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# Context, Challenges, And Tensions In Global Efforts To Engage Men In The Prevention Of Violence Against Women: An Ecological Analysis

Erin A. Casey

University of Washington Tacoma, [ercasey@uw.edu](mailto:ercasey@uw.edu)

Juliana Carlson

Cathlyn Fraguela-Rios

Ericka Kimball

Tova B. Neugut

*See next page for additional authors*

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**Authors**

Erin A. Casey, Juliana Carlson, Cathlyn Fraguera-Rios, Ericka Kimball, Tova B. Neugut, Richard M. Tolman, and Jeffrey L. Edleson

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violence against women: An ecological analysis**

**Corresponding author - Erin A. Casey, PhD, MSW**

Associate Professor  
University of Washington, Tacoma, Social Work Program  
1900 Commerce, Box 358425  
Tacoma, WA 98402  
253-692-4524  
[ercasey@uw.edu](mailto:ercasey@uw.edu)

Juliana Carlson, PhC  
University of Minnesota School of Social Work  
1404 Gortner Ave  
St Paul, MN 55108  
[carl3902@umn.edu](mailto:carl3902@umn.edu)

Cathlyn Fraguera-Rios, MSW  
University of Washington School of Social Work  
[cmfr@uw.edu](mailto:cmfr@uw.edu)

Ericka Kimball, PhD  
University of Minnesota School of Social Work  
1404 Gortner Ave  
St Paul, MN 55108

Tova Neugut, MSW  
University of Michigan School of Social Work  
1080 S. University  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109  
[tneugut@umich.edu](mailto:tneugut@umich.edu)

Richard Tolman, PhD, MSW  
Professor  
University of Michigan School of Social Work  
1080 S. University  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109  
[rtolman@umich.edu](mailto:rtolman@umich.edu)

Jeffrey L. Edleson, PhD, MSW  
Dean and Professor  
University of California School of Social Welfare  
120 Haviland Hall #7400  
Berkeley, CA 94720-7400  
[swdean@berkeley.edu](mailto:swdean@berkeley.edu)

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**ABSTRACT**

As gender-based violence prevention programs around the world increasingly include efforts to engage men and boys as anti-violence allies, both the profound benefits and inherent complexities of these efforts are emerging. Acknowledging and exploring tensions associated with engaging men is an important element of thoughtfully fostering men's anti-violence ally movements so as to both respectfully invite men into anti-violence work and create effective, gender-equitable prevention programming. To this end, this study presents descriptive findings regarding challenges associated with men's engagement programming from in-depth interviews with 29 representatives of organizations that engage men and boys in preventing violence against women and girls in Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania, and North and South America. Programs reported negotiating complex issues related to gender, the intersectional nature of men's identities, and establishing legitimacy and sustainability within communities while maintaining ideological focus and consistency. Additionally, programs reported that these tensions manifest across ecological layers of analysis, and impact both the participation of individual men as well as programs' experiences in community and national contexts.

*Key words: Prevention, Violence against women, Engaging men, Global*

**Context, challenges, and tensions in global efforts to engage men in the prevention of violence against women: An ecological analysis**

Global efforts to prevent and end gender-based violence increasingly include the proactive engagement of men and boys. Across a myriad of programs and approaches, this involvement typically entails engaging men in educational opportunities, fostering their awareness of violence against women, and nurturing their ability to cultivate non-violence and gender equity in their families, peer groups, communities and at broader societal and policy levels (Flood, 2011b). Consensus is emerging across practitioners, scholars, and policy makers that ending gender-based violence requires full community participation – and particularly the increased participation of men (Flood, 2005; World Health Organization, 2007).

While increasingly perceived as a vital element of ending violence, the process of engaging men in anti-violence work is fraught with complexities. As an “ally” movement (a conceptualization we employ in this paper), engaging men involves mobilizing a socially privileged group to work towards dismantling a problem largely perpetuated from within its own ranks (Black et al., 2001). This carries fundamental tensions around engaging men in ways that do not reinforce or recreate gendered power inequities (Casey, 2010; Edwards, 2006) or that result in supplanting women’s voices and leadership in anti-violence movements (Atherton-Zemon, 2009) while still attracting and sustaining male participation. Some of these tensions, particularly those involved in reaching out to and engaging *individual* men as anti-violence allies, are beginning to be described in existing literature (e.g. Casey, 2010; Funk, 2008). Less articulated are barriers to men’s engagement that emerge at broader organizational and community levels, or the ways that these challenges vary regionally as men’s anti-violence groups become a central part of global gender-based violence prevention efforts. Ultimately, the

broad participation of men in reducing gender-based violence requires a strategic examination and negotiation of these inherent complexities, both to more successfully engage individual men and to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of men's anti-violence efforts over time. The purpose of this paper is therefore to present findings from a study of organizations around the world that work to engage men in gender-based violence prevention and to describe the multi-level challenges and dilemmas they encounter in these efforts.

### **Defining men's anti-violence engagement**

Increasingly, gender-based violence prevention efforts are conceptualized and described using ecological frameworks (e.g. Centers for Disease Control, 2004). An ecological framework builds on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model which postulates nested levels of the human environment that have reciprocally influential impacts on human behavior and social problems. One of the most prominent uses of an ecological framework within gender-based violence prevention is the Prevention Institute's Spectrum of Prevention (Davis, Parks & Cohen, 2006) which delineates six levels at which prevention efforts operate. These range from micro-level approaches aimed at raising awareness and changing violence-related attitudes among individuals to macro-level strategies that attempt to shift broader community and social norms and to enact policy that fosters violence-free communities (Davis et al., 2006). Flood (2011b) applies the Spectrum of Prevention to describe efforts around the world that incorporate men into gender-based violence prevention. These endeavors range from individual-level educational programs for boys and men in school or community settings (such as Program H in South & Central America; Ricardo, Nascimento, Fonseca & Segundo, 2010), to social network-level ally-building programs aimed at cultivating men's ability to intervene in the problematic behavior of their male peers (such as Mentors in Violence Prevention; Katz, Heisterkamp & Fleming, 2011),

to multi-level and community mobilization efforts such as the now international White Ribbon Campaign (<http://whiteribbon.ca/>). Across these levels of strategy, programs often have the aim of increasing men's awareness about gender-based violence, thereby encouraging them to deepen their on-going commitment to ending it - by becoming formally involved in violence-prevention organizations, and/or by being a role model and vocal proponent of respectful relationships in their own families and communities (see for example the One Man Can Campaign in South Africa; <http://www.genderjustice.org.za/onemancan/>).

Globally, many men's engagement programs are also informed by a pro-feminist analysis (Carlson et al., in press). This perspective ties gender-based violence to social, economic and political inequities based on gender as well as to socially constructed notions of masculinity that link manhood to dominance and control (see for example, Murnen, Wright & Koluzny, 2002). In feminist-informed programs, critically examining traditional assumptions about gender and particularly masculinity constitutes a central component of discussions with men regarding dismantling violence. In a global review of evaluated gender equity promotion programs, the World Health Organization (2007) concluded that programs with the strongest impacts on men's behavior and beliefs were those that explicitly addressed gender and masculinity-related norms. Simultaneously, critically exploring traditional masculinity and its associated privileges generates one of the fundamental tensions inherent in engaging men in anti-violence work – inviting men to re-imagine closely held beliefs about their own gender means examining and perhaps working to shed the privileges that accrue to them based on gender.

### **Engaging men in violence prevention: challenges and complexities**

Linked to the fundamental gender-related tension identified above, an emerging literature identifies several complexities related to engaging individual men in gender-based violence

prevention. For example, men may perceive gender-based violence prevention efforts as inherently antagonistic towards and blaming of men (Casey, 2010; see for review, Flood, 2001a), and may view gender-based violence as a “women’s issue” with no relevance to their own lives (Crooks, Goodall, Hughes, Jaffe & Baker, 2007), or may perceive violence prevention to be associated with a feminist agenda with which they are uncomfortable or disagree (Casey, 2010). On the other hand, evidence suggests that many men see violence against women as an important problem and want to help, but may not know how to contribute (Crooks et al., 2007), or lack the skills or knowledge to take some kind of active stand against violence (Casey & Ohler, 2012). Further, some men who become visible anti-violence allies or who speak up about the disrespectful behavior of other men may encounter skeptical, negative and/or homophobic reactions from their male peers (Berkowitz, 2004). Organizers of men’s anti-violence projects and organizations have also found it difficult to sustain individual men’s commitment to and involvement in the work over time (e.g. Funk, 2008). To negotiate these complexities, men’s ally programs have developed a number of strategies to both reach out to men in positive ways and to move past initial defensiveness. These strategies include strengths-based outreach that approach men as partners in prevention efforts (Berkowitz, 2004), initiating conversations with topics of central importance to men, such as fatherhood and relationships (see for example, the Founding Fathers Program; [www.foundingfathers.org](http://www.foundingfathers.org) and MenCare, a global program promoting men’s involvement in fathering <http://www.men-care.org>), and providing men with opportunities to reflect on ideas about positive, healthy masculinity that combine notions of strength and non-violence (see for example, [www.mencanstoprape.org](http://www.mencanstoprape.org)).

Reaching out to individual men occurs in larger organizational, community and social environments, however, which can harbor both supports and challenges to the gender equity

goals of violence prevention programs. This means that it is critical not only to articulate the complexities involved in reaching out to individual men, but to examine the obstacles present in the settings and communities in which those efforts occur. Evidence from prevention fields more broadly suggests that prevention efforts that operate on multiple levels and that engage both individuals and their communities can be particularly effective in fostering lasting change (Wandersman & Florin, 2003; WHO, 2007). To date, however, most “tested” gender-based violence prevention programs operate almost exclusively at the individual-level (Senn, 2011), circumscribing the knowledge base about the impact of multi-level approaches. To date, there has also been limited examination of how the larger contexts in which men’s engagement occurs affect the process and outcomes of organizations that involve men in violence prevention. To move towards addressing this gap, this study examines qualitative data from interviews with 29 organizational representatives speaking on behalf of gender-based violence prevention programs around the world that involve men in their work. Specifically, this study aims to 1) provide an ecological description of challenges experienced by men’s anti-violence organizations at individual, organizational and community levels, and 2) examine how these challenges manifest across different regional contexts. By more fully explicating the multi-level complexities involved in engaging men, we hope to move closer to conceptualizing ways to navigate them.

## **METHODS**

### **Participant recruitment**

Research procedures described below were approved by a large public university’s Institutional Review Board. Findings presented in this paper are from the second phase of a larger, on-going research effort aimed at describing the nature of world-wide efforts to engage men in the primary prevention of gender-based violence. We recruited participants for this study

from the pool of individuals who responded to the first phase of our research, which consisted of a global, online, quantitative survey of organizations that had a programmatic component related to engaging men in efforts to end violence (see Kimball, Edleson, Tolman, Neugut & Carlson, in press, for a more in-depth description of the first phase of this project). For the first phase, we sent email invitations to participate in the internet-based survey to relevant violence and prevention-related listserves, professional networks and programs around the world, with the added invitation to forward the survey link to other potentially eligible parties. Participation eligibility was described as having part or all of the organizational mission dedicated to engaging men in violence prevention (operationalized as “men taking action to stop violence against women and children before it begins by advocating for and creating respectful relationships”). The first survey was conducted over a two-month period ending in June 2010 and was provided in English. One hundred and sixty-five programs around the world responded to the first survey and 104 of these provided contact information and consent to be re-contacted for the research described here.

We subsequently re-contacted 48 organizations by email to invite a program representative to participate in our in-depth interview for this study (these invitations included 46 organizations from the first phase of the project, and 2 additional referrals contacted to increase global representation). To maximize regional representation, we re-contacted all responding organizations that provided information from Africa, Asia, Europe and Central and South America. Additionally, a sample of potential respondents from Australia and North America was selected, stratified by region and organizational type (i.e. NGO, university, etc.). Invitations to participate included study information and a consent form. Program representatives returning

our email and indicating their consent to participate were scheduled for a phone or Skype interview with one of the four interviewers (two male, two female) on the team.

### **Sample**

Twenty-nine organizational representatives (21 male, 8 female) participated in the interviews. Nineteen organizations either did not respond to the invitation to participate, or did not follow up to schedule an interview. Descriptive information about participating organizations is provided in Table 1. We spoke with program representatives from Australia, Brazil, Canada, England, Grenada, India, Kenya, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Rwanda, Scotland, South Africa, Syria, Thailand, Uganda and the United States. Participating organizations were involved in a range of activities, from conducting prevention education in schools or community settings, to facilitating community-based men's awareness or activist groups, to convening national or international anti-violence coalitions. Many organizations described an integrated conceptualization of prevention that blended primary, secondary and tertiary prevention work. Although not a criterion for eligibility, all participating programs reported that they apply some kind of gendered analysis to the issue of violence, viewing gender roles and expectations as important topics to explore in efforts to reduce violence (although the specific ways programs conceptualized and implemented this analysis varied). For a more detailed description of the activities of and strategies employed by the programs in the sample, see Carlson et al. (in press).

[TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE].

### **Data Collection**

All participants provided a single interview over the phone or via Skype in English. Interviews varied from 45 to approximately 90 minutes in length and were semi-structured, with broad questions designed to elicit information about the organizations' programming and

strategies for reaching out to men. Identifying challenges to men's engagement was a secondary aim of the main study, and we solicited this content by asking about common barriers that organizations encounter. Some content about barriers and challenges also emerged organically in other parts of the interviews as program representatives described their activities and strategies. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis proceeded in two phases using Atlas.ti software and techniques drawn from grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). First, because of this paper's primary focus on challenges related to engaging men, transcripts were analyzed thematically by two coders, with all text related to barriers and challenges grouped together for deeper analysis. Next, guided by techniques described by Charmaz (2006), two researchers conducted inductive, line-by-line coding of the relevant text. Researchers had both shared and unique portions of text and met frequently to compare emerging concepts and develop a shared set of themes to describe the data. Constant comparison within and across cases using data display matrices was also used (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Collectively, these techniques surfaced five categories of challenges related to engaging men, which we have conceptualized as "tensions." Once saturation and agreement between the two coders was reached, a third researcher on the team reviewed the themes and supporting data as a check on trustworthiness. Adjustments to the analysis were made (particularly with respect to findings related to gender), resulting in the findings below.

## **RESULTS**

Organizational representatives described five core challenges related to designing, implementing or sustaining efforts to engage men in the prevention of violence against women: 1) negotiating issues of gender, 2) intersectionality, 3) sustainability, 4) legitimacy and 5)

ideological inclusivity. Here, we operationalize these challenges as “tensions,” as they often involve arbitrating among competing priorities and/or multiple constituencies or ideologies. Influencing these tensions are two larger themes. The first is the influence of context. In this study, although programs of different types and in different regions often described navigating similar tensions, the specific manifestations of these challenges were bound by local cultural, political, economic and social structures – encompassed in our subsequent employment of the term “context.” Secondly and related, all tensions could be conceptualized as manifesting across multiple ecological levels of analysis, with implications for working with individual men, but also with impacts at organizational, community and sometimes national levels.

Each tension, along with examples of how it intersects with issues of context and multiple levels of impact, is elucidated below. In the supporting participant quotes associated with each theme, we refer only to an interviewee’s identification number and geographic region so as to preserve anonymity. Although some individual programs also discussed specific strategies for moving beyond these tensions, our analysis did not surface “solutions” for each challenge that cut across multiple participants and regions. In a previous analysis of data from this project we identified recruitment and engagement strategies used by the programs to reach out to men in their communities; many of these strategies intersect with (or may have been developed in response to) the tensions described below. Readers are referred to Carlson et al. (in press) for an in-depth discussion of the creative engagement strategies these programs reported using. The discussion that follows is therefore largely a delineation of the core challenges of engaging men identified by participating programs.

## Gender

Not surprisingly, the most common tension described by program staff centers on navigating the role of gender in violence prevention and in creating strategies for inviting men's participation. Twenty-five program informants (86%) representing every region of the world spoke about the gendered complexities inherent in engaging men to address a topic long seen as a "woman's issue," a process that inevitably involves examining gender roles, men's own past behavior, and men's power. Participants noted that the movement to engage men is both rooted in and further complicated by the historical leadership of and struggle by women and women's organizations in efforts to end violence, and their long-standing work to gain access to sufficient resources and recognition of the problem of violence against women. Although the tensions posed by sorting out the role of gender in violence prevention are nuanced and multifaceted, two strong, major sub-themes related to gender emerged from the interviews: negotiating male privilege, and having man-only spaces.

**Male privilege.** Eighteen program representatives (62%) spoke about the inevitable tension involved in asking a privileged social group – men –to examine their deeply held beliefs about what it means to be a man as well as critically evaluate the sources of that very privilege. Participants noted that addressing male privilege entails the need to surface and examine assumptions linking traditional definitions of masculinity to power and authority over women. This can make it off-putting and difficult both to initially engage men and to convince them to sustain their participation. Program representatives cited homophobia, transphobia, and men's assumptions that anti-violence programs are inherently anti-male as related barriers. For example, a program representative in South America felt that by surfacing issues of gender in his men's groups he was inescapably perceived as undermining fundamentally held beliefs:

“It’s hard. It’s hard to get men to... I mean, when you’re inviting them, you’re basically telling them there’s something that they grew up their whole lives thinking they could do... ‘she’s my wife, she’s like an object so I can do with an object whatever I want to, she’s mine.’ And for you to tell those men, ‘look... this is wrong, you need help, this has to stop’.... it’s quite an issue.” (P21)

Other program staff talked about their struggle to navigate the simultaneous and yet conflicting needs to make participation palatable and inviting for men without colluding with or reinforcing the notions of male privilege that contribute to perpetuating the problem of gender-based violence in the first place. A program representative in North America lamented:

“...there are a lot of men doing it [sexual violence] and there are a lot of men that are sitting down watching all those guys do it and helping them do it. And we’re [anti-violence groups] tiptoeing around them trying to figure out how we can say this so that they won’t be offended. Right? Meanwhile, they’re beating and raping women and making massive [money] at enormous rates and we’re being entertained by it, both the depiction and the realities of it... and we’re sitting around tiptoeing around men wanting to be polite with them.” (P96)

On a macro level, program representatives identified institutionalized male power within governmental, media, criminal justice, religious, tribal and other community institutions as a significant barrier. This socially embedded patriarchy not only reinforces notions of traditional masculinity and male privilege held by individual men, it also impedes prevention groups’ efforts to garner resources, legitimacy, support, and membership. In a handful of cases, program staff reported experiences of being publicly ridiculed for their efforts:

“...one of the challenges is... because most of the men here do not think the time has come for men to talk about the rights of women... according to the newspaper, we’re just a group of men battered, beaten by our wives. So we are going around telling men, crying around like babies who cannot handle their wives. I should have read [you] the editorial of that newspaper that actually called me, specifically, a ‘sissy.’... They call me a ‘notorious sissy.’” (P30 – Africa)

In this case, the disjuncture between this program representative’s anti-violence work, and widely understood ideas in his community about the allocation of power across genders results in his own masculinity being publicly called into question. By implication, other men joining the

group are at risk of similar treatment and of being defined as outside the norm – a tactic that organizational representatives across regions reported being used against their efforts. A similar experience with some unique implications was reported by a program informant in South Asia, who noted the danger involved in challenging gender norms upheld by religious leaders in some local communities: “... we are facing the religious leaders’ influencing in our programs and threatening us - to we are spies of the global world, ‘you are spies of the United States’ and like this they say to us.” (P34) Here, by attempting to “sensitize” local men about violence against women, this program was testing entrenched gender-based power structures, and in this case, being defined as outsiders to the state through accusations of collusion with “terrorist” entities.

Although programs in every region of the world reported navigating tensions related to negotiating the role of gender, the specific expression of those challenges were locally and culturally specific. Program representatives highlighted features of their local context/culture that they perceive to be tied up in constructions of gender and violence. For example, the previously mentioned program in an urban region of South Asia, and a program in rural North America both articulated the ways in which local notions of appropriate masculinity reinforced gendered power inequities and resistance to prevention efforts. However, the participant in South Asia attributed the stability of these norms to power structures within local religious and political institutions while the organization in rural North America cited economic forces that drove a long-standing division of labor and gender roles:

“Well, there is the hyper-masculine stereotype guy that goes out and shoots the buffalo or elk and brings enough for the family, and the wife is at home and he is working on the railroad or in the mine. It is a very frontier mentality here by and large as a society...” (P84)

A program informant in Australia perceived that a sports-focused culture feeds pockets of misogyny and disrespect for women in and around the context of sport:

“[Rugby] is a very, what we call in Australia a very “blokie” environment, it’s not mitigated very much by the presence of women. There can be a culture, I don’t know if you have the same thing with your football teams, but there can be quite a culture of disrespect with rugby.” (P18).

It bears reiteration that these perceptions of the role of culture and context come from individual program representatives, and can be read as examples of links between culture and gender, but not links that are necessarily universally agreed upon, or exhaustive.

**Man only spaces?** The second sub-theme related to gender was articulated by 9 programs (31%), which included organizations in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America. Program staff reported deliberating within their programs about the appropriateness of focusing only on men’s engagement and creating spaces that were man-only or dominated by men. Many organizational representatives, including those that provide treatment services to perpetrators, felt that having gender-specific spaces was essential to facilitate the kind of atmosphere necessary for honest discussion and minimizing defensiveness. Others, however, expressed concern about fragmenting prevention efforts either along gender lines, or by a proliferation of disconnected programs that communicate only minimally with one another. Program representatives were also mindful of the risk of reinforcing gendered inequities by creating man-only spaces or unnecessarily undermining the positive change and relationships that could be fostered by co-educational programming. Further, some program staff warned that engaging men (or “changing” men) should not be an end unto itself. Rather, participants suggested that inviting men’s participation should be one strategy within a larger movement to promote norms of respect and equality within communities. For example, a program in Africa that focuses on engaging community members to foster localized activism related to violence and gender noted:

“Actually, our perspective has always been that we have to work with both men and women if we’re about to create social change. How else can we do it? If we’re in a community where men and women, together, make up the values of that community, how can we be working with just one group? We can’t, and, I think [there are] dangerous results when we try... I think what we need to be saying is we need to talk about social change, talk about community mobilization, whatever language, but make it inclusive.” (P47)

At organizational and community levels, this tension could take the form of suspicion from or conflict with victims’ services organizations, feminist organizations or other women’s groups. While most of the program representatives in this study highlighted the importance of working collaboratively with and being accountable to women and women’s organizations, some noted that their presence was nonetheless perceived by others as encroaching on hard-won territory. Given the historical difficulty of establishing violence against women as a critical issue, and of garnering resources to assist victims, the emergence of groups focused on engaging men holds the potential to raise concerns about the allocation of resources, ideological compatibility, and leadership sharing across organizations. A participant in Europe highlighted the tension caused by the rise of men’s engagement efforts in her community:

...we’ve got a big strategy at the government level for the past 10 years now, working on men’s violence against women and children, funding a lot of women-only organizations. It [doing men’s engagement work] seems to have led to quite a high degree of anger, fear and hostility. And there has been sort of two camps you know; the center feminist camp almost and then men. So trying to break through that particularly when we’re working with abuse issues has been quite hard. (P36)

### **Intersectionality**

Closely related to the issue of gender, 10 programs (34%) discussed how other aspects of identity and social position (and their intersections) complicate the conceptualization, implementation and even prioritization of engaging men in gender-based violence prevention. These 10 programs came from Africa, Asia and North and South America. On an individual

level, barriers which align with social position based on class, ethnicity, religion, etc. within their national or regional context, render men themselves more vulnerable to multiple kinds of violence or impede their access to getting involved in anti-violence efforts. Program representatives noted that issues such as poverty, migration, racism, illiteracy, and food insecurity make the issue of violence against women less visible and a potentially lower concern for many men. “On the scale of things to worry about, domestic violence doesn’t come very high on boys’... list of priorities” noted a program in South Asia (P.27). Organizations identifying this tension largely either served a marginalized group within a specific national context (such as a specific ethnic minority group), or had programs focused exclusively on gender-based violence (many programs in the sample included other and sometimes multiple social and health issues within their organizational mission).

The specific nature and impact of intersectionality-related barriers was context-specific. Many regions highlighted poverty-related barriers, such as the South American participant who noticed differential participation in his program, with the men who dropped out being “younger... they were poorer, they had less money than the men that were in the project.” (P. 21) In another vein, a staff member from a program focused on engaging a culturally-specific group of men in North America noted that societal racism undermined programmatic efforts to foster sustainability, and made more complex the nature of support and engagement needed by individual male participants. These same experiences may leave men feeling limited in their access to power and security, an experience at odds with many violence prevention strategies that ask men to critically evaluate their power and privilege. Further, for some men marginalized by racism and/or poverty, traditional avenues for performing and embodying hegemonic masculinity may be complicated or foreclosed. Some program informants suggested that this

may increase risk of adhering to traditional gender roles, which allow men to align with at least one source of widely accepted “masculine” norms.

“...and this is an issue that I think goes beyond... the issue of gender-based violence, is the high degree of number of individuals who have left schools early, left secondary school early for a number of different factors, to generate income for their homes.... and so there are a lot of young men here who are now unemployed. And so that is definitely challenging some of the dimensions of how do they define themselves in terms of masculinity.” (P26 – Central America)

On a macro level, program informants delineated a tension around highlighting and prioritizing the issue of gender-based violence when violence more generally is structurally embedded in communities and society. Further, these forms of violence, which across contexts might include poverty, genocide, racism, civil war or multi-state war, can serve to marginalize men who likely have important contributions to make to gender-based violence prevention efforts. A multi-country coalition noted the challenge of trying to support local communities in doing gender equity work while acknowledging the larger context of violence that simultaneously undermines a focus on violence against women and makes smaller-scale prevention efforts feel inadequate or off-target:

“...what is difficult for the field and for us is grappling with the intersectionality of violence... where we have all of these modifiers of identity. Identities constructed by ethnicity, class, race, and all this, and for people to understand violence as cross-cutting or intersecting those domains, and therefore, response changing is a big challenge because there’s so much that’s just targeted, short term – these short-term interventions that are like, ‘ok, we’re going to work with just youth inside this classroom. We’re going to tell them how to be better men and we’re going to practice how to be better men and we’re going to sing and dance and all this’ and then, you walk outside the classroom and exactly the opposite messages are being reinforced through many ways. You know, like men understanding their own violence and experiences of violence like, just to say, in a place like [specific country] where violence is a tool to keep power hierarchies in place.” (P106)

Among the many important tensions embedded in this participant’s comments, two bear re-highlighting. First, the backdrop of the multiple ways in which men, themselves, experience

violent marginalization (often in state-sanctioned ways), calls into question the legitimacy of prioritizing and focusing on men's violence against women. Here, "short-term," gender-focused prevention activities at the individual level can seem misplaced or inadequate in the face of broad-based political violence and/or violence experienced on the bases of other markers of identity. Second, this organizational representative notes that violence modeled, sanctioned or even promoted on a broad scale can directly undermine and counteract efforts to support men in critically evaluating their own misuse of power. At the same time, it should be noted that a small number of programs identified intersectionality and men's experiences with marginalization as a point of opportunity and connection. Helping men apply their personal experiences of exclusion and powerlessness to analyzing gender-based power and violence was a strategy reported by programs such as the following organization in Africa:

"...if we're really talking about equality between women and men, gender, all these issues, like if we actually can deconstruct and figure out this issue of power and how people understand that in a personal way, in their own life, that means something to them as a person, then I think that we have so much more potential for actually making change on violence against women, on family planning, on HIV/AIDS, on a whole range of things" (P47)

Another program in Africa described working towards suffusing gender equity and gender-based violence prevention goals into larger peace-building and human rights efforts. Still, the question of how to appropriately calibrate a focus on gender-based violence prevention in the context of the multiple challenges in men's lives was identified as a live tension for many programs, as well as a barrier to program sustainability – another strong theme elaborated below.

### **Sustainability**

Twenty one of the program informants (72%) identified program sustainability as a continual tension. These organizations came from every region represented in the study. On an individual and organizational level, participants primarily operationalized sustainability as

keeping men actively engaged in the vision, direction and activities of the program in an on-going way. Competing demands on individual men's time, difficulty nourishing momentum, a lack of tangible action, and skill deficits related to community organizing and facilitating were all cited as barriers to maintaining a vibrant, consistent and active program once the initial recruitment of male participants was accomplished. An organizational representative from North America summed up these challenges:

“...people do not know how to organize and they don't know how to have a meeting and they don't know how to keep men in meetings, So that's another thing, if you're going to have men that are going to keep coming on this issue, you have to be either moving towards the action, and/or, generally, you have to be talking with them and sharing information about male socialization, manhood, power and violence. They'll keep coming back if you talk about that... and/or you gotta be moving towards some kind of action so they feel like it's worth their time.” (P96)

In some contexts, organizational representatives also noted that because men's engagement programming is relatively new and still developing, the pool of qualified and ideologically compatible workers is limited. A program representative in South Asia noted:

“Suffice it to say, you can't hire these people off the block. So for us, the most important thing is that the people we hire are actually sincere about the type of work we're doing. It's more important to be sincere about, you know, gender equality and domestic violence than it is about being a professional trainer or professional mentor. And so, my point is that we've only got one mentor at the moment, and the people that we would want to hire are few and far between.” (P27)

At a broader level, program representatives' discussion of sustainability largely focused on funding. Across all regions of the world, the primary organizational-level challenge to sustainability was a lack of funding and difficulty securing on-going resources to continue to build on organizational accomplishments. For some programs, this was related to time constraints, the small size of the program, and the considerable effort needed to pursue stable funding sources. A handful of program representatives pinpointed the difficulty created by bureaucratic funding cycles for programs with on-going support needs as a major hurdle in

securing stability. Others noted additional funding challenges including the recession, and mismatches between the preventative focus of their organization with national or local funding priorities: “The main challenge is how to get funding for such programs, because lots of funding [is] going on developing economic projects like [unemployment]. Social programs get less funding than others.” (P34, South Asia)

### **Legitimacy**

Intricately connected to the notion of sustainability was the struggle to realize “legitimacy,” a theme articulated by participants from every region except South America. Nine program representatives (31%) spoke about striving to establish relevance and validity, both within their specific community contexts and with organizational peers and funders. For many organizations this tension emerged from a perceived lack of tested models for effectively engaging men in violence prevention, coupled with a simultaneous cultural narrowness of models that are available. For example, a program in South Asia noted:

“...it’s quite funny. So, all the manuals that we’ve come across talk about quite academic subjects of masculinity and discrimination and...you know violence and sort of human rights, and these sorts of things. So we’ve found as soon as you start talking about human rights and discrimination, violence and stuff like that to the boys we work with, you know, you lose fifty percent of them straight away.” (P27)

‘Legitimacy’ tensions were inherently contextual. The small number of available models or curricula creates a tension between developing or tailoring existing programs to be culturally and contextually appropriate while still meeting ‘dominant’ notions of and funders’ ideas about effectiveness and a rigorous evidence base. Organizations in multiple regions reported a disconnect between being ‘legitimate’ in the context of the community they serve, and achieving the kind of legitimacy that attracts external support and funding. A representative from a North American program serving a particular, historically marginalized ethnic identity group said:

“We don’t necessarily get invited or included because we often question the process that goes on and how this has looked and still men’s work is looked at in a very Western European manner of looking at this, and so that’s the framework and people look it that way and people who have the funding usually did take that [approach]. When we come in and question, sometimes, it doesn’t meet with great acceptance.” (P. 76)

Other program staff noted that the time and resources needed to conduct evaluations of their programs and outcomes created a barrier to rigorously evaluating their work and “proving” success. The difficulty and expense of evaluating prevention and men’s engagement emerged as a strong driver of concerns about both achieving legitimacy and fostering sustainability. Some program informants noted that evaluation is a unique skill set, and a difficult, expensive undertaking for already under-resourced organizations. Other representatives felt at a loss as to how to evaluate the nuanced and long-term kinds of individual and social change they were hoping to foster with their work, and lamented the mismatch between the timeline of social change and funders’ timelines:

“[An agency] will come in and say, ‘OK, we’ve got three years and so much money. We need these outputs, we need these deliverables in three years. If you want to do it, we’ll work with you.’ But it’s very top down and rigid. That’s simplifying things a lot but it tends to be that many service providing agencies are sort of tightening their belt and being driven by different impact and results evaluations where they have to show people are being motivated by these measurements that are... you know, within three years, that I think in prevention, it just doesn’t fit. You know, you’re not going to change much in three years in terms of behaviors and attitudes.” (P. 106, Asia)

On the other hand, one South American program noted that a recent influx of funding for domestic violence services had sparked a troubling proliferation of fragmented programs whose “legitimacy” could not be evaluated: “...these groups are sort of popping up everywhere and no one actually knows what’s going on. Who’s doing those groups, what types of information do those people have, where did they get the information to actually do that?” (P21). Providing an apt summary of tensions related to establishing benchmarks for legitimacy, a North American

program informant noted, “So that’s the challenge, that we have to create these models so that people can begin adapting them and shifting them and changing them so we can get into some kind of, you know, some promising practices.” (P96). In the shorter term, at least, negotiating legitimacy may therefore require programs to strike a balance between honoring the unique components relevant to localized communities with adopting evaluated models of prevention that appeal to funders and that can be brought to scale across communities.

### **A Big Tent**

Finally, seven representatives (24%) from all regions except Asia and Australia discussed the dilemma inherent in reaching out to more men and more diverse circles of men while trying to maintain a specific ideological purity (generally pro-feminist) of anti-gender-based violence work. This tension interacts with the aforementioned challenge of sustainability; as programs look to increase their membership, impact and stability, they pull in a greater diversity of men and community partners. On a micro level, this means that individual men come in the doors of these organizations with a variety of ideas and worldviews related to gender, with unexamined sexist beliefs, and potentially with histories of their own use of violence. In striving to be inclusive, organizations may risk having their organizational focus on gender equity diluted or even co-opted. Some programs, such as this coalition in North America, intentionally worked towards building a “big tent,” and in so doing, had to manage diverse agendas:

“I mean, it’s really created some painful experiences within the organization because what we wanted to do was have this really big tent. Not naively, but hopefully so, so that any man could be involved with us and do this work with us and sit on our board of directors and all that kind of stuff. And, of course, what that has resulted in is we’ve had attempts by the father’s rights groups to take over the board, we’ve had campaigns on the phone from across [the country] about the work we do. We’ve had attempts to change what we call ourselves, that is pro-feminist... we’ve kind of stuck with it and have not done what other groups have done, which has been to become more restrictive about who can be involved. But it’s been painful.” (P25)

Other program informants reported choosing the opposite path, and restricting partnerships to organizations who were willing to commit to an ideological alignment across multiple issues. In a macro example of navigating this tension, a coalition in South America noted:

“We could be talking to maybe a broader audience right now if we could have gotten the support of a number of other institutions. But for example, one of the difficulties to getting other institutions involved is that for it to join, you have to be aligned with all the work that [our organization] does... you can't just choose, OK, I want to work with the [pledge program], because everyone wants to work with the [pledge program]... Specifically, when people have to also support the issue of abortion, of legalized abortion and that's something that's on the [organization] agenda, so we won't take them. And so it's a choice, we've been small ever since we started.” (P21)

In their comments, program representatives described negotiating the trade-off between organizational sustainability and the movement's momentum by casting a wide net on the one hand, and sustaining a clear, usually pro-feminist ideological stance on the other.

### **Discussion**

The challenges described by the participants in this study surfaced the complexity inherent in the work of engaging men and boys in gender-based violence prevention in a global context. Many of the tensions articulated here affirm those identified in previous literature, particularly related to reaching out to and engaging individual men. For example, organizational representatives across all regional contexts reported that their programs' gendered analysis of violence against women necessitates inviting men to take a close look at constructions of gender and particularly masculinity, which can simultaneously be a source of discomfort and disengagement for men and boys. This echoes a considerable body of conceptual and empirical work on engaging men (e.g. Berkowitz, 2004; Crooks et al., 2007), and is the motivation for many of the creative, positive outreach strategies developed both by programs in this study and by other well-established organizations dedicated to positively partnering with men in their

community (see for example, Carlson et al., in press; WHO, 2007). Respondents in this study also indicated struggling with sustaining both the involvement of individual men and the momentum of their programming, challenges noted in extant research (e.g. Funk, 2008).

Additionally, programs highlighted ways that tensions manifest across ecological levels of analysis, and across geographic regions. For example, organizational representatives highlighted the role of intersectionality in engaging men, and the ways that gender-based violence interlocks with community or state-sanctioned forms of violence, as well as the class, race, and orientation-based marginalization experienced by many potential male allies. Programs described balancing the degree to which singling out gender-based violence may place it in competition with these larger issues, render it less relevant, or result in obscuring or de-prioritizing other ways that men are marginalized. Participants also reported dilemmas such as trying to balance achieving 'legitimacy' in the eyes of both their local communities and the funders that could provide sustainability, as well as balancing inclusiveness (having a 'big tent') with preventing the erosion of a pro-feminist analysis of violence against women.

Some limitations circumscribe the study's findings and implications. A main limitation was sample selection, which was impacted both by interviewee self-selection and by including only participants who had responded to our earlier online study. Further, some English proficiency was a pre-requisite for participation. Thus, perspectives of programs without internet access or English-speaking staff are not represented in this study; both factors reduce the comprehensiveness and global scope of our findings. Phone and Skype interviews reduced the extent to which non-verbal communication could provide deeper nuance to data collection and interpretation. Finally, some regions of the world were less well-represented among participating organizations, particularly Europe, Northern and Eastern Asia, and Central and South America.

### **Negotiating tensions: Implications for future practice and research**

A central finding here is the simultaneous similarity across regions around the kinds of tensions men's organizing efforts are experiencing, alongside the role of context in shaping the location-specific manifestations of these tensions. On the one hand, the relative uniformity with which organizations identified challenges related to navigating gender, legitimacy and sustainability suggest there is much to be gained from cross-program and cross-region exchange about strategies for tackling these tensions, and for solidarity around the difficulty of doing so. For example, some programs reported experiences of having their members' masculinity publicly called into question, the impact of which may be mitigated by cross-program and international communication and support among men. Similarly, threats or challenges to an organization's perceived legitimacy in a specific governmental or funding context may be answered by evidence of the prevalence and level of acceptance of similar programs in other communities or countries. Indeed the nascent existence of men's anti-violence engagement programs in every region of the world is a testament to the growing legitimacy and evidence base for this element of violence prevention. As a whole, the shared nature of many of the challenges surfaced here suggest that strategy sharing and testing across regions is a fruitful practice deserving of continued and enhanced support, and that leadership resources in this regard exist across all regions of the world.

On the other hand, many of the tensions surfaced here play out in very contextually-specific ways for each program. Context in this study can be described as the socially constructed local cultures which are situated in the economic, historical and political environment of a community or region. It likely goes without saying that as strategies are shared cross-regionally, careful assessment of fit to local context and culture is critical. This also

suggests that enhanced resources are needed for more localized evaluation of men's engagement efforts, to allow programs to simultaneously tailor their ally-building activities, generate evidence of the importance and impact of their work and contribute to the cross-regional knowledge base that could enhance legitimacy, effectiveness and sustainability of men's engagement programs more broadly.

Another important finding here is that the complexities described by program informants move beyond the difficulties of engaging individual men and exist at larger community levels. Much of the strategizing in this field related to how to appeal to and partner with men has centered on how to convince individual men to initiate participation (e.g. Casey, 2010). However, a lack of concomitant social change strategies within the institutional, peer and community networks in which men spend most of their time may undermine or directly threaten men's efforts to address gender-based violence and create equity. Indeed, programs in this study identified entrenched male privilege in community structures, and a lack of "legitimate" community recognition or allocation of resources as barriers to convincing more men to participate and to achieving sustainability. Addressing this may mean more concretely conceptualizing what "engagement" at a macro levels means, and inextricably coupling this with the recruitment of individual men. This might suggest supporting men engaged in gender-based violence prevention efforts to do policy analysis and advocacy, to conduct evaluations of culturally-tailored prevention models in service of achieving "legitimacy," to reach out with strategic, positive and partnering messages to local sites of power and authority, and to increase the degree to which they build cross-organization coalitions that could impact funding, policy and the gendered distribution of power within community structures. Additionally, future research and theoretical work is needed to more fully understand and operationalize how the

concept of “engagement” can be institutionalized not only in the work of recruiting individual men, but in “engaging” and impacting the social structures in which they operate. This, again, is a project to which cross-program and cross-national fertilization may be critical. And, while it was not directly stated by the organizational representatives we spoke with, continued robust documentation, evaluation and sharing of global efforts to engage men could lend legitimacy to (as well as provide support for) programs that can more readily identify themselves as part of a global movement rather than isolated local initiatives.

In addition to cutting across ecological levels of analysis, these tensions intersect with one another. Although program representatives tended to describe the challenges they face as a “list” of difficulties, we can speculate about the ways in which these challenges complicate and reinforce one another. For example, how programs decide to delicately navigate the timing and degree to which issues of masculinity and male privilege are explicitly confronted in the process of engaging men generate implications related to other challenges. Addressing this may mean working with a smaller group of men who are willing or ready to engage in those conversations, or expanding participation at the expense of deeply tackling core issues of male privilege, at least initially. Each of these paths has (perhaps contradictory) implications for the perceived legitimacy of men’s engagement efforts with various constituencies which could include the local community, local women’s or feminist anti-violence organizations, and potential funders. Perceived legitimacy, in turn, may circumscribe or support sustainability through factors such as the number or commitment level of men who engage in the work in an on-going way, the ease of reaching out to new partners, the availability of funding, and support or active resistance from the local community or context. Developing strategies to navigate these tensions therefore

requires both an ecological analysis and a mindfulness of the ways in which “solutions” for one challenge hold implications for the ways in which other challenges manifest.

Finally, the ways that intersecting social identities and experiences of violence both impede and can be leveraged in the successful engagement of men is an area critically in need of additional research. Coupled with the lack of men’s engagement models in general, and culturally tailored models in particular, the intersecting sources of identity and marginalization of men is under-addressed within this work. Some gender-equity programs around the world address this, in part, by avoiding the silos of tackling single issues (such as solely IPV), and conceptualizing their work as addressing a range of related outcomes (sexual health, human rights, family economic security, etc.; WHO, 2007). Incorporating an intersectional analysis into anti-violence work may therefore be done through collaboratively addressing shared structural contributors to / risk factors for a range of health and equity issues that ultimately impact both men and women. Similarly, the operationalization of desired outcomes from men’s engagement efforts could reflect a broader range of interrelated health, safety and human rights indicators as well as reductions in violence-supportive attitudes and behaviors. This, along with addressing the aforementioned complexities of creating locally tailored, multi-level models for positively involving men in violence prevention, requires much more global research and conversation about the shared strategies that will engage whole communities in ending violence.

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**Table 1. Participating organization characteristics**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>N (%) of sample</b>
<b>Region</b>	
Africa	7 (24%)
Australia	5 (17%)
Central / South America	3 (10%)
Europe	3 (10%)
North America	7 (24%)
South Asia / Southeast Asia / Middle East	4 (14%)
<b>Type of organization</b>	
Stand-alone agency (mostly non-profits)	16 (55%)
Unit or program within a larger, multi-service agency	5 (17%)
Regional or multi-national coalition	5 (17%)
Program in a university setting	2 (7%)
Governmental organization	1 (4%)
<b>Length of program history</b>	
Less than 2 years	2 (7%)
2-5 years	12 (41%)
6-8 years	4 (14%)
8+ years	11 (38%)