raising; c) fostering an equal share of responsibility in domestic life; d) promoting gender equality in health; e) breaking the cycle of violence; f) establishing a legal and policy framework; and g) building institutional capacity.

The report notes the potential of work to engage men and boys as partners and states that such engagement should recognise that men and boys interact with gender roles and gender inequality in different ways and from different perspectives. It recommends engaging men and boys as part of broader community-based efforts that are grounded in approaches that seek to shift patriarchal norms and structures, are informed by the views and experiences of women and girls, and supportive of women's rights movements and women's empowerment. It concludes that in order to be transformative, interventions must be designed in consultation with women's rights advocates, and must challenge gender inequitable power relations and structures.

[Interventions addressing men, masculinities and gender equality in sexual and reproductive health and rights: an evidence and gap map and systematic review of reviews](#). (Ruane-McAteer, E., Amin, A., Hanratty, J., Lynn, F., Corbijn van Willenswaard, K., Reid, E., Khosla, R. & Lohan, M., 2019)

This review generates an interactive evidence and gap map through a

systematic review of interventions engaging men and boys across all World Health Organisation sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) outcomes, including on VAWG. The review is based on the fundamental understanding that engagement of men and boys with women in efforts to promote gender equality and reduce harmful social norms linked to male power and control over females, is essential to addressing gender inequality and sexual and reproductive rights, and focuses specifically on the quality, quantity and effectiveness of these interventions.

A total of 462 programmes were considered and mapped; these were relatively evenly spread across low-income (24.5%), middle-income (37.8%) and high-income countries (37.8%). However, only 8.4% of interventions were considered gender-transformative, and the majority of these were concentrated in the VAWG category of SRHR (18 of 39, or 46.2%). Reviews of gender-transformative interventions were generally of low or critically low quality (97.1%) – largely due to insufficient reporting of methodologies - and findings inconclusive (59%), but 38.5% found positive results. The review further found that gender-transformative approaches with men and boys are particularly likely to be implemented low-income and middle-income countries.

The review recommends that future research and interventions with men and boys must explicitly promote a gender-transformative approach through intervention logic models and use more robust research and measurement designs.

[What works to prevent violence against women and girls in conflict and humanitarian crisis: Synthesis Brief](#) (Murphy, M, Hess, T, Casey, J & Minchew, H, 2019)

*NB: As this synthesis brief is included in the GBV Area of Responsibility Helpdesk [Evidence Digest on Intimate Partner Violence in Emergencies](#), only the content*

*relevant to engaging men and boys is included here.*

Several successful community-based approaches including targeted involvement of male community members and leaders are identified, such as a faith-based approach in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that worked with faith leaders, gender champions and community groups to share information with the wider community both individually and in group settings, and the *Communities Care: Transforming Lives and Preventing Violence* pilot in South Sudan and Somalia, which included facilitated dialogues with male and female community members on VAWG prevention. Evaluation results from the DRC study found significant reductions in both intimate partner violence (IPV) and non-partner sexual violence, as well as improved attitudes towards gender equality and VAWG following the intervention, though the lack of control or comparison communities requires circumspection about attribution. Evaluation data from Somalia similarly revealed that intervention communities showed changes in relevant social norms. Further evidence from a longitudinal study of the Communities Care approach suggests that change in social norms remains significant over time.

Successful programs demonstrate common factors. These include an ‘all-of-community’ approach, even when using methods that specifically prioritize outreach to one demographic group (e.g. working with faith leaders to deliver messages to community members), as well as accountability to women and girls through, for example, creating effective feedback mechanisms during programme implementation, ensuring women and girls are part of the design process, and supporting women and girls to take up leadership roles in prevention efforts.

[Preventing Household Violence: Promising Strategies for Humanitarian Settings](#) (Asghar, K., Rubenstein, B., and Stark, L., 2017)

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Of the 11 evaluations that measured physical violence against females by male intimate partners (both adolescents and adults), four resulted in statistically significant reductions in violence through changing social norms, described further below. Notably, these were not perpetrator programmes, but rather programmes targeted to the general community.

Gender Roles, Equality and Transformations Project (GREAT) used radio drama, discussion groups to target adolescent boys and girls, as well as broader community mobilisation components. A case-control evaluation found significant reductions in violent responses to partner conflict and inappropriate touching, and an increase in gender-equitable behaviours.

Zero Tolerance Village Alliance (ZTVA) supported villages in Uganda to achieve 'zero tolerance' of VAWG through a pledge-taking ceremony and 'Roll of Honor', where men's names were placed once they took the pledge (and removed if they were found to break the pledge). A pre-/post-test evaluation found significant decreases in reported IPV and acceptance of IPV. Findings related to changes in community perceptions about gender-inequitable norms were mixed.

Responsible, Engaged, and Loving Fathers Initiative (REAL Fathers), targeted men ages 16-25 in Uganda who were parenting children ages 0-3 years, combining discussion groups with information, education, and communication (IEC) materials to encourage healthy relationships and parenting. The approach combined men's group discussions with discussions that included their female partners. A quasi-experimental study found that men who participated reported using less psychological and verbal IPV against

their female partners. Notably, however, physical IPV was not reduced.

Safe Homes and Respect for Everyone (SHARE), used Raising Voices' SASA! approach to changing attitudes and social norms related to IPV and HIV risk amongst men and women ages 15-49 in Uganda. The intervention included community activism and advocacy, capacity building, reproductive health outreach, HIV/AIDS outreach, counselling and referral, and distribution of information, education, communication materials on the above topics. Two and a half years after the intervention, a cluster-randomized controlled trial found statistically significant decreases in experiences of physical and sexual IPV and forced sex among women.

### Practice-Based Evidence

[How a lack of accountability undermines work to address violence against women and girls](#), *Feminist Perspectives on Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls Series, Paper No. 1* (Coalition of Feminists for Social Change – COFEM); [Staying accountable to women and girls](#), *Feminist Pocketbook Tip Sheet 4* (COFEM, 2018), [Men as allies and activists](#), *Feminist Pocketbook Tip Sheet 6*.

These complimentary learning papers developed by the Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM) emphasize that the evidence base for effectiveness of stand-alone male engagement approaches is weak, highlighting a 2014 systematic review of VAWG prevention programming that identified some male engagement models as showing some promise in shifting attitudes but having limited behavioural impact on perpetration of VAWG. The authors also note that some of the best-supported male engagement interventions utilize high profile global 'awareness' campaigns (e.g. HeforShe, MenCare, WhiteRibbon), even though similar awareness-raising approaches have been found to have weak or no impact on reducing VAWG.

The three papers note several challenges with, and recommendations for, work on engaging men and boys in the prevention of VAWG. Among the challenges identified are:

- a shift in focus, funding and resources towards the experiences, challenges and priorities of men and away from the violence and oppression faced by women, sometimes without sufficient evidence;
- de-politicisation of issues around VAWG, and an increased focus on violence against men at the expense of attention and resources for addressing violence against women and girls.
- a failure to address gender inequality and patriarchal structures, which can reinforce norms around men's power over women (for example by encouraging men to think of themselves as protectors of women, rather than allies or supporters).
- programming that positions men as leaders in the movement to end VAWG, directly or inadvertently undermining women's leadership and recreating existing power structures and imbalances.

Accountability to women and girls at every level of male involvement efforts is critical to ethical and effective VAWG programming and to securing women and girls' full and equal rights. GBV work that does not prioritise accountability to women and girls can cause direct harm or reinforce unequal power between women and men. The papers note that to ensure accountability, male engagement work must:

- promote and ensure women and girls' leadership and make sure that work to prevent VAWG is women-centred and empowers women and girls;
- listen to the demands and advice of diverse women and girls when undertaking male involvement efforts and partner with women's organisations throughout planning, implementation and evaluation;

- recognise the existing gender hierarchy, and strive to transform patriarchal systems based on a solid gender-power analysis;
- work at both individual and structural levels to change personal behaviour while transforming patriarchal systems;
- ensure that male involvement efforts demonstrably empower women and girls; and
- develop clear women-centred standards and systems for accountability to women and girls for GBV work, and allocate time and resources to their operationalisation.

The papers note positive examples of efforts to establish and operationalise accountability frameworks and mechanisms, and to strengthen accountability practice in male engagement work.



## Case Study: Evolving Accountability Practices

Concerns about and the need for improvement in accountability to women, girls, women's movements and feminist activists within interventions and organisations working to engage men in VAWG prevention are highlighted within various reviews cited in this digest. Driven by similar concerns, the MenEngage Alliance, ATHENA Network, the Equality Institute, COFEM, Raising Voices and the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) organised a facilitated discussion with participants of the SVRI Forum in October 2019 on challenges and practical ways to improve accountability practices. This included discussion of a recent online survey by the Equality Institute addressing questions around work engaging men and boys to end VAWG. Both the survey and the facilitated discussion at SVRI highlighted progress and ongoing challenges in this area. At SVRI, concerns were raised about how global commitments to accountability are (or are not) reflected and reinforced at the local level. Survey respondents highlighted the three most important challenges to accountability as 1) too much focus on individual change not enough on structural change and transforming gender norms in men engage work; 2) lack of a feminist approach and reinforcing patriarchal structures; and 3) inadequate accountability regarding abuses of power and harassment in men engage communities. Survey participants further highlighted the following five areas as priorities for discussion at the 3<sup>rd</sup> MenEngage Global Symposium:

1. Accountability
2. Intersectional activism networks/social movements
3. Privilege and entitlement
4. Backlash to women's rights
5. (in equal 5<sup>th</sup> place) Sexual and reproductive health; feminisms; and violence

## Additional research, guidelines, & other resources

### Research

Brush, L & Miller, E (2019). Trouble in Paradigm: "[Gender Transformative](#)" Programming in [Violence Prevention](#). *Violence Against Women*, 25(14) 1635–1656.

Dworkin, S & Barker, G (2019) [Gender-Transformative Approaches to Engaging Men in Reducing Gender-Based Violence: A Response to Brush & Miller's "Trouble in Paradigm"](#). *Violence Against Women* 25(14) 1657–1671.

Flood, M. (2015) [Work with men to end violence against women: a critical stocktake](#). *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 17: 2 (159-176)

Colpitts, E. (2019) [Engaging men and boys to prevent gender-based violence in South Africa: possibilities, tensions and debates](#), *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, 40:3, 423-439.

Ellsburg, M. et al (2014), [Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls: What Does the Evidence Say?](#) *The Lancet*: November 2014).

Leek, C (2019) [Understanding Feminist Resistance to "Men-Streaming"](#), *Global Social Welfare* 6: 219-229.

The Prevention Collaborative (2019) [Elevating Practice-Based Knowledge to Improve Prevention Programming: A Prevention Collaborative Paper](#)

Spangaro, J., Adogu, C., Ranmuthugala, G., Powell Davies, G., Steinacker, L., & Zwi, A. (2013). [What Evidence Exists for Initiatives to Reduce Risk and Incidence of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict and Humanitarian Crises? A Systematic Review](#). *PLOS ONE*, 8(5).

Tolman, R. et al (2019), [Global Efforts to Engage Men and Boys in Gender-Based Violence Prevention](#). *Global Social Welfare* 6: 215-218.

What Works (2019), [Impact of Indashyikirwa: An innovative programme to reduce partner violence in rural Rwanda](#). Evidence Brief.

### **Tools and Guidelines**

MenEngage Alliance (2014) [Accountability Standards & Guidelines](#).

MenEngage Alliance (2018). [Accountability Training Toolkit, Second Edition](#).

International Rescue Committee (2013), [Introductory Guide: Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls: Engaging Men Through Accountable Practice](#). New York: International Rescue Committee.

### **The GBV AoR Help Desk**

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