**Shared Futures: Engaging Men in Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls**

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Preventing violence against women and girls (VAWG) is increasingly considered to require alternative, proactive approaches which function alongside the (largely reactive) UK criminal justice system. Reports produced by the UK government’s End Violence Against Women (EVAW) coalition have highlighted gaps in current policies concerning the three stages (primary, secondary and tertiary) of VAWG prevention ([Cerise, 2011](http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/resources/19/a_different_world_is_possible_report_email_version.pdf); [Dustin, 2013](http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/Deeds_or_Words_Report.pdf)). The preferred primary approach refers to strategies that aim to prevent violence *before* it occurs on both a macro and micro level. Recommended initiatives include public awareness campaigns which target whole or specific populations with a view to altering the social, cultural and structural contexts within which violence occurs, as well as embedding prevention measures in educational settings ([Cerise, 2011](http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/resources/19/a_different_world_is_possible_report_email_version.pdf): 14).

The expansion of VAWG prevention into the mainstream domain is to be welcomed in order to challenge the gendered ‘ghettoization’ of responsibility: that VAWG is a ‘woman’s issue’ in terms of care-giving, research, policy development and lobbying for legal reform. The message being indicated is clear: not perpetrating VAWG is no longer enough; being active in helping prevent other men’s violence against women and girls is possible, desirable and necessary to effect change.

Jonathan Crowe ([2011](http://www.xyonline.net/sites/default/files/Crowe%2C%20Men%20and%20feminism%202011.pdf): 52) supports strategies aimed at preventing VAWG which diversify to encompass a broader range of people; specifically men: "In order to move forward in this way, it is necessary for men to recognise the practical role they can play in advancing feminist objectives. This involves acknowledging that ‘I can make a difference’ and then translating this into action". A similar call to arms has been outlined by Michael Flood ([2011](http://jmm.sagepub.com/content/14/3/358.refs): 359) who claims that:

There is a growing consensus in violence prevention circles that to end this violence, we must involve and work with men. While men have long been addressed in secondary- and tertiary-based interventions as perpetrators, now they are also being addressed as ‘‘partners’’ in prevention.

Flood outlines ‘six levels of intervention’ detailing *how* to engage men in preventing VAWG: strengthening individual knowledge and skills; promoting community education; educating providers (and other professionals); engaging, strengthening and mobilising communities; changing organisational practices; and influencing policies and legislation. He also indicates three core rationales for *why* those working in the violence prevention domain should engage with men: first, men disproportionately commit most of the violent victimisation experienced by women (and men). Second, the continued problematic social constructions of masculinity may in some way account for such violence; and third, men not involved in violent conduct are ultimately affected by it in various ways.

Challenges to involving men are outlined by Casey et al. ([2013](http://jmm.sagepub.com/content/16/2/228.short): 25) where engagement with traditional and contested concepts of masculinity and masculine identity constructions may require men to first undergo a re-examination of ‘closely held beliefs about their own gender … examining and perhaps working to shed the privileges that accrue to them based on gender’. Not all will want to do this. There will be some men who perceive VAWG prevention groups to be inherently antagonistic toward men or male involvement ([Casey 2010](http://vaw.sagepub.com/content/16/8/953.short); see for review, Flood 2011). Indeed, whilst this may be true of some it cannot be generalised to all, so using this as an excuse likely indicates a less open-minded approach than would be desired from participants. Some men may be of the perspective that VAWG is fundamentally a ‘‘women’s issue’’ with little or no relevance to their own lives ([Crooks et al. 2007](http://neighboursfriendsandfamilies.on.ca/sites/default/files/crookspubengagingmenandboys.pdf)). They are the ones to whom such knowledge will probably not be imparted by women who, statistically, will likely have it to share at some point in their lives. There are also those who may perceive violence prevention to be associated with a feminist agenda with which they are uncomfortable or fundamentally disagree (Casey 2010). They too are not likely the target audience of such initiatives.

However, for those who *do* wish to become involved in prevention efforts, evidence suggests that men who see violence against women as an important problem and want to help may not know how to contribute ([Crooks et al. 2007](http://neighboursfriendsandfamilies.on.ca/sites/default/files/crookspubengagingmenandboys.pdf)), or lack the skills or knowledge to take some kind of active stand against violence ([Casey and Ohler 2012](http://jiv.sagepub.com/content/27/1/62)). It is these men whose assistance needs harnessing, not least as they may far outnumber the detractors.

Several grass-roots prevention initiatives targeting male involvement as allies and role models exist, designing workshops to address violence prevention and facilitating bystander intervention training. Groups such as [*The White Ribbon Campaign*](http://www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk/), [*Men Can Stop Rape*](http://www.mencanstoprape.org/), [*Men Against Rape*](http://www.menagainstrape.co.za/) and [*Men Stopping Violence*](http://www.menstoppingviolence.org/) demonstrate the growing number (and nature) of men who are not only opposed to VAWG, but prepared to vocalise this and act on it to effect prevention where possible. These groups offer spaces for men opposed to (or, in some cases, affected by) VAWG to do something about it in ways most recently noted by the global [*He for She*](http://www.heforshe.org/) campaign. Collaborative engagement is also useful for pro-social modelling of opposition to violence, indicating that this is not a default setting of masculinity. Capitalising on social media has proved useful in exacerbating awareness and involvement, with several organisations using a variety of tactics to get their message across. This has ranged from videos which problematise masculine stereotypes through to more politically–targeted fundraising campaigns, although some criticism has been aimed at these male-focused or male-led endeavours based on buying into a commercialised advertising medium ([Murphy](http://jmm.sagepub.com/content/12/1/113.abstract), 2009).

The endemic proportions to which violence against women and girls now features in people’s lives has indicated that this is a struggle that cannot be left to women alone to address, particularly in light of the significant and continued discrepancies when it comes to gender representation in positions of power, politics and policy making. Furthermore, addressing violence primarily from a criminal justice perspective means that investment remains responsive and reactionary, with offences already having been perpetrated and victims created. The VAWG prevention efforts detailed above indicate that viable alternatives are being built which may well transform not only pockets of society but the trajectory of people’s lives away from experiencing, witnessing or perpetrating violence; a future many, regardless of gender, would surely be happy to share.