Policy Agenda
Generation Equality Fora (GEF)
GBV Action Coalition
MenEngage Alliance Joint Recommendations for Action Coalition Leaders

Rationale

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 girls[2].**

Approximately one in three women around the world experience physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetimes. Nearly four in every ten female homicides are committed by an intimate partner, and upwards of 50 percent of children experience violence, often in settings presumed to be safe: the home and at school. Globally, 18 percent of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15–49

have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of a current or previous partner in the previous 12 months.

Such high levels of intimate partner violence serve to maintain men's control over women's lives both directly, through the fact of the violence, and indirectly, through women's fear of men's violence. In this sense, the effects of domestic violence are not confined to the home.

Indeed, it is also the case, though still rarely foregrounded, that when the personal histories of those who commit terrorist violence are known, they frequently include histories of perpetrating violence against intimate partners. As Díaz and Valji emphasize: One can find examples of expressed misogyny or domestic violence in the personal histories of nearly all the perpetrators of the worst terrorist incidents and mass killings in Western countries in recent years, which is remarkable because neither misogynist acts or expressions nor violence against women are typically reported and exhaustively documented.

As well, in the weeks following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, alarming increases in violence against women and children were reported, linked to the lockdown measures imposed by many governments. In Chihuahua State, Mexico there was a reported 65 percent increase in femicides between March and April 2020. After the International Rescue Committee opened a GBV Hotline in Lebanon, the number of women and girls seeking support more than doubled between March and April compared to the first two months of the year. UNFPA has warned that an additional 15 million cases of gender-based violence (GBV) will occur every three months that the lockdown continues. But COVID-19 and the public health measures imposed in response, are not the cause of this spike in violence against women and children; they merely expose and worsen the underlying inequalities that fuel this violence.

VAW&G has only been exacerbated by the spread of digital technologies, including the rise of men's rights movements. One of the most dangerous aspects of these groups' messaging is its minimization of violence against women and girls, and the often-related claim that violence against men and boys is of equivalent concern. Yet, as decades of research make clear, violence against women and girls is normalized to an extraordinary degree in many societies.

Tactics

- 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.

- 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 violence [3].
- 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&G[4]. 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 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 [5]. 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[6]. 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[7].

● 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[8]. 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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[3] Gondolf, E. (2009) The Survival of Batterer Programs? Responding to "Evidence-Based Practice and Improving Program Operation." Position paper presented at the policy symposium - Batterer Intervention: Doing the Work and Measuring the Progress. Sponsored by the National Institute of Justice and Family Violence Prevention Fund, Bethesda, MD, December 3-4, 2009.

[4] Engaging men and boys in changing gender-based inequity in health: evidence from programme interventions. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2007

[5] Barker G., Peacock, D., / Working with men and boys to promote gender equality: A review of the field and emerging approaches, 2012.

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