



Backgrounder:

Engaging Men and Boys through Education to End Violence against Women and Girls

The Challenge

Around the world, more than one in three women will experience gender-based violence (GBV) in her lifetime. In some countries, this can be as high as seven out of ten women. Violence against women is most often perpetrated by an intimate partner, but it can take many other forms (a family member, sexual harassment and abuse by authority figures, trafficking, rape, child marriage, sexual violence in wars, and more). Violence often begins in childhood and is exacerbated by early marriage and exclusion from health services, education and economic opportunities. Transitions to motherhood, widowhood, and older age increase vulnerability. The violence older women experience remains largely invisible and uncounted.

In sub-Saharan Africa, grandmothers and the children in their care are particularly vulnerable. In a 2005 World Health Study on women's health and domestic violence, the WHO found that 56 per cent of women in Tanzania and 71 per cent of women in Ethiopia's rural areas reported beatings or other forms of violence by intimate partners. In some cultures in sub-Saharan Africa, older women continue to be victims of harmful practices such as widow inheritance, accusations of witch craft, and denial of land rights.

Rooted in Culture

The relationship between gender and violence is complex and there is no simple cause or solution. Those who commit acts of violence against women typically have a history of violent behaviour, grew up in violent homes, and often are abusers of drugs and alcohol. Too often, GBV starts in the home during childhood, creating fertile ground for GBV in schools, colleges, and throughout the life cycle. It is a continuum, the root causes being harmful gender norms and unequal power dynamics between boys and girls, men and women. If we can change gender norms, can we end GBV? Is it possible?

Engaging Men and Boys

According to a **2018 UNESCO Report**, gender norms are perpetuated, directly or indirectly, by education systems. Actively addressing boys' needs and involvement in education could be transformative in promoting gender equality, reducing violence, and protecting youth from risk factors that could distort their futures.

(Policy Paper #35, Achieving Gender Equality in Education: Don't Forget the Boys, April 2018)

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000262714>

Michael Flood, pro-feminist educator and activist, believes that sexual harassment will only disappear when men take an active role in ending it. He supports the *White Ribbon Campaign* which focuses on the positive roles men can play in preventing men's violence against women. A minority of men treat women with contempt and it is up to the majority of men to help create a culture in which this becomes unthinkable.

<http://xyonline.net>

A **World Health Organization** briefing report (2009) reviewed some of the most promising methods of promoting gender equity and their effectiveness in reducing violence towards women by their intimate partners. These included: school-based interventions, community interventions, and media interventions. Community interventions included methods to empower women economically and to include men as partners against GBV.

https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/overview.pdf

How can we work towards ending gender-based violence (GBV)?

As bleak as it sometimes looks, there are some impressive initiatives around the world where people are working tirelessly to challenge the social norms that have been used to justify violence against women and girls. The following are just a few examples of some of the innovative programs that engage men and boys in being part of the solution to ending GBV:

In Canada

A Better Man is a newly released high school learning kit developed by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF). It aims to spark conversation in the classroom on intimate partner violence. Available for streaming from TVO: www.abettermanfilm.com

TVO's *The Agenda's* episode "**Boys Will Be Men**" continues the #MeToo conversation and looks at the gap between what boys learn at home, how they are socialized at school, and the impact of outside influences. See the episode here: <https://www.tvo.org/video/programs/the-agenda-with-steve-paikin/boys-will-be-men>

Kizhaay Anishnaabe Niin (*I am a Kind Man*), is an indigenous initiative created to provide community-based facilitators to train men to speak up in their own communities. The program engages Aboriginal men and youth in understanding violence against Aboriginal women and supports them in joining together to end the violence. <http://cbpp-pcpe.phac-aspc.gc.ca/aboriginalwtt/kizhaay-anishinaabe-niin-im-a-kind-man/>

In sub-Saharan Africa

The **Global Partnership for Education (GPE)** is committed to enabling partner governments to prevent and respond to violence in and around their education systems through policy dialogue, gender-responsive education sector planning and grant funding. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/we-must-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-and-ensure-all-girls-can-get-quality-education>

PROMUNDO's Prevention+ programme envisions a world where healthy, respectful and equal relationships are the norm. The program involves young and adult men and women in comprehensive gender-based prevention programs. It addresses the root causes of GBV, seeking to ensure long-lasting impact and to transform the mutually reinforcing social and structural factors that support GBV and allow it to persist. Learn more about PROMUNDO's work in Uganda here: <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/engaging-men-rural-uganda/>

Nice Nailantei Leng'ele is a Kenyan Maasai woman who convinced her community's elders to end female genital mutilation and to celebrate women and girls in a different way. She is one of *Time Magazine's* "100 Most Influential People of 2018". Learn more in this CBC interview: <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-november-13-2018-1.4902679/meet-the-kenyan-woman-urging-village-elders-to-abandon-female-genital-mutilation-1.4903434>

In November 2016, Oxfam launched "**Enough**", a new global campaign to enable millions of people around the world to end violence and discrimination in their communities – for good. Oxfam is working with communities and local leaders, as well as celebrities, influential figures and the media, to show that each can play a key role in ending abuse by speaking out and replacing harmful ideas with positive ones. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/campaigns/enough>

Conclusion

While the root causes of this violence are complex, one thing appears to be clear: It is widely believed that the main reason lies in deep-seated patriarchy, in men's power and control over women. Evidence also seems to show that legislation alone cannot shift patriarchal expectations. Education, both formal and informal, is needed for change. We need to work with communities, and with influencers, to create a tipping point where violence is no longer condoned.