



Promoting Positive Masculinities to Address Violence Against Women in Young People: Evidence From the PositivMasc Project

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Executive Summary

Violence against women (VAW) is a global problem of significant magnitude that negatively affects women, men and society as a whole and is becoming more pervasive at earlier ages. In the European Union in 2015, one in three women reported having experienced physical or sexual abuse since age 15 [1]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one in four young women ages 15-24 who has been in a relationship will have experienced violence by an intimate partner by her mid-twenties [2]. New forms of violence against women, such as cyber-harassment, image-based sexual violence and controlling behavior via social media are quickly emerging as young people embrace technology in their socialization [3]. This is disturbing, given that VAW has devastating consequences for society as a whole. It not only affects the health and well-being of both women and men, it is estimated to cost the EU about 366 billion euros annually [4].

Recent research suggests that societal gender norms and harmful understandings of manhood are at the root of VAW. Men who believe that manhood is about dominance and being in control are more likely to commit VAW [5]. These harmful ideas not only affect women through intimate partner violence (IPV - one form of VAW), they also negatively impact men's health and well-being, in terms of violence towards other men, poor health, fatherhood and increased risk behaviors among

young men [6]. Gender norms are changing along with legislation that favors gender equality, but harmful forms of manhood still persist [7-8], and young people face considerable difficulty in navigating these changes.

Research shows that educational interventions that incorporate and support positive understandings of manhood, referred to as positive "masculinities" in research literature, are a promising approach to VAW prevention in young people [9]. This brief reports findings from PositivMasc, a multi-country research project that aims to understand how young people think about manhood and VAW and to identify strategies to promote positive masculinities in efforts to reduce gender-based violence.

The project's findings suggest that VAW policies and interventions should explicitly reference manhood and gender roles. They should also integrate a gender-transformative approach in VAW prevention education in schools, among families and in communities, to build gender equity and cultivate empathy and understanding among men. Given that long-term violence can begin and endure if VAW is normalized at young ages, reshaping gender norms must begin early. Supporting the development of positive forms of manhood among young people is crucial to continuing to make progress in eliminating VAW.

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Overview

Violence against women: a pervasive problem.

The United Nations defines violence against women (VAW) as any act of gender-based violence 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 deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life [10]. In Europe, over 30 percent of women have reported experiencing physical or sexual abuse since age 15 [1]. Initiatives including the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the European Guidelines on Violence Against Women and Girls and a number of country-level legislative initiatives have acted to address gender-based violence, yet VAW continues.

In PositivMasc Project countries, lifetime prevalence of physical/sexual violence is high, reaching 46 percent in Sweden, 22 percent in Spain, and 26 percent in Ireland [1]. Up to 40 percent of women in Israel have experienced intimate partner violence [11]. VAW has a negative impact on society and poses a serious burden to the economy, costing the EU an estimated 366 billion euros annually [4]. A study in the US estimated the population economic burden of intimate partner violence, one form of VAW, at nearly \$3.6 trillion over the victims' lifetimes [12].

VAW also affects the physical and mental health, well-being and personal development of both women and men. Women exposed to IPV have a greater likelihood of chronic disease, psychological distress and poor health [13]. Violence perpetrated by men against women in other settings (at work or in the street) has been shown to be linked to drug use and health problems.

New forms of VAW are emerging among young people with the rise of technology as a means of socialization. Online violence, to which women and girls are more vulnerable, includes online stalking, image-based

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sexual abuse, and disclosure of private information, among other forms [3]. Between 5 and 18 percent of women over age 15 have experienced cyber-harassment [1], which can leave permanent trauma and has been associated with depression, anti-social behavior and low self-esteem [14].

Traditional understandings of gender roles, especially beliefs about what it means to be a man, are at the root of VAW.

To understand violence against women, it is important to consider not only the individual but the societal context, including gender norms and manhood. VAW is influenced by how manhood is understood and enacted. Manhood refers to qualities associated with being a man- or with masculinity- that are commonly held in society. Traditional notions of manhood have often included qualities such as aggression, dominance, control and, in particular, the subordination of women, characteristics that reinforce the dominant position of men in society. Men who believe in and who act out these qualities are more likely to commit VAW [15-16]. Harmful understandings of manhood are also damaging for men's health and well-being, particularly their mental health [17]. European research has shown that violent qualities of manhood often result in violence against other men, poor health and increased risk behaviors among young men [6].

Positive masculinities represent a promising approach to VAW prevention.

Manhood need not always be associated with violence, as gender norms are constantly evolving. Research points to the emergence of new understandings of manhood among young men, referred to as "positive masculinities", characterized by more progressive attitudes in relationships and gender relations and decreased homophobia [17]. In some European countries, manhood is increasingly oriented around positive values such as caring for others, interdependence, and emotional expression [18].

Research on educational interventions that aim to prevent violence through transforming understandings of gender norms have shown promising results [9]. Thus, exploring gender norms and positive understandings of manhood among young people represents an opportunity to address VAW.

About PositivMasc

PositivMasc: a multi-country research project to understand notions of manhood among young people and identify strategies to promote positive masculinities in reducing VAW.

The PositivMasc Project was carried out from 2019-2022 by researchers in Ireland, Israel, Spain and Sweden, funded by the European GENDER-NET research program. Its aim was to explore the link between gender norms, manhood and VAW, and to identify ways to support positive or alternative understandings of manhood that are emerging among young people ages 18-24 in Ireland, Israel, Spain and Sweden. The project also aimed to identify opportunities to support and promote positive masculinities in informing policy and practice to reduce VAW.

Project researchers wanted to know how young men and women ages 18-24 understand manhood and explore how this influences their attitudes, behaviors and responses to VAW in their day to day lives. They also wanted to determine whether there are individual and societal factors that can support and promote positive masculinities, as an approach to addressing VAW.

Data was gathered in two phases. In the first phase, in-depth interviews and focus groups were carried out with young men, young women and local stakeholders (government, NGOs and youth organizations). In total, between 25 and 30 interviews and 8 focus groups were conducted per country. Topics of discussion included perceptions about masculinity, different forms of VAW (emotional, physical, sexual, controlling behavior, cyber harassment and image-based/online violence, among others) and strategies to best address VAW. In addition to direct questioning, project researchers used vignettes of short stories describing hypothetical everyday situations related to different types of VAW (without an explicit mention of the term VAW).

The interviews were used to identify the actions that interviewees thought were needed to support and promote positive manhood as a strategy to prevent VAW. In the second phase, researchers used concept mapping methodology to gauge the relative importance of and relationship between these actions. They also reviewed the policy frameworks and educational initiatives that exist in each country.



Findings From the PositivMasc Project

Young people link some forms of VAW to societal understandings of manhood. They reject more extreme forms of VAW, but normalize forms that are present in their daily lives.

In all of the project countries, the young people in the study were able to identify various forms of VAW, especially more severe forms such as sexual and physical violence. They often connected gender norms to VAW. Swedish young women recognized a range of types of violence, but linked physical violence to gender norms specifically. In Israel young people rejected clear-cut cases of extreme VAW, but this did not translate into recognition of other types of violence as unacceptable, including cyber-harassment, verbal IPV or men's controlling behavior towards women. In Spain, physical or sexual violence outside of a relationship was condemned, but more subtle violence (such as emotional manipulation, revenge porn, control in social networks, non-consensual sex within a couple, etc.) was common. It was normalized in daily behavior via young people's inegalitarian beliefs about masculinity and femininity.

Though young people reject VAW practices in theory, they tend to reproduce them in their behavior.

The use of vignettes in the research was effective in highlighting differences in young people's ideas about VAW versus how these beliefs play out in their day to day behavior. Because vignettes refrained from explicitly mentioning violence, young people were more open to sharing personal experiences. Their reactions to the vignettes showed how they rejected VAW in its extreme forms but also (consciously or unconsciously)

reproduced it and contextualized it, especially new online and image-based forms of VAW that are a part of their everyday experience. These justifications were often based on harmful social gender norms.

In Ireland, young people identified the peer group as a powerful and key regulator of norms around manhood. They specifically identified the ways in which young men use sexual VAW to create and maintain their bonds and relationships with other young men, conferring masculine qualities and heterosexual status [7]. In Spain, young people showed internalization of myths of romantic love (which perpetuate harmful gender norms). They also indicated a lack of positive role models and lack of psychological safety as elements that reproduce harmful masculinity, impede bystander intervention and generally result in VAW.

More flexible and positive understandings of manhood are emerging among young people, but traditional, harmful understandings also persist.

Young people in all of the project countries reported that new understandings of manhood are emerging, sometimes linked to the #metoo movement and media coverage of VAW issues. In Sweden young women reported that norms for women are changing more quickly than those for men, and they perceived young men as open to a softer "new masculinity" [19]. In Israel, an understanding of a link between manhood and VAW emerged alongside hybrid ideas of manhood that incorporate men's privileges as well as notions of women's equality and equal decision-making in the family and couple.

However, more traditional gender norms persist that harm both women and men. Swedish women suggested that harmful manhood is most supported among male groups and sports clubs [19]. In Spain, harmful gender norms still underlie the way young people behave. However, some men, especially those who identified as homosexual or bisexual, presented a counter argument with a high level of criticism towards gender inequalities [20].



Young people see some expressions of VAW, especially cyber-harassment and image-based violence as common and difficult to avoid.

In all of the project countries, digital forms of violence, including men's control, were often minimized and explained as being extremely common or unavoidable. This reflects the widespread media coverage of controversy surrounding episodes of cyber-harassment and extreme sexual violence against women. In the interviews young people saw cyber-harassment and image-based violence as problematic, yet common.

Swedish young women strongly rejected so called 'revenge porn', but saw controlling behavior as difficult to recognize, both in social media and in "real life", a sentiment shared by young people in Spain, who signaled the disproportionate negative impact of revenge porn on women, compared to men. In Israel most participants did not recognize cyber harassment as violence. Those who criticized and rejected image-based sexual abuse also reported being able to understand young men's positions and rationalized them as somewhat normal.

School, family and peer environments are those in which young people most strongly desire educational support to address VAW.

Researchers asked what should be done to reduce VAW and promote positive understandings of manhood among young people. In all of the project countries, young people were able to describe their needs in contributing to reducing VAW. They indicated the need for programs in their schools and communities and voiced the importance of role models of positive relationships.

Specific areas of need included education on sex and consent, relationships, gender norms, emotional literacy and regulation, VAW, bystander intervention, mentoring, conflict resolution and non-violent communication for children. Some young people identified the need to have conversations about gender norms among peer groups (especially among young men), in the family, at school and with sports coaches.

Young people identify the need for education on sex and consent, relationships, gender norms, emotional literacy and non-violent communication, among other areas.



In all four countries, there is insufficient policy attention to the link between gender norms and VAW.

Building alternative understandings of manhood is needed in educational initiatives with men.

Young people identified the need for educational initiatives that enable men to explore alternative understandings of manhood, especially in relation to emotions. They also identified and strongly linked VAW to the stigma associated with emotions for men. They argued for the need for educational initiatives with men that explore the relationship between manhood and emotions and building skills based on emotional literacy, emotional regulation and empathy.

NGOs, stakeholders and social movements play a role in consolidating work on manhood, VAW and gender equality.

In addition to young people, the PositivMasc Project engaged with stakeholder groups. In all of the countries, there are examples of NGOs and educational initiatives that have worked with boys and men in exploring manhood and its relationship to gender equality. In Sweden, the project country with the longest history of VAW prevention efforts, the question of how manhood and gender norms affect violence and its prevention has become a part of the public agenda, whereas piecemeal efforts have occurred in the other project countries [21].

Across all four countries, however, the work of stakeholders is hindered by insufficient policy attention to the link between gender norms and VAW. Social movements in Israel that presented positive alternatives to traditional ideas about manhood have been difficult to sustain [21]. Educational initiatives, such as the Exploring Masculinities Program that directly focused on exploring manhood in Ireland, have received both support and resistance, and Spain's gender and violence prevention strategies do not recognize the need to involve men and boys. Most VAW work has been carried out with

an individual, rather than societal focus, and it has usually not involved an emphasis on manhood or men's involvement.

A few EU level policy frameworks recognize the need to incorporate men, boys and manhood into gender equality work, but there are gaps in connecting VAW to gender norms.

Findings from the research with young people and stakeholders reflect the state of VAW legislation. At the EU level, strategies on gender equality (in 2011 and 2015) mentioned the need for the active participation of men in gender equality efforts. Two Council of Europe (CoE) strategies (2014, 2018) have recognized how gender norms justify and maintain the historical power relations between men and women, and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions recommended (2019) that any new European gender equality strategy should explicitly attend to the inclusion of men, boys and manhood. However, currently there is no EU-wide strategy to address VAW, and there is still limited focus on the connection between manhood and VAW [21].

Country policy initiatives reflect the importance of positive understandings of manhood, but there is a need for consolidation.

In all four project countries regulations and policies have striven to improve gender equity and strengthen women's position in society. Among project countries, Sweden has the longest history of work to prevent VAW in different levels of society and is beginning to address the role of manhood. In Ireland, the two strategies on gender-based violence did not specifically address education around gender roles. VAW was absent in national legislation in Israel until 1970, and there is no current legislation in Spain that addresses manhood in the context of VAW, though gender equality is widely reflected in educational curricula [17].

Conclusions & Recommendations

For Policy Makers

- Legislation has been enacted to improve gender equity, but it has not sufficiently included reshaping understandings of manhood in efforts to reduce VAW. There is a need for policy makers to develop strategies and initiatives that address the harmful, societal ideals of manhood that continue to underpin VAW.
- There is an urgent need to identify and address emerging forms of VAW, including cyber-harassment and image-based sexual violence, which young people identify as problematic and common in their everyday lives. It is also important to explore how social media can be used to empower young people to reject harmful traditional gender norms.
- Greater commitment and engagement is needed between governments and stakeholders in all of the project countries to strengthen programs that work with men and boys on gender norms and VAW prevention.
- Despite recognition of the need to involve men and boys in gender equity initiatives at the government level, there is little in the way of practice. Innovative initiatives are needed to ensure the sustainability of gender equality work that integrates men and boys and explores gender norms, while not sidelining the work of women's organizations.
- Young people are resourceful. They are aware of the need to address VAW, can identify their needs and have clear ideas about areas for change. Efforts should be made to include young people's voices in decision-making to address VAW from the policy to programmatic level.

For Educators & Stakeholders

- A singular focus on men's attitudes and beliefs about women is insufficient to address VAW. Prevention efforts should challenge and engage with men's beliefs about manhood and what they need to "do" to secure peer group status and belonging.
- Rather than consider male peer groups as problematic, VAW educators should work *with* peer groups and see them as resources to develop alternative and positive understandings of manhood. Programs that involve the perspectives of both women and men are needed.
- Interventions that aim to transform notions of gender to promote gender equality and social justice can benefit from including the voices of LGB youth, in addition to heterosexuals and young people involved in activism.
- Young men need to be equipped with bystander intervention skills, which recognize both the supportive factors and the barriers and vulnerabilities they face when intervening.
- Education on emotions, sex and relationships carried out with young men are key to incorporating exploration around alternative and positive masculinities in addressing VAW.
- Any educational initiatives with men should explore the relationship between manhood and emotions and support skill building on emotional literacy, emotional regulation and empathy.
- Young people desire greater involvement of schools, family and peer groups in exploring understandings of manhood and VAW. Efforts should be made to expand and facilitate engagement in these settings.

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- Although young people tend to reject VAW and recognize some of the emerging, positive understandings of manhood, there are gaps in translation into everyday behavior. Involving families, coaches, peers and other actors in education and VAW prevention programs is recommended to support young people.
- Even among young people who reject cyber-harassment, image-based and other “less severe” violence against women, they admit that it is common among young people and harmful to health. Educational programs should address and incorporate broad based and multi-faceted understandings of violence and abuse.
- Young people recognize that men’s mental health is under pressure with changing gender norms in society. They also suggest that men experience pressure from peers to conform to harmful notions of manhood and may commit VAW to cement social bonds and that this is harmful. Efforts to promote and sustain the well-being of young men as gender norms change and evolve are essential.

For Researchers

- In all of the project countries, there is limited or outdated research on the relationship between societal gender norms and VAW, especially among young people. More research is needed on current and/or positive masculinities and the relationship to VAW prevention to help inform policy and practice.
- Young people in this study reported that VAW, particularly image-based sexual abuse and harassment, is one way that young men engage in gender socialization and consolidate peer groups. There is a need for more research on how gender socialization relates to social and online media.
- Cyber-harassment, image-based violence, control and emotional violence are forms of VAW that young people have difficulty in identifying, yet are common and normalized in their everyday lives. There is a need for research to address emerging forms of VAW among young people to help inform interventions to address them.
- Gender norms are a sensitive topic, and young people navigate the influence of both traditional, harmful notions of manhood as well as more positive ones. Creative and innovative methodologies such as the use of vignettes can elicit nuanced understandings of young people’s attitudes and behaviors and support a safe space for young people to explore ideas about gender norms.

For country-specific information or to learn more about the PositivMasc Project, connect with project researchers:

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About the Project

PositivMasc is a multi-country research project on Violence Against Women. Research was carried out with young people, VAW professionals and stakeholders in Ireland, Israel, Spain and Sweden.

Project Goals

PositivMasc aims to explore the link between gender norms and VAW and to identify ways to support and promote positive masculinities in informing policy and practice.

Results from this research suggest that:

- VAW policies and interventions should make explicit reference to manhood and gender roles.
- Incorporation of a gender-transformative approach in VAW educational interventions is needed. A gender-transformative approach promotes actively challenging gender norms and addressing power inequalities between women and men, helping to build equitable and non-violent relationships [9].
- Efforts should include changing cultural norms of gender inequity in the media and in public opinion.
- A focus on cultivating empathy and understanding among men about their position in society is important.
- Community engagement in prevention through a focus on children and families is crucial.

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IRELAND

Translating Consciousness of Men's Violence Against Women Into Action

The social, cultural, political and economic situation of post-independence Ireland, combined with Catholic social teachings and values, has shaped Ireland's response to gender equality and men's violence against women. These values have shifted considerably in twenty-first century Ireland, however, there are still barriers to translating a growing desire to address VAW into action. Inclusion of men in addressing this pervasive societal problem is needed.

About the Fieldwork in Ireland

The Irish qualitative data was made up of one-to-one interviews with 14 stakeholders and 27 young people (12 men and 15 women), which included in-person and telephone interviews. The quantitative data included 105 individuals (81 young people and 24 stakeholders).

For more information on the project findings on Ireland, contact Dr. Claire Edwards at claire.edwards@ucc.ie or Dr. Robert Bolton at robert.bolton@ucc.ie.



PositivMasc Findings in Ireland

- Young people associated particular types of behavior and practices with specific versions of masculinity, such as the “lad”. A “lad” version of masculinity was viewed negatively by participants and was associated with strong peer group loyalty, sexual bravado, and the objectification of women. Participants described this “lad culture” as contributing to sexual harassment and violence against women in Ireland.
- Participants perceived formal education on sex and relationships in Ireland to be very poor and, for some, non-existent. They suggested that this need is often filled by the Internet and pornography. The haphazard teaching of sex education was put into context with reference to the legacy of Catholic social teachings around sex in Irish society, in which sexual expression was seen as shameful. For an overwhelming number of participants, secular and progressive sex education in Ireland, separated from any religious teaching/ethos, is urgently required.
- Both young people and stakeholders perceived a positive change in gender roles and consciousness around VAW within Irish society. This has emerged partly in response to “flashpoint” events which have provoked increased discussion and sensibility around the problem of men's violence against women. They perceived the question of “what men can/should do” to be increasingly urgent.
- Stakeholders perceived difficulties regarding how to discuss and implement formal education on VAW in schools. They cited issues such as men's defensiveness, differing pedagogical priorities, and public backlash against a perceived feminist ideology. They argued for strategies to gain “buy-in” from young people, schools, and the public and an approach to pedagogy that avoids demonizing men.

ISRAEL

A Complex Social and Political Context Shapes Perceptions of Masculinities, Gender Relations and Men's Violence Against Women

The socio-political context and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have a tremendous effect on shaping perceptions of masculinity, gender relations and violence against women (VAW) in Israel. In 1948 Palestinians became an indigenous minority in their homeland, with the Jewish majority controlling country resources. The militarist discourse became dominant in shaping masculine identity and gender relations in Israeli Jewish society. The central role of the military in Israeli society and culture contributes to discrimination not just against Jewish women, but also against the Palestinian-Arab minority. In the last decade there has been a notable shift at the policy level towards VAW, however barriers remain to including men in combating VAW, specifically among the Palestinian-Arab community. Most VAW interventions focus on women, and men receive less attention in programs and policies.

About the Fieldwork in Israel

The qualitative data was collected via face-to-face, in-depth interviews. The participants included 15 stakeholders, 20 Jewish young people (10 men and 10 women) and 15 Palestinian young people (8 men and 7 women). In addition, 30 young people participated in 4 focus groups. The quantitative data came from 139 individuals (110 young people and 29 stakeholders) who participated in the concept mapping study.

PositivMasc Findings in Israel

- Political and socio-economic status and the cultural values of patriarchy intersect with ethno-national identity to shape types of masculinities, responses to gender equality and men's violence against women. There were different perceptions of masculinities and VAW among Jewish and Palestinian-Arab young adults.
- Masculinities among Palestinian-Arabs are shaped by the intersections of political forces and patriarchy that embody unequal ethno-national power and gender relations. Palestinian masculinities are socially constructed to resist oppression, which highlights the possibility for simultaneous liberatory transformation towards egalitarian gender relations and ending of subordination.
- Jewish young people understood masculine behavior on a spectrum, ranging from the hegemonic, militaristic discourse of the Sabra, to a preference for egalitarian masculinity. This egalitarian masculinity rejects stereotypical macho masculine identity and supports emotionally expressive manhood. These masculinities are influenced by the "Zionist ideology" and "the state's militaristic nature"; the "global neoliberal order" and values of "liberal-feminism"; the ethnic and racial hierarchy; and conservative religious beliefs.
- The positions of Jewish young adults on VAW were not based solely on toxic forms of masculinity. Some young adults took a situational perspective, based on their life experiences and exposure to VAW. Thus, for some young adults, the neoliberal feminist discourse about equality, autonomy, and individuality acts as a barrier to understanding the systematic, social, and structural features of VAW. This resulted in a lack of clear definitions of masculinity, gender equity and VAW and a discrepancy between young people's perceptions of gender equality and their reactions towards actual acts of VAW.

For more information on the project findings in Israel, contact Prof. Nihaya Daoud at daoud@bgu.ac.il.

SPAIN

Young People Need Safer Social and Institutional Contexts for Healthy, Non-Violent and LGB-Friendly Masculinities to Flourish

Violence against women legislation in Spain dates back to 2004, with the ratification of Organic Law 1/2004, on integral protection against gender violence. Regulations enacted in 2021 have included strategies to address emerging forms of VAW, such as cyber-harassment and image-based sexual violence, forms of VAW that young people are exposed to in their everyday lives. There is no current legislation in Spain that addresses the relationship between masculinities and VAW. In Spain, as in other countries, violent attitudes and GBV continue to exist in young people, despite years of interventions designed to raise awareness. However, young people, especially those with experience in gender equality activism, actively challenge traditional, harmful gender norms.

About the Fieldwork in Spain

In Spain, the project research included young women and men of different sexual orientations, some involved in feminist activism and some not. A total of 73 young people ages 18 to 24 took part in the study (39 men and 34 women; 22 activists and 51 non-activists). Twenty interviews and 8 discussion groups were conducted between October, 2019 and February, 2020. Stakeholders were also included through interviews with a total of 23 participants (13 women and 10 men).



PositivMasc Findings in Spain

- Some young people were critical of the dominant construction of gender and the inequalities it perpetuates. These views were especially present among activists (of all sexual orientations) and among non-activist homosexuals and bisexuals. Young people expressed difficulty in putting these ideas into practice, due to peer pressure and institutional neglect. Their voices should be considered in developing policies to promote changes in the construction of gender.
- Young men suggested that beliefs linked to hegemonic masculinity - including emotional censorship, aggressiveness and hypersexuality - can lead to bullying, mental health problems, lack of affection in interpersonal relationships and illness caused by harmful behaviors (drug and alcohol use, etc.) Homosexual and bisexual men may be particularly at risk of the negative health consequences of hegemonic masculinity.
- Young people confused victims and perpetrators of VAW when discussing subtle forms of violence, victim-blaming for sexual violence, digital VAW and bystander intervention of men. They sometimes expressed normalization and justification of VAW through beliefs about gender inequality, even among those who condemned VAW from a conceptual or activist point of view.
- Stakeholders in Spain pointed to formal and informal education, for both cisgender men and women and transgender people, as the key to preventing VAW and harmful masculinities. They also saw education as a key area that can both establish and perpetuate inequality in the future.

For more information on the project findings in Spain, contact Carmen Vives-Cases at carmen.vives@ua.es.

SWEDEN

Interventions to Reduce VAW and Promote Positive Masculinities Must Challenge Traditional Gender Roles in Society

Sweden is one of the most gender equal countries in the world and has strong legislation that aims to curtail violence against women. In addition, non-governmental organizations have developed interventions to challenge harmful, traditional forms of masculinity among young people. Despite these advances, the percentage of women reporting physical or sexual violence by their partners is higher than the EU average. Although governmental VAW prevention policies exist, they have been criticized for becoming gender neutral and failing to acknowledge the role that unequal gender relations have in the recurrence of VAW.

About the Fieldwork in Sweden

Qualitative and quantitative studies were used to gather the data. Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with 16 young men, 12 young women and 12 local stakeholders. Quantitative data was collected through an online survey of 83 participants (including 77 young men and women).



PositivMasc Findings in Sweden

- Young men and women understand and react to VAW in different ways. They recognized the most common forms of VAW (emotional, physical, and sexual). However, more insidious forms of VAW, such as controlling behavior and economic violence, were absent in some descriptions of VAW. Bystander intervention to tackle VAW and constraints on individual action were discussed.
- When discussing sexual violence and consent, both young men and women suggested that there are “grey zones” implicit in the nature of sexual communication that can lead to sexual violence; it can be difficult to determine whether the other person wants to engage in sex or not. Young women described sexual violence as “hopeless to report and difficult to prove”, which highlights a key area for future preventive interventions.
- In general, participants rejected any justification for VAW. However, some young people’s discourses shifted part of the responsibility for sexual violence to women, since “a woman is partly responsible for her own safety”.
- Actions to promote positive masculinities were grouped into six thematic areas: self-reflection and change, actions in leisure/cultural spaces, mandatory education on gender and VAW, positive role models in public arenas, support from civil society and strengthening of the government, police, and legal response. Participants rated action in mandatory education on gender and VAW and self-reflection and change as of higher importance. Mandatory education on gender and VAW and action in leisure/cultural spaces were rated as most feasible.

For more information on the project findings in Sweden, contact Mariano Salazar at mariano.salazar@ki.se.

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SPECIAL THANKS

