

## **Changing men: Best practices in sexual violence education**

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### **Literature Summary**

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#### *Introduction: Men's role in violence prevention*

“Even though only a minority of men may commit sexual assault, all men can have an influence on the culture and environment that allows other men to be perpetrators.”

Masculinity and male privilege and what our culture perceives them to be is a contributing factor for the occurrence of sexual violence, especially when men have a hostile attitude towards women and do not see them as equals. The power dynamic of men who see themselves as dominant in society is a risk factor for perpetration of women.

“Effective strategies confront the beliefs, values and discourses which support violence, challenge the patriarchal power relations which sustain and are sustained by violence, and promote alternative constructions of masculinity, gender and selfhood which foster non-violence and gender justice.”

#### *Make a difference: evaluation*

A common mistake amongst educational programs is the lack of sufficient evaluation following an intervention. In order to properly evaluate the effect of these programs, there needs to be long-term follow up and consistent evaluation in the communities that are receiving the education. Despite this, many programs' evaluations show short term success in efforts of changing attitudes of men (or mixed sex audiences) in sexual violence.

“Evaluations commonly find that men's attitudes towards violence have undergone a significant improvement immediately after the program, but then return to pre-intervention levels one or two months afterwards.”

The most effective evaluations are one derived from long-term, extensive and lengthy educational programs.

Another common issue found in evaluations is the notion that attitude change does not guarantee behavior change, in fact, statistically it does not prove to be the case. Again, there is a greater chance for behavior change with more lengthy and extensive programs, Safe Dates is a great example of this.

“In order to assess and improve their effectiveness, violence prevention programs among men must use pre- and post- intervention evaluations, based on standardized measures of both attitudes and behavior, with both short and long-term assessments. Education programs must use more sophisticated understandings of the intended, and actual, processes of change

among participants rather than assuming that there will be one common pattern of change among participants..”

### Effective Prevention

Effective prevention programs have five key components, they are comprehensive, intensive, they address cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains, they are relevant to the audience, and they offer positive messages.

In order for an effective program to be intensive, they have to occur frequently and long enough for there to be retention in information, and there needs to be depth in the material. Single workshops are not effective and are unlikely to produce the change that community is looking to create.

Examples of the three domains are as follows: cognitive education can include dispelling myths, affective education can include a panel or discussion about rape in the community (with a humanization aspect), and behavioral education can include role plays of scenarios involving date rape.

### Men Engaging Men

Because of the difference in strategies and goals, it is most appropriate to have separate groups for men and women when addressing sexual assault prevention. It is not only more appropriate but it has proven to be more effective and men also report feeling more comfortable when there are only men involved in the conversation.

Men should also be facilitating the education programs in male group settings. There are several reasons for this, first being men’s attitudes and behaviors are shaped in powerful ways by their male peers and it is most effective to reshape those attitudes and behaviors with male role models. Second, having only males present in the groups provides a safe space for open discussion without the fear of judgement by a female presence. Next, having a male facilitator makes it easy for participants to have someone to look up to who demonstrates non-violent masculinity. Fourth male participants find that having a male educator means they are more likely going to trust the information that is coming from him rather than if it were coming from a woman. Last, mixed sex groups can potentially cause conflict and more nonconstructive behaviors when discussing sensitive topics such as men apologizing to women and women being the caretaker of the men and their emotions.

### Making Interventions Relevant

In order for interventions to be effective, they must be relevant to the audience and recognize cultural differences and barriers amongst participants, tailoring material to meet the needs using inclusive language, and acknowledging the difference of the issue amongst class, race and ethnicity, age, and other social characteristics.

It is also important to note that though there is a large difference in how to approach the educational material between genders, there are also major differences amongst gender and how groups of people perceive gender norms and masculinity/femininity.

“Making one’s intervention relevant also means matching it to men’s level of awareness about and willingness to take responsibility for the problem of violence against women. Men are at different places along the continuum from passive indifferences to active intervention, and different educational approaches should be adopted for men at earlier and later stages of change.”

### *Enabling and Inspiring Men*

Giving participants examples of men who have actively stood up against violence and represent fluid forms of masculinity is a positive and effective approach in prevention. It can also be beneficial for educators to encourage participants to think of ways they have acted in a non-violent manner and/or stood up against violence in order to shed light on the capabilities they already have in this movement.

A challenge that many educators will face is participants’ defensiveness and hostility towards the information they are receiving. Because there is already a notion that men are ‘bad’ when it comes to perpetrating violence, many participants will already hold guilt and feel blame just for their identity as a man. This challenge can be eased when approaching men as partners in the fight rather than students.

The most important component of enabling men to participate in these conversations is making it a safe and welcoming environment where they feel comfortable to be vulnerable and open up during discussion without the fear of judgement.

### *Questions of Pedagogy*

Encouraging victim empathy is a method that is often used but can often lead to rape supportive behaviors and is typically unsuccessful in changing attitudes against rape.

Another pedagogy which is not recommended is teaching young boys and men the consequences of participating in perpetration. This method shows the potential outcomes for perpetrators as a scare tactic to encourage boys and men to practice nonviolence. This method is also nonrealistic considering the majority of men who perform an act of sexual violence will not receive legal punishment if any punishment.

Teaching skills in non-violence and consent is often misinterpreted as teaching that sexual assault is equivalent to a misunderstanding in terms of consent. The problem with teaching skills is that men do not lack the skills to be nonviolent, they are conditioned to believe they have the right to be violent towards women.

Two effective pedagogies that are well known and respected are teaching bystander intervention as well as undermining men's conformity to sexist peer norms.