

## Literature review about strategies, good practice and study results of Ally groups working to tackle violence against women and girls

### 1. Introduction and Overview of the topic

A 15-year-old girl named Mala Yousafzai became an international symbol of the fight for girls' education after she was shot in October 2012 by the Taliban for opposing their restrictions on female education in her home country of Pakistan. In 2009, Malala had begun writing a blog under a pseudonym about the increasing military activity in her hometown and about fears that her school would be attacked (United Nations 2017).

In September 2022 the 22-year-old Mahsa Amini died in police custody following her arrest for allegedly failing to comply with Iran's strict rules on women's dress, by wearing what authorities said was "an improper hijab" (United Nations 2022b).

These examples received worldwide attention but are only two of many where women and girls experienced violence: one in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence (UN Women). The United Nations (UN) defines Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) as:

*"...any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Violence against women and girls encompasses, but is not limited to, physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family or within the general community, and perpetrated or condoned by the State."* (UN Women).

In 2018 the World Health Organisation (WHO) analysed data from 2000-2018 across 161 countries and areas, on behalf of the UN Interagency Working Group on Violence Against Women. The study showed that worldwide, nearly 1 in 3, or 30%, of women have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner sexual violence or both. Most of this violence is intimate partner violence. Almost one third (27%) of women aged 15-49 years worldwide reported that they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner (World Health Organization 2021).

These numbers highlight VAWG as one of the worst forms of discrimination but also one of the most widespread and pervasive human rights violations in the world (United Nations 2022a) - and the perpetrators are mostly men (World Health Organization 2021).

In response feminist and women's movements have built up over the years, so that the issue receives more attention, stimulating international and national public debates (Lori et al., 2015). It's said that a large-scale reduction in VAWG can be achieved through intensive feminist activism among other things. There is also evidence that strong and autonomous feminist movements are the most critical factor in ending VAWG (UN Women 2022). In most cases men are the perpetrators, and according to Flood (2005), reducing and preventing VAWG requires the participation of men who can model non-violent behaviour, and hold their male peers accountable for sexist or abusive conduct VAWG happens because of social constructions of masculinity and men's structural dominance across the different

levels of society (Flood, 2011). Men even have an ethical responsibility to stand up for this issue (Pease 2002).

Allyship is one way to engage men to help end VAWG. There are various definitions of 'ally' and 'allyship' in the literature. For this review, Nicole Asong Nfonoyim-Hara's (Director of the Diversity Programmes at Mayo Clinic) definition is applied: *"when a person of privilege works in solidarity and partnership with a marginalized group of people to help take down the systems that challenge that group's basic rights, equal access, and ability to thrive in our society."* (Dickenson 2021)

## **2. Purpose and Focus of the Literature review**

VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) needs to be tackled, including with strategies which engage men in this process. There is research about the impact of men's involvement in anti-violence programmes, but little is known about the effect of strategies which encourage men's initial participation (Casey 2010, p.268).

This review is intended to be shared with partner organisations of GREC and community groups to explore how we could develop an ally group in Aberdeen and/or Grampian. The focus of this **short version** of the Literature review is to summarise and compare the main findings of four different studies observing men's involvement in anti-VAWG work and their role as an ally. Specifically, gathering good practice strategies and approaches which support men's engagement in this work and what helps them to maintain their participation. These studies were chosen because they provide a wide range of ally groups worldwide (including USA, Sweden, Italy, Spain, India) and different research methods (surveys, interviews, focus discussion groups). The main findings of the studies were structured by the following questions:

1. How to get men involved in anti-VAWG work in the first place?
2. How to keep men involved and motivated in anti-VAWG work?
3. What are the barriers for men to get involved in anti-VAWG work?
4. What are the risks of men being involved in anti-VAWG work?

Open questions, weaknesses and gaps will be highlighted after that.

## **3. Introduction to the four studies**

**Study 1: Strategies for Engaging Men as Anti-Violence Allies: Implications for Ally Movements – Erin A Casey**

27 men who recently got involved in an organisation or event which aims to end sexual or domestic violence were interviewed regarding their perceptions of effective approaches to reaching and engaging other men in anti-violence work (Casey 2010, p. 270).

**Study 2: Men's Activism to end violence against women-voices from Spain, Sweden and the UK - Nicole Westmarland, Anna-Lena Almquist, Linn Egeberg Holmgren, Sandy Ruxton, Stephen Burrell and Custodio Delgado Valbuena**

The purpose of this study was to get an understanding of the factors that enable men to actively take a stance against men's violence against women. A survey as well as in-depth interviews with men from Spain, Sweden, and the UK, who are involved in this work, were conducted. The focus was on men's

own personal backgrounds and motivations as well as asking them to act as ‘experts’ in understanding which factors (personal, socio-cultural, political and/or economic) might encourage and support more men to become active (Westmarland et al. 2021, p. 1).

**Study 3: Strategies to Engage Men and Boys in Violence Prevention: A Global Organizational Perspective** – Juliana Carlson, Erin Casey, Jeffrey L. Edleson, Richard M. Tolman, Tova B. Neugut, Ericka Kimball, p. 1406 – 1425 in “Violence Against Women”, Volume 21, Issue 11, 2015

This study presents descriptive findings from in-depth interviews with 29 representatives of organisations in Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania, and North and South America that engage men and boys in preventing gender-based violence. The focus of the study is key strategies used by the organisations for men’s initial engagement, their principles to deepen men and boys’ engagement in anti-VAWG work and lastly the respondents’ caution about the risks of separating men’s violence prevention work from women’s (Carlson et al. 2015).

**Study 4: “We Learn How to Become Good Men”: Working with Male Allies to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls in Urban Informal Settlements in Mumbai, India** – Proshant Chakraborty, David Osrin, Nayreen Daruwalla, in Men and Masculinities, Volume 23, Issue 3-4, 2020, p. 749-771

This study focuses on men’s participation in a violence prevention programme in Dharavi (Mumbai) in India. Specifically, the focus was on how the programme has an influence on the young men’s transformations in their conceptions of masculinity and their personal and communitarian relationships. Certain limits to men’s engagement in VAWG work, that reproduce gender inequality or fail to critique men’s privileges, were also explored. The programme was designed and implemented by an NGO called the Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action (SNEHA), that works with both women’s and men’s groups to tackle gender-based violence (Chakraborty et al. 2018).

#### **4. Main findings of the 4 studies**

##### *4.1 Which are the most common and most effective strategies/approaches to engage men into anti-VAWG work and to become an ally?*

- ◆ How to get men involved in anti-VAWG work in the first place?

**Using personal or social networks:** Those involved in ally groups use their existing personal networks (Study 4) such as friends, families or their professional networks to recruit more men, as the movement is then seen as more relevant and credible (Study 1). Men also get engaged with tackling VAWG-work in particular through ‘strong’ women (teacher, friends within political movements, intimate partners) in their life (Study 2). Study 3 uses the social network strategy in one of their principles for engaging men for the first time using “Intentional invitations” (through formal invitations or social networks).

**Choose conversation starters:** tailored and personalised conversations with easy topics help to engage with men initially (Study 1), as well as topics which are likely to resonate with and that men can relate to, like fatherhood (Study 3). There is also the idea of talking about broader topics first, like

sexuality, masculinity, and health, before engaging men in VAWG-discussions (Study 4). A ‘soft peddle’ approach by avoiding heavy and judgemental topics like male violence or human rights is also a supportive strategy (Study 3). Non-personalised strategies are seen as less successful by Study 1. However, Study 3 uses films to engage men, which don’t seem to be obviously personalised.

**Identify and choose physical locations:** find the right place to engage with men in the first place, for instance meet them where they usually are and where they don’t need to make a huge effort, e.g., within a workplace or at schools (Study 3). Educational institutions like schools are named as relevant places providing anti-violence education targeting boys and girls. Higher education institutions like universities are particularly seen as places which offer opportunities and space to talk about gender inequalities, feminism, and issues of men’s VAWG. Trainings could be implemented for staff at the workplace (Study2).

**Target those involved in other social movements:** Study 2 describes that if men are already engaged in other issue-based groups, they also tend to be more attracted to anti-VAWG events.

- ◆ How to keep men involved and motivated in anti-VAWG work?

**Using role models and or other men as supporters:** ‘average’ and ‘normal’ men, who are already involved in anti-VAWG work can be used as role models (for example by sharing sexist mistakes, vulnerability etc.) to connect with those more recently involved (Study 1). Ambassadors (e.g., peer educators, community representatives) can also work as role models. ‘The White Ribbon’ uses ambassadors to engage men in violence prevention (Study 3). Men can be kept motivated and engaged when they feel the support of other men they can talk to (e.g., ‘male - only supper clubs’ in Spain and Sweden, where they have dinner together and talk about topics such as feelings, sexual harassment and violence) (Study 2) and have the feeling of being part of a supportive community (Study 1).

**Becoming active and having the opportunity to participate:** men need to become active in the process and need the opportunity to participate meaningfully in anti- VAWG work, e.g. through organising events or festivals (Study 4), being part of demonstrations and marches (Study 2), so they feel that they can be “part of the solution” (Study 1, 2).

**Non-judgemental approaches:** an approach which is hopeful about men (Study 3) and which avoids blaming and judging men (Study 2) is seen as most effective. A negative approach makes men feel ashamed, even if they are not perpetrators themselves (Study 1).

**‘Beyond workshops’:** reaching out to extend social networks and collaboration with e.g., local theatres were mentioned by Study 3 as a path towards a sustainable change.

**Create change locally:** men taking part in local marches and demonstrations (Study 2), tailored strategies and goals for one specific community (Study 3), and creating change by implementing prevention training for men specifically to make them aware of the work women do in their community (Study 4) are approaches which advocate for local community work in the context of tackling VAWG.

- ◆ What are barriers for men to get involved in anti-VAWG work?

**Fear of rejection:** there is a risk for men who take part in more publicised initiatives to receive ‘hate-mail’. There is also a possibility for men getting rejected from friends and family members (Study 2).

**Ambivalence:** men can feel ‘unmanly’ when they start getting engaged in anti-VAWG work (Study 2) in terms of having a fear of being hypocrites (Study 1).

**Women's organisations don't want to work with men:** there is a slight risk, that some women's organisations avoid collaborative work with Men's Ally Groups (Study 2).

**Men's privilege:** men might not see tackling VAWG as a relevant issue, because of their privileged position in society (Study 1).

- ◆ What are risks of men being involved in anti - VAWG work?

**Men getting involved in anti - VAWG work without reflection:** there is a problem of men getting engaged without reflecting on issues of patriarchy and masculinity (Study 2), as well as when they see VAWG as an individual problem, rather than a structural issue by e.g., making a differentiation between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ men (Study 4).

**Abusive behaviour inherent in male allies groups:** male allies can still make use of gender unequal and misogynistic idioms and language (Study 4) or even abuse women (Study 2).

**Men's voices and efforts receiving greater attention and being seen as more valued than women's':** men from Study 2 began to realize their privileged situation regarding the possible risk of taking away a platform from women related to VAWG.

#### *4.2 Other key findings*

**Using masculinity:** using masculinity to engage men in becoming an ally for anti-VAWG work is seen as a promising but also a controversial strategy (Study 1). The benefit is that men like challenges and like being needed to make a change. On the other side there is the potential risk of reinforcing or reproducing male privilege, which is why male allies need to reflect on the underlying system of inequity that supports violence against women.

**Find locations where there are a large number of men:** Sports clubs as well as religious institutions were mentioned as places to engage with men to recruit them to stand up against VAWG and to become allies (Study 2).

**Personal frustration as a barrier to speak out against VAWG:** Male allies from India involved in the violence prevention programme talked about their personal struggles and frustrations which makes it harder for them to focus on women's needs. To reach these men and to overcome these barriers men's lived realities and material conditions must be put more in focus, rather than just a focus on changing the men's attitudes and behaviours.

#### 4.3 Open questions, weaknesses & gaps

A significant limitation of all four studies is the lack of diversity among the participants involved in the different research processes. Most of the recruited men graduated in higher education and were already involved, at least in some part, in anti-VAWG work, voluntarily or work related. This leaves the question open, how to engage other men who are not already aware or familiar with the topic of VAWG. Only one of the studies (Study 3) engaged women's perspectives, which might be reasonable because of the topic about men's involvement. However, in the process of creating male ally groups women should be involved and seen as collaborating partners, which is directly outlined by study 1,2 and 3. Women should not carry the burden of doing this work all by themselves. There also needs to be further study asking women about what men should discuss in their groups, and how men and women can collaborate better to challenge VAWG. Most of the respondents of the studies are originally from the country where the study took place and predominantly 'white'. Only one identified himself as Latino (Study 1) and some Swedish respondents identified themselves as having multiple ethnic identities or heritages (Study 2). When developing ally identities, different countries and areas need to make use of different strategies. The motto: 'Meet men where there are' which was mentioned in Study 1 can work as a good slogan here; physically, mentally, socially, and financially.

#### 5. Conclusion:

This **short version** of the Literature review provides an overview of existing experiences, good practice strategies, and study results in how to engage men into anti-VAWG work and to become an ally. Comparing the main findings of the four international studies with each other, two significant points emerged.

Education was mentioned by half of the studies as a relevant opportunity to prevent VAWG in an early stage. The studies argued that educational institutions like schools and universities provide opportunity and space. Regarding to schools there is that additional argument-, children and young people spend a great amount of the day there (often even after school), and there is time to educate them in gender equality. School is also a social system where adolescents develop their identities, which often links strongly with the conflicts they are having either with themselves or classmates. Talking about, for instance masculinity, social expectations around beauty standards, or gender roles, can help support their identity process.

Second, that involving women's voices and organisations seems to be a very effective support for male ally groups working towards ending VAWG. In the first place this can tackle some of the identified possible risks of men being involved in anti-VAWG work (e.g., men taking the women's platform or opportunity). Especially in Study 2, men were embracing and talking about the significant impact, specific women had in their life and how they influenced their motivation to become active. There were men in every study who were open to engage with women's organisations and speakers, as well as seeing it as urgently relevant. Involving women in the process of tackling the issue is also important as they have a very different perspective on this topic, that they know the threat of being a victim of violence (sexual, physical, verbal, etc.) or have already experienced some sort of violence against them. Consequently, this makes women experts in this field. On the other side, the men's perspective is also an important one. By sharing their fears and concerns regarding their involvement in anti-VAWG work, women get a better understanding about their feelings. More knowledge is also available if

more people are involved in a process. With both perspectives (men/boys and women/girls) male allies group have the chance of being very effective and innovative.

To sum up, this review gives a global overview of different engagement strategies and approaches, and it's helpful to know what is already out there. The gathered strategies can be used as guidelines and inspirations to create a specific tailored concept for a local community, such as Aberdeen.

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