

# *Engaging Men in Ending Gender-Based Violence*

“While some men are part of the problem, all men are part of the solution.”

-Michael Flood, *Men and Masculinities*

*There can be an overwhelming cultural norm of ignoring the impact, severity, and harm of gender-based violence, which continues to threaten the health of both individuals and society. This paper highlights effective ways to engage men as a key part of the solution to this human rights violation.*

*Victoria Carmona  
Ana Grahovac  
Jennifer Martin  
March 23, 2012*



## **Introduction**

For purposes of this paper, gender-based violence, specifically violence against women, is defined as any act that “results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (Terry & Hoare, 2007). Violence against women will affect one in three women globally in their lifetime (World Health Organization, 2011) and will often leave victims with devastating physical, emotional, and psychological effects (Terry & Hoare, 2007). The World Health Organization also recognizes gender-based violence as an important public health and social issue. As well as being a direct cause of injury, poor health, and sometimes death, violence against women affects victims’ health indirectly through unwanted pregnancies and attendant health risks, mental illness, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV and AIDS, just to name a few (Terry & Hoare, 2007).

Previously viewed as a private or women’s concern (as most victims are women or girls), gender-based violence can only be stopped with *both* men and women taking responsibility to end this human rights violation. Although women’s rights continue to progress in the world, men and boys are frequently left out of feminist discourse. The fact that half of the world’s population is potentially being omitted from these discussions is detrimental to the fight against gender-

based violence (Crooks, et. al, 2007). Since offenders are predominately male, strong involvement and leadership from men is essential to end violence against women (Casey & Smith, 2010). In order to accomplish this, however, men must be effectively engaged in anti-gender-based violence work; otherwise, any initiatives to end this harm will have little long-term impact.

Although little research exists about the motivations for how and why men become involved in initiatives to end gender-based violence, case examples from men's groups help showcase emerging best practices of how to connect men to this work. Male ally-building programs such as *The Men's Program*, *Mentors in Violence Prevention*, and *Men Can Stop Rape's Men of Strength Clubs* are considered promising prevention strategies due to their success in the number of men involved in the organizations' work (Casey & Smith, 2010). Studying these groups reinforces the need for a clear, theoretically framework to understand why men become involved in this work, what practices sustain their involvement, and how to maintain men's participation in ending gender-based violence (Crooks, et. al, 2007).

### **Engaging men as part of the solution**

How do non-violent men commit to becoming part of the solution to end gender-based violence? Claire V. Crooks of the University of Western Ontario Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children has suggested a pro-feminist position to engage men. Her theory emphasizes the importance of creating attitude and behavioral change among men through three steps: goal setting, core belief creation, and strategies for change (Crooks, et. al., 2007). When initiatives have clearly defined goals, it provides a roadmap that helps connect men and boys to the desired outcome of a campaign. Clearly articulated end goals should be broken

down into smaller goals or steps that can be accomplished along the way; the end goal should be that men accept “broader, and more varied concepts of masculinity” (Crooks, et. al., 2007). This would include defining the role of men in the movement against gender-based violence by intervening against the violence of other men, and by addressing the root causes of violence (Crooks, et. al., 2007).

Crooks’ cognitive-based model suggests that taking specific actions, such as intervening against the violence of other men, will then alter men’s thoughts and attitudes towards gender-based violence in a positive way. This, in turn, will encourage men to raise their awareness of gender issues and violence against women. This model can also address common barriers to men’s antiviolence involvement, such as uncertainty about how to address the seriousness or relevance of violence against women (Casey & Smith, 2010). Crooks also says that listening to and retelling the stories of young men who now have a pro-feminist stance can help inspire men who are new to the movement and create a roadmap for men to engage others (Crooks, et. al., 2007).

In order to effectively engage boys, Crooks encourages male mentors to challenge dominating theories of masculinity (Crooks, et. al., 2007). She recommends prolonged campaigns that support the idea of teaching early and often against gender-based violence (Crooks, et. al., 2007). *Futures Without Violence*, an international non-profit organization, has created the *Coaching Boys into Men Leadership Program*, which incorporates these ideas by encouraging high school and community sports coaches to give players a short, 10-minute, interactive lesson before each practice on how to respect themselves and others [See *Coaching Boys into Men Leadership Program*, <http://www.coachescorner.org>]. Brief activities for young men are at the core of the program. By consistently repeating these messages on a weekly basis,

coaches can make a long-term impact and prevent gender-based violence. Also essential when striving to engage men is ensuring that men are viewed and treated as essential allies, instead of being solely defined as the cause of violence. An interim goal in Crooks' model is to acknowledge "well-meaning men" or the average men who believe women should be respected and who don't condone violence against women (Crooks, et. al., 2007). These men must be sought out to serve as a vital source of support.

Through the cognitive-based model, men are more likely to respond to other men's mentorship while in gender-based violence prevention programs. In this way, male-led prevention groups or discussions are more effective in changing attitudes in men than similar groups led by women (Crooks, et. al., 2007). Initiatives such as the *Mentors in Violence Prevention* (MVP) Program at Northeastern University's Center for the Study of Sport in Society have engaged youths through the use of high-profile athletes as spokesmen against violence against women (Crooks, et. al., 2007). Role models are essential in helping shape young men's attitudes towards women. Outside positive reinforcement is needed to withstand society's view of stereotypical masculinity and to provide men with role models to whom they can relate (Crooks, et. al., 2007). Similarly, men who are specifically invited to or encouraged to participate in programs against gender-based violence, or who have respected mentor or peers involved with such programs can play a key role in encouraging other men to join this work.

In order to successfully engage men in violence prevention, men need to know that their participation in these initiatives will lead to a positive outcome, such as skill-building (Crooks, et. al., 2007). Crooks provides the effective example of the *Fourth R* school program in Canada, which incorporates themes of values clarification, provision of information, decision-making, and an extensive skill development component while addressing multiple forms of violence,

including dating and gender-based violence (Crooks, et. al., 2007) [See also [www.youthrelationships.org](http://www.youthrelationships.org)]. Following the program, students demonstrate better conflict resolution skills, in addition to a positive attitude against ending gender-based violence (Crooks, et. al., 2007). Such ongoing programs, in comparison to one-time workshops, show a vast increase in effectiveness of improving attitudes and decreasing the likelihood of violence against women (Flood, 2011).

### **Male Volunteers**

When men initiate involvement in anti-violence groups several common themes appear, and understanding these themes can inform the creation of programs to successfully engage men. Men often identify several factors for wanting to join an anti-violence program (Casey & Smith, 2010). These factors include: personal experiences or exposure to violence, receiving support from outside peers or role models around joining or remaining active in initiatives, and a connection to or respect for female role models associated with these groups (Casey & Smith, 2010). Some men have also reported a mandate to join in the effort against gender-based violence, such as having a sense of responsibility and awareness of the issue (Flood, 2011). Other men report viewing violence against women as an addressable issue, having the feeling that they can make a specific contribution or difference, or being close to a victim of violence (Floods, 2011). Men who worked in anti-violence groups reported reevaluating their past actions and an increased desire to be positive towards women (Casey & Smith, 2010).

Casey & Smith have created a conceptual model based on their data regarding reasons why men become involved in anti-violence groups. Reasons included, but were not limited to:

#### **A Sensitizing Experience:**

This included having a survivor disclose their experience to them or witnessing to an act of violence, being conscious of social justice issues, seeing involvement as a learning opportunity, being influenced or encouraged to join by women, or hearing stories about the impact of violence against women.

**An Opportunity Experience:**

Men joined due to a personal invitation or nomination to join the group, or through direct personal or community connections. Some men were looking for community involvement or were seeking a job or volunteer position.

**Leading to a shift in meaning:**

***Compelled to action***

This included being charged with a mandate, seeing an addressable need, and/or identifying his own strengths. These men reported feeling that their knowledge or awareness of gender-based violence rendered them responsible for taking action.

***Changing world view***

Some men reported understanding violence as a relevant social issue. This included a structural analysis by seeing violence against women as relating to other social issues, including domestic violence, racism, or homophobia, thus making violence a more pressing concern. Men felt they could address larger issues of oppression by focusing on gender-based violence. Men also reported that hearing victim's stories made them reassess their past violent or aggressive behavior, and made them want to change.

***Joining with others***

Some men reported feeling connected with other men by building a community and support system. Men also expressed relief and excitement at being able to have close friendships with

other men while not having to meet the stereotypes of masculine behavior [such as violent sports or drinking].

(Casey & Smith, 2010).

### **Summary**

Work to end gender-based violence cannot be successful without men as allies and activists. Although this paper has explored several paths to effectively engaging men, these paths are neither exclusive nor exhaustive. It is also important to remember that men may view and approach ending gender-based violence differently, partially based on such factors as race, culture, religion, or social-economic status. Most initiatives to engage men have remained at a local or individual level (Flood, 2011). In order to engage men effectively and at a societal level, the focus must shift to larger-scale national and coordinated efforts (Flood, 2011). Campaigns such as *MenEngage*, a global alliance of non-governmental agencies and United Nations agencies, show promise in creating a much-needed, large-scale campaign to engage men (*Voice Male Magazine*, 2011). Key to this strategy is ensuring that men are included in strategic discussions and movement building. Rus Funk argues that “one of the core components of men working to end men’s violence is the notion of empowering men to be involved in this movement by generating a sense of connection to and ownership of the issues related to men’s violence” (Funk, 2008). To achieve this, all men should not be blamed for violence against women; only some men are perpetrators, but all men must be part of the solution.

Funk identifies several common challenges facing men who work to end gender-based violence. First and foremost men have personal concerns, such as feeling isolated while engaging in the work or feeling that there is little male support or acceptance for their work (Funk, 2008). Another challenge men face is making the connections between men’s violence and “other forms

of oppression, violence, or social justice issues.” (Funk, 2008). In order to combat these challenges to be effectively engaged, men must have a system of support and acceptance. For every man who is a perpetrator of violence against women, there are hundreds of others who wish to work for victims and to end gender-based violence. The acts of a few should not and cannot overshadow the many men who are allies.

There are signs of hope as men continue to join the movement and a future without violence against women becomes more possible. Men must motivate each other to be agents for change. Contemporary resources such as *Voice Male Magazine* and Kaufman & Kimmel’s *The Guy’s Guide to Feminism* aim at engaging men for pro-feminist causes by changing views of masculinity and promoting equality. *Voice Male Magazine* joins several male-led, pro-feminist organizations that call on men to voice their opposition and take action to not only view the horrendous effects of gender-based violence, but identify how men can engage other men to join the movement and to set an example for boys and future generations (*Voice Male Magazine, 2011*). *The Guy’s Guide to Feminism* takes a modern, accessible approach geared toward young men to help them relook at feminism and to become an ally (Kaufman & Kimmel, 2011). All feminist work would benefit from learning how to effectively engage men in the fight to end gender-based violence and harm.

### **Further Notes**

The following ideas are additional methods for engaging men in the fight against gender-based violence:

- Initiating prevention programs to engage adolescents early, such as focusing on healthy dating relationships, ways to foster respect, and promoting non-violence.
- Creating communication and social marketing campaigns around these issues.
- Approaching men (and boys) as potential witnesses or bystanders to sexual violence.
- Implementing workplace prevention strategies.
- Engaging in community development strategies (through events, networks, or campaigns), such as drawing together local organizations, contacting public officials, churches, schools, or social work agencies to take a stand against violence.
- Developing mentor or peer groups, specifically led by men [See such campaigns and organizations such as the *White Ribbon Campaign*, *Men Stopping Violence*, *Man Up Campaign*, and *Engender Health*, among others].

## References

- Casey, Erin, and Smith, Tyler. "'How Can I Not?': Men's Pathways to Involvement in Anti Violence against Women Work." *Violence against Women*. 16.8 (2010): 953-973.
- Coaching Boys into Men Leadership Program, <http://www.coachescorner.org/>, (accessed January 27, 2012).
- Crooks, Claire, Goodall, George, Hughes, Ray, Jaffe, Peter, and Baker, Linda. "Engaging Men and Boys in Preventing Violence against Women." *Violence against Women*. 13.3 (2007): 217-239.
- Flood, Michael. "Involving Men in Efforts to End Violence against Women." *Men and Masculinities*. 14.3 (2011): 358-377.
- Funk, Rus E. "Men's Work: Men's Voices and Actions against Sexism and Violence." *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*. 36 (2008): 155-171.
- Kaufman, Michael, and Kimmel, Michael. *The Guy's Guide to Feminism: A Guy's Guide to Feminism from A to Z*. New York: Seal Press, 2011.
- Terry, Geraldine, and Hoare, Joanna. *Gender-based Violence*. Oxford: Oxfam, 2007.
- The Fourth R School Program, [youthrelationships.org/](http://youthrelationships.org/), (accessed January 27, 2012).
- Voice Male Magazine*. 33 Gray Street, Amherst, MA 01002. <http://voicemalemagazine.org/>, (accessed February 24, 2012).
- World Health Organization (WHO). *Violence against women: Intimate partner and sexual violence against women*. Fact sheet N°239. Updated September 2011. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/index.html>, (accessed February 3, 2012).