



**Communicating
Equality**

Gender-Transformative Approaches to the Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls

**Summary of a Scoping Review of
Academic Literature**

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Gender-Transformative Approaches to the Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls: Summary of a Scoping Review of Academic Literature

Communicating Equality

for Preventing Violence against Women and Girls is a research-to-action project led by the Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (CEWH). The aim is to develop gender-transformative messaging for primary prevention of violence against women and girls in the Canadian context.

CEWH researchers conducted a scoping review in 2022 guided by the questions:

1. What gender-transformative approaches and frameworks (theoretical and applied) to engaging men and boys in the primary prevention of violence against women and girls (VAWG) are available in academic literature?
2. What approaches and frameworks (theoretical and applied) for developing gender-transformative messages on the primary prevention of VAWG are available in the academic literature?

We searched three electronic databases (Scopus, EBCSO Host, and ProQuest) for English-language articles combining keywords related to: 1) gender-based violence, 2) women and girls, 3) gender-transformative, 4) primary prevention, 5) engaging men and boys, 6) masculinities, men and boy's health, 7) bystanders, and 8) communication and messaging.

GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES AND FRAMEWORKS TO ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN THE PRIMARY PREVENTION OF VAWG

There is significant interest in working with men and boys to prevent VAWG using a gender-transformative approach. Eighty-seven ($n = 87$) papers were identified on this topic. Research was reported from 31 different countries involving both Global North and South nations, with most conducted in North America and Africa. Men and boys were engaged separately and/or with other populations such as women and girls, youth in general, and communities at large.

Most of the papers analyzed initiatives that aimed to transform men and boys' perceptions and attitudes towards VAWG. This included helping men and boys to identify subtle forms of violence, decrease their acceptance of sexual and physical violence, and increase their gender-equitable attitudes and willingness to transform and expand masculinity. Several initiatives also focused on equipping men to intervene when witnessing VAWG. We organized these studies into four categories: transforming gender norms, roles and stereotypes ($n = 29$), transforming masculinities ($n = 28$), mobilizing communities ($n = 17$), and bystander approaches ($n = 13$).

1) TRANSFORMING GENDER NORMS, ROLES, AND STEREOTYPES

Initiatives using this approach fostered conversations about gender norms, gender roles and the social construction of gender identities. These initiatives included different populations such as families, couples, men, adolescents/middle school students, and university and college students. Most of these initiatives encouraged individuals to explore scripts of dominance and violence based on gender roles and the interconnections between gender roles and gender-based violence. These initiatives also suggested positive alternatives to traditional gendered and interpersonal behaviours. A few initiatives also described modelling positive parenting and challenged traditional parenting roles in order to create more equitable household roles where men were equal partners in parenting.

2) TRANSFORMING MASCULINITIES

Initiatives using this approach sought to encourage reflection, share discomfort, and instill a critical awareness of the social constructions of gender and masculinity and the links between the socialization of masculinities and VAWG. These initiatives were developed with men in community and institutional settings, middle and high school boys, and university and college students. In many of these programs, men and boys were encouraged to reflect on how their power impacts both themselves and the people (specifically girls and women) in their lives, and how this power needs to be critiqued and used intentionally. Several initiatives focused on the links between hegemonic masculinity and health issues that adversely affect men, such as substance use, access to care, HIV, and violence perpetration.

3) MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES

Initiatives using this approach aimed to mobilize various actors and stakeholders within a given community to prevent VAWG. These initiatives had a specific focus on transformative actions such as reframing masculinities and gender norms at the community level, engaging men and boys as allies and advocates, engaging religious communities, and/or enhancing school curricula on anti-violence and gender education. Several initiatives utilized a train-the-trainer model to empower community members to become community mobilizers and effect change. Mobilizers were trained on topics such as human rights, equitable gender attitudes, gender and power, the relationship between alcohol use and VAWG, local advocacy for change, and direct prevention and response services within the community.

4) BYSTANDER APPROACHES

Bystander approaches aimed to provide men, women and gender diverse individuals with the knowledge and tools to be active bystanders who intervene in situations of violence, abuse, harassment and/or sexism. The majority of bystander interventions were based in the United States and were predominantly integrated in post-secondary institutions. Social justice, social norms and feminist theories were some of the frameworks used in specific bystander initiatives. Other initiatives focused on sports and adopted a role model approach where coaches were trained to deliver violence prevention messages to male athletes in high school settings. Coaches were encouraged to deliver messages to athletes using their own examples and stories to allow for greater relevance and connection.

BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT & INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

In all four categories there were papers that discussed the barriers to engagement with men and boys. These barriers were frequently related to loss of social power (e.g., believing women's rights would negatively impact men's roles). In some cases, men resisted the gender-transformative teachings of the initiatives [1-3]. In other cases, men reported being ridiculed and threatened with violence when they took actions such as helping their wives with chores or standing up when a woman was being harassed. Several articles also indicated that some men struggled to engage as they were also dealing with violence in their lives, often from other men, and therefore found it challenging to help prevent violence

against women. Additionally, some men reported that the pressures of unemployment and poverty were all consuming and were experienced as a barrier to changing their values, and at times contributed to conflict with their wives.

The majority of programs operationalized masculinity as a single concept, and did not consider intersectional factors. However, in several countries, initiatives attended to systemic violence experienced by groups of men and to the impact of colonialism and racism. These programs used men's experiences of racism as a framework to help men and boys understand women's experiences of discrimination and inequity. Further attention must be given to intersectionality when engaging men and boys in gender-transformative work.

Gender-transformative messaging

Twenty-two ($n = 22$) of the eighty-seven included papers contained information about messaging in gender-transformative prevention initiatives. Prevention messaging was often described in the context of campaigns and/or curriculum-based programs. While specific messaging examples were not often proffered, our review considered other elements that were connected to and/or influenced communication of prevention messaging.

There were similarities in the themes presented to specific populations in both campaigns and programs. General trends that targeted communities at large and men in particular were messaging related to raising awareness of VAWG, mobilizing groups to take action on prevention, and building allyship and solidarity in

addressing gender inequalities and violence. Messaging aimed at transforming dominant masculinities that drive violence and gender inequality were present in both campaign and curriculum initiatives with men, young men, and boys, while messages that promoted healthy relationships were the focus of both campaign and curriculum initiatives with adolescents, youth, and couples. Positive parenting and fatherhood messages were also reported in campaign and curriculum initiatives that engaged couples.

CAMPAIGN MESSAGING

The main audiences for gender-transformative prevention campaigns were communities at large, men, young men and boys, adolescents and youth, and couples. A few papers discussed approaches for engaging men and boys, such as using sports as an entry point. Other strategies for engaging men focused on building solidarity by showing men speaking out or standing together against violence. Messages aimed at youth on the topic of healthy relationships were developed in age-appropriate, evidence-based, and sex-positive ways.

For communicating key messages, most campaigns relied on multi-channel/multi-platform distribution strategies and multi-pronged approaches. Audience-specific strategies included involving sport role models to deliver messaging to men and leveraging social media and school settings to reach adolescents and youth.

CURRICULUM MESSAGING

The main groups engaged in curriculum-based prevention programs were men and women as community members, couples, adolescents and youth, and young men and boys. Common themes discussed with all groups included gender socialization, roles and norms, and gender-based violence (or intimate partner violence in the case of programs with couples). Healthy relationships were also discussed with communities,

couples and young men and boys, while initiatives with adolescents discussed dating norms and dating violence. Responsible fatherhood, positive parenting and alternative strategies for non-violent discipline of children were topics discussed in curriculum initiatives with community members and couples. Initiatives with couples also discussed caregiving and male engagement in reproductive and maternal health.

A variety of learning modalities were observed. Curriculum delivery with youth and adolescents involved participatory and creative techniques, such as cooperative games; analysis of songs, videos and films; role-playing; theatre; and study of personal and hypothetical situations. Teaching and facilitation by role models or peer leaders was frequent in programs with young men and boys.

Conclusion

Gender-transformative primary prevention initiatives that engage men and boys, alone or with other populations, largely focus on change at the individual, relationship, organizational and community levels. Transformative efforts at institutional and systemic levels with these populations were not frequently found in our review. The development, testing and evaluation of prevention messages also emerged as an understudied area in the academic literature. Four main approaches were identified in gender-transformative primary prevention work with men and boys, alone

or with other populations: transforming gender roles, norms and stereotypes; transforming masculinities; mobilizing communities; and bystander approaches. Some key messaging themes are prominent in gender-transformative prevention work with specific population groups, such as youth, parenting couples, etc. Key messages and communication modalities have been created and/or adapted to the specific prevention technique (either a campaign or curriculum-based program) within these overarching themes. More research is required to demonstrate a wider range of ways to develop and engage in gender-transformative efforts in relation to the prevention of VAWG.

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