

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE CULTURE OF MASCULINITY

*'When it comes to violence against women (VAW), men  
are both part of the problem and part of the solution'*  
*Michael Flood, Australian National University*



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## Introduction

The struggle to end violence against women (VAW) has been on the agenda of numerous women activists and organizations for decades. Men have traditionally been all but absent from this endeavor, but in later years have begun to speak out against VAW. Though not all men use violence against women (although alarming statistics suggest there are many hidden depths with 44 percent of women reporting violence in a 2001 WHO report) all men can take responsibility to break their silence about this issue. The message of this leaflet is that men can stop violence

against women, as many are already doing, in ways that respect gender equality, justice and development. This leaflet is based on a special issue of the Society for International



Development's quarterly journal *development* "Violence against Women and the Culture of Masculinity" and a launch of the journal in Rome in cooperation with UNICEF and AIDOS. At the launch, which was broadcast on radio, contributors to the journal described their campaigns with boys and men throughout

the world to foster dialogue and awareness of the importance of involving boys and men in the fight to end VAW.



Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace.

Kofi Annan  
Secretary General of the United Nations

## Women and Men: An Alliance for Change

In the last two decades women's movements have consistently emphasized that the question of VAW is not a 'cultural' or 'private' affair. Rendering VAW visible meant to link it conceptually to community and public political dynamics. Through their activism VAW has become a major development issue. Critical to these campaigns and discussions has been to see violence against women as an issue of gender equality and gender justice. Therefore as when addressing all cases of gender inequality the role and contribution of men in addressing and solving gender based violence is vital. It is important not to generalize blame to all men, while at the same time to put into question the culture of masculinity and male privileges in patriarchal societies. We need to encourage men not to remain passive in the face of a

culture of masculinity that condones violence against women but rather to speak up and take action alongside women's struggles to stop violence.

The incorporation of boys and men in the struggle to end VAW is complex as they themselves will have to work through issues of masculinity and the patriarchal order, questioning their own psychological and social identity. It is complex because most men and boys are not aware that they are in a position of social power and privilege over women. It is complex because many boys and men feel that opposing VAW threatens their masculine identity. And it is complex because many boys and men have experienced violence themselves. However, it is vital that men are involved practically not only to provide support and security for the women, girls and boys around them but also for themselves to embrace a less demanding form of masculine identity.

Source: UNICEF/00-04389/Balaguer/Brazil



### **But won't men corner valuable resources that women's groups could use?**

Many may argue that utilizing the precious few resources available to fight VAW in the work with men can drain money and attention from programmes aimed at women and girls. Michael Kaufman points out this is not so.

Men working effectively to end VAW will reduce the incidence of violence, which in turn means a decreased financial burden on women's programmes. Or as he puts it in the journal: "It is not money spent 'on men' any more than money spent to reduce malaria is being spent 'on mosquitoes'". The mobilization of men is no doubt a net gain, financially and otherwise, for women and the struggle to end VAW.

## Men's movements against VAW

Working with men and boys to end VAW does not merely mean involving and addressing them in women's work to end violence against women, but also to encourage men to work together to form men's movements to fight against gender based violence. Bearing in mind that:

- Men are much likelier to listen to men than to women or to disembodied media voices, hence the need to emphasize men's independent activism.
- Men's voices in the struggle to end

VAW validate and add force to women's concerns and claims.

- More egalitarian and nurturing forms of masculinity need to be developed and celebrated by men, that will replace the traditional forms premised on dominance, authority, control and force.
- Working together they can be stronger partners for women and be able to work in close collaboration with women's groups in a cross-gender partnership in the struggle to end VAW.
- Only if men work together with women to end VAW can gender equality be successfully pursued.

**Promundo** is a Brazilian NGO that carries out action-research projects in *favelas* –shanty towns- in Rio de Janeiro, on the question of masculinities and VAW. The organization sets up focus groups with young men to discuss their understanding and experience of VAW. From these, the most gender-equitable young men are identified and recruited as promoters of the project; they would be perceived as positive role models for other young men. The activities organized involved the participants writing a play and photonovela, with their own words and language, that would bid other men not to use VAW and encourage them to intervene in favour of the victim when they witness VAW. The aim of the project is to deconstruct and challenge negative aspects of masculinity and of community values around domestic violence.





## The White Ribbon Campaign

*Men working to end men's violence against women*

### The White Ribbon Campaign

This White Ribbon Campaign ([www.whiteribbon.com](http://www.whiteribbon.com)) is at the forefront of men's activism to end VAW. It was started by three men in 1991 in Toronto, Canada. It is a campaign designed to educate and raise awareness among men on the issues of VAW, and has in less than a decade spread well beyond Canada, to many countries in Europe, Latin America, and Asia, as well as to the US and Australia. Men and boys participate by wearing a white

ribbon between the 25th of November and the 6th of December each year, or by joining WRC activities in their communities. The main aims of the campaign are to encourage self-reflection among them, to forge alliances between men and women, and to call on governments and institutions to seriously address the question of VAW. The WRC operates through extensive use of the media, fundraising and close cooperation with women's groups working towards the same ends.

**"Violence against women** includes physical and sexual assault, sexual harassment, psychological abuse, or emotional abuse. It occurs throughout the world, among the rich, the poor, and the middle class, and among those of every nationality, religion, and race. Violence is something that some men learn. Men's violence is a result of the way many men learn to express their masculinity in relationships with women, children, and other men. Many men learn to think that the use of violence is acceptable. Change will occur if: we each accept personal responsibility to make sure it happens; challenge sexist language and jokes that degrade women; learn to identify and oppose sexual harassment and violence in the workplace, school and family; support local women's programmes; work towards long-term solutions."

The White Ribbon Campaign website.

## Other initiatives round the world

The White Ribbon Campaign is only one example of men fighting to end men's VAW. There are numerous other instances that testify to a growing trend.

- **Men Can Stop Rape**  
([www.mencanstoprape.org/index.htm](http://www.mencanstoprape.org/index.htm)) based in Washington, DC. It seeks to promote gender equity through awareness and education campaigns, and community organizing. It advances a model of masculinity that is caring and nurturing, and in which strength is "not for hurting".
- **Men Against Sexual Assault**  
([www.sa.rochester.edu/masa](http://www.sa.rochester.edu/masa)) This website contains a great deal of information, from statistics, FAQ, and advice on issues of VAW, to online pledges for men and guidelines on educational programmes.
- **No To Violence**  
(NTV), the Male Family Violence Prevention Association Inc. ([www.ntv.net.au](http://www.ntv.net.au)), is an Australian-based NGO working for the prevention of male family violence.
- **The European Profeminist Men's Network**  
([www.europrofem.org](http://www.europrofem.org)), is a European-

wide network that links individual men and men's groups working to end VAW.

- **CANTERA**  
([www.oneworld.org/cantera](http://www.oneworld.org/cantera)) is a Latin American NGO dedicated to the promotion of equitable gender relations. The organization carries out workshops on critical examination of the concept of "masculinity".
- **Men Against Violence Against Women**  
([www.menagainstviolence.tripod.com](http://www.menagainstviolence.tripod.com)) is a proactive organization, based in Trinidad and Tobago, concerned with men taking responsibility for male violence.
- **Male Network**  
([www.man-net.nu/engelsk/start.htm](http://www.man-net.nu/engelsk/start.htm)) A Swedish based male network working for gender equality against violence and abuse by men. The site is available in Swedish, English and Spanish.

There are many other men's groups working to end VAW. Please check out:

- **Dads and Daughters**  
([www.dadsanddaughters.org](http://www.dadsanddaughters.org))
- **CHANGE**  
([www.changeweb.org.uk/index.htm](http://www.changeweb.org.uk/index.htm))
- **Men Overcoming Violence**  
([www.menovercomingviolence.org](http://www.menovercomingviolence.org))
- **Men for Change**  
([www.chebucto.ns.ca](http://www.chebucto.ns.ca))
- **Men Stopping Violence**  
([www.menstoppingviolence.org](http://www.menstoppingviolence.org)).

### The Namibian Men for Change (NAMEC)

The National Conference on Men Against Violence Against Women in Namibia held in February 2000, brought men from all walks of life in Namibia together to sensitize fellow men to the problem of violence against women. The Namibian Men for Change (NAMEC) founded after the Conference, functions as an awareness-raising group among young adult men on issues such as masculinity, relationships, parenthood, sexual abuse and the creation of a non-violent culture in Namibia. NAMEC is currently active in most of Namibia's regions, where its members visit schools and organize a range of forums for discussions amongst boys and men.

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## Resources

These are resources individual activists and groups can refer to for information on VAW and strategies to end it:

- **UN Men's Group for Gender Equality**  
([www.undp.org/gender/programmes/men/men\\_ge.html](http://www.undp.org/gender/programmes/men/men_ge.html))  
It looks at the need for men to be included in gender equality and suggests an entry point through the exploration of the meanings and uses of masculinity.
- **UNFPA: a new role for men**  
([www.unfpa.org/modules/intercenter/role4men/index.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/modules/intercenter/role4men/index.htm))  
The 'A New Role for Men: Partners for women's empowerment' page focuses on the role that men can play in empowering women.
- **UNICEF: 'Men in Families' report**  
([www.unicef.org/reseval/malesr.htm](http://www.unicef.org/reseval/malesr.htm))  
Prepared by Patrice Engle, this is a study on the role of males and fathers can play in achieving gender equality.
- **UNICEF**  
([www.unicef.org/programme/gpp/profiles/masc.htm](http://www.unicef.org/programme/gpp/profiles/masc.htm))  
UNICEF's Gender Programme on Masculinities and Gender Equality

contains a comprehensive list of about 60 organizations worldwide working with men to end VAW.

- **World Bank GenderNet**  
([www.worldbank.org/gender](http://www.worldbank.org/gender))  
This page provides information about how the world bank promotes gender integration.
- **Violence Against Women Online Resources**  
([www.vaw.umn.edu/index.asp](http://www.vaw.umn.edu/index.asp))  
The site (by the University of Minnesota) provides professionals working in the field of VAW with up-to-date information on interventions to stop violence against women.
- **World Health Organization**  
([www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/vaw/infopack.htm#Infamilies](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/vaw/infopack.htm#Infamilies))  
The WHO site considers violence and injury against women from a health perspective. Available in English and Spanish, the pages give comprehensive information and data on violence against women in families, rape, and sexual assault.
- **Michael Kaufman, Phd**  
([www.michaelkaufman.com](http://www.michaelkaufman.com))  
Michael Kaufman is the founder of the White Ribbon Campaign and a leading voice in the worldwide men's movement against VAW. His website contains a large number of his articles and presentations, as well as some PDF versions of his now out-of-print books.
- **INSTRAW**  
([www.un-instraw.org/mens-roles.html](http://www.un-instraw.org/mens-roles.html))
- **UNESCO: Men Against Violence: A culture of peace perspective**  
([www.unesco.org/cpp/uk/projects/wcpmenaga.htm](http://www.unesco.org/cpp/uk/projects/wcpmenaga.htm))
- **Men as Partners for Ending Violence Against Women and Children**  
([www.mapev.org](http://www.mapev.org))



## Challenging conventional ideas of masculinity through film

Working with boys and men to end VAW can take many forms. Rahul Roy, documentary writer and director, argues that films are a creative means to engage men and boys in critically evaluating their own masculine identities and the patriarchal order. They also add to in-depth analysis of gender issues in which studies of masculinities, unlike those of femininities, were missing.

Roy directed a documentary on masculinities among working class young men in New Delhi, as part of a wider UNICEF project on masculinities in South East Asia. It is entitled *When Four Friends Meet*, and focused on the way they behave in and relate to different aspects of their lives; their families, friends, women, jobs, the police, and so forth. He argues that this media can be successfully used with young audiences to generate discussions and critical examination of the choices and assumptions of the characters of the film. It can thus pave the way for self-reflection and evaluation of societal paradigms and attitudes towards gender models and relations, and VAW, as well as provide the basis for the creation of alternative models of masculinities.

### Key reference sites

- **The Men's Bibliography, Michael Flood**

([www.anu.edu.au/~a112465/mensbiblio/mensbibliomenu.html](http://www.anu.edu.au/~a112465/mensbiblio/mensbibliomenu.html))

A comprehensive bibliography of writing on Men, Masculinities and Sexualities.

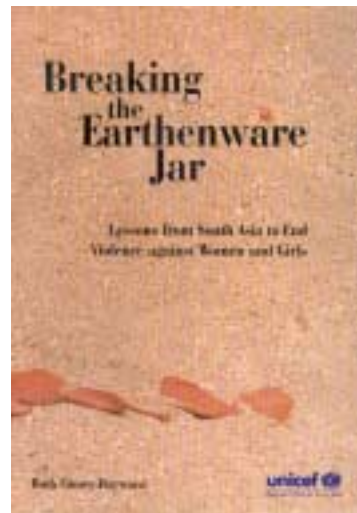
- **The 'Changing Men Collection', Men's Studies Bibliography, Michigan State University**

([www.lib.msu.edu/coll/main/spec\\_col/radicalism/men](http://www.lib.msu.edu/coll/main/spec_col/radicalism/men))

The Changing Men Collection is a research collection representing all activities of the contemporary men's movements.

few examples of innovative programmes funded by UNIFEM's Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against women.

- **Breaking the Earthenware Jar: Lessons from South Asia to End Violence Against Women and Girls** (Ruth Finney Hayward, 2000, United Nations Children's Fund)



### Other

- **UNIFEM's** book 'With an End in Sight', explores seven projects to end VAW in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Gaza, Honduras, India, Kenya and the West Bank. The initiatives outlined are just a

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