



## Working with Men to Prevent Violence Against Women: An Overview (Part One)

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There is a growing awareness that men, in partnership with women, can play a significant role in ending violence against women. This has led to an increase in programs and activities that focus on men's roles in violence prevention. Men should take responsibility for preventing violence against women because of the untold harm it causes to women in men's lives and the ways in which it directly hurts men. Violence against women hurts men when it results in women being afraid of or suspicious of men due to fear of potential victimization and when it perpetuates negative stereotypes of men based on the actions of a few. The behaviors and attitudes that cause violence against women may also be a cause of men being violent towards other men. These same behaviors and attitudes may also keep men from having close and meaningful relationships with each other. Finally, while only a minority of men are violent, all men can have an influence on the culture and environment that allows other men to be perpetrators. For example, men can refuse to be bystanders to other men's violent behavior.

For all of these reasons men have a stake in ending violence against women. To do this, men must accept and examine their own potential for violence and take a stand against the violence of other men. In recent years, a number of authors have argued persuasively that men need to take responsibility for preventing men's violence against women, both in the United States (Berkowitz, 2002a; Funk, 1993; Katz, 1995; Kilmartin, 2001; Kivel, 1992), and internationally (Brienes, Connell, & Eide, 2000; Flood, 2001, 2003; INSTRAW, 2002; Kaufman, 2001).

This paper provides a brief overview of what is known about effective strategies for involving men in violence prevention efforts from the perspective of men who are recipients of anti-violence programs as well as from the men who provide them. It defines the term "prevention" for men's violence against women, reviews best practices for involving men and for tailoring programs (for men in general and for particular groups of men) and, in Part Two, offers examples of prevention program formats and pedagogy. These examples are provided to illustrate best practices rather than to describe specific programs, as this review is not intended to be exhaustive or comprehensive of all violence prevention efforts involving men. Finally, in order to be useful to practitioners and educators the paper provides references to websites containing information about men's anti-violence organizations and programs. While the conclusions and trends noted here are applicable to the prevention of all forms of men's violence against women, the preponderance of literature cited is from the rape prevention field where there has been more research conducted on this subject.

### Defining Men's Roles in Prevention

Men can prevent violence against women by not personally engaging in violence, by intervening against the violence of other men, and by addressing the root causes of violence. This broad definition provides roles for all men in preventing violence against women. Men's involvement can take the form of primary or universal prevention (directed at all men, including those who do not appear to be at

risk of committing violence and those who may be at risk for continuing a pattern of violence), through secondary or selective prevention (directed at men who are at-risk for committing violence), and/or through more intensive tertiary or indicated prevention (with men who have already been violent).

For violence prevention these distinctions may be somewhat artificial because it can be argued that all men are at risk for perpetration by virtue of their socialization as men (Hong, 2000; Kaufman, 1985), because men can commit violence without defining it as such, and because men who have been violent can successfully participate in programs to prevent other men's violence. "Prevention" is defined here as any program or activity that reduces or prevents future violence against women by men. Programs for men who already have a documented history of violence against women, such as batterer's or perpetrator treatment programs, will not be discussed here.

Prevention programs can take the form of one session, a series of sessions or ongoing interactive educational workshops, leadership training, social marketing and social norms media campaigns (defined in Part Two of this paper), or through participation in one-time or ongoing public events. These may focus directly on the issue of violence or on its specific forms (for example, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and/or harassment, and stalking), or indirectly through men's involvement in consciousness raising, fatherhood and/or skill-building programs that foster attitudes and behaviors that may protect against violence, or by providing healthy resocialization experiences about what it means to be a healthy, nonviolent man. In its broadest definition, violence prevention for men includes any activity that addresses the root causes of men's violence including social and structural causes as well as men's gender role socialization and men's sexism.

Among men's violence prevention programs those for school-aged boys have tended to focus on issues of sexual harassment and dating violence, those for college age men have tended to focus on sexual assault, and those for men not in college or older have tended to focus on domestic violence in

longer-term partnerships. In actuality it is important for all men to be involved in the prevention of all forms of violence against women, even when it may be developmentally or strategically appropriate to foster this involvement by focusing initially on one form of men's violence.

### **What Works in Men's Violence Prevention?**

Due to evaluation literature that is limited in scope, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of violence prevention programs for men. For example, most prevention program assessments measure changes in attitudes that are associated with a proclivity to be violent rather than actual violent behavior. Reviews of the literature suggest that sexual assault prevention programs for college men can be effective in improving attitudes that may put men at-risk for committing violence against women, although these attitudinal changes are often limited to periods of a few months (Brecklin & Forde, 2001; Breitenbecher, 2000; Lonsway, 1996; Schewe, 2002). In contrast, programs that focus only on providing information have not been found to be effective (Schewe, 2002). Among pre-college aged males, dating violence and harassment prevention programs offered to mixed gender groups in school settings can result in both attitude and behavior change for a few months or longer (Avery-Leaf & Cascardi, 2002).

Despite the limited research, there is an emerging consensus regarding what constitutes effective violence prevention for men. Violence prevention programs that have been found effective in evaluation studies tend to share one or more of the assumptions listed below. Practitioners who work with men to prevent violence have also concluded that effective violence prevention programs for men share some or all of these assumptions:

- Men must assume responsibility for preventing men's violence against women.
- Men need to be approached as partners in solving the problem rather than as perpetrators.

- Workshops and other activities are more effective when conducted by peers in small, all-male groups because of the immense influence that men have on each other and because of the safety all-male groups can provide.
- Discussions should be interactive and encourage honest sharing of feelings, ideas, and beliefs.
- Opportunities should be created to discuss and critique prevailing understandings of masculinity and men's discomfort with them, as well as men's misperceptions of other men's attitudes and behavior.
- Positive anti-violence values and healthy aspects of men's experience should be strengthened, including teaching men to intervene in other men's behavior.
- Work with men must be in collaboration with and accountable to women working as advocates, educators, and prevention specialists.

**What is the Logic of these Assumptions?** First, research and experience have shown that putting men on the defensive or using blame is not effective and can even result in negative outcomes. Thus, in Lonsway's review of the literature she stated: "although educational programs challenging rape culture *do* require confrontation of established ideologies, such interventions *do not necessitate a style of personal confrontation*" (Italics added, 1996, p. 250). Thus, men should take responsibility for acting as perpetrators and bystanders of violence and the best way to accomplish this is to encourage men to be partners in solving the problem rather than by criticizing or blaming men (Berkowitz, 2002a; Men Can Stop Rape, 2000; Schewe, 2002). Most men are not coercive or opportunistic, do not want to victimize others, and are willing to be part of the solution to ending sexual assault. (In contrast, while men who are predatory or who have a history of perpetration may benefit from exposure to some education and prevention programs, more intensive treatment is likely required for these men to change previous patterns of perpetration).

The majority of men may already hold attitudes that can be strengthened to prevent and reduce violence and encourage men to intervene with other men. For example, research has demonstrated that most men are uncomfortable with how they have been taught to be men, including how to be in relationship with women, homophobia, heterosexism, and emotional expression, and that they are uncomfortable with the sexism and inappropriate behavior of other men (Berkowitz, 2003; 2004). Because many men already feel blamed and are on the defensive about the issue of men's violence (even when this defensiveness is misplaced), effective approaches create a learning environment that can surface the positive attitudes and behaviors that allow men to be part of the solution. This can be accomplished in the context of a safe, nonjudgmental atmosphere for open discussion and dialogue in which men can discuss feelings about relationships, sexuality, aggression, etc. and share discomfort about the behavior of other men.

### **What Types of Discussions are Effective?**

Literature reviews have suggested that the quality and interactive nature of the discussion may be more important than the format in which it is presented (Breitenbecher, 2000; Lonsway, 1996), a dimension that Davis (2000) has called "program process." Because men are influenced by other men and by what men think is true about other men, this influence can be positively channeled in all-male groups. Thus, effective violence prevention for men acknowledges the important influence that male peer groups have on men's actions (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997), corrects misperceptions that men have about each other's attitudes and behavior (Berkowitz, 2002a), and channels this influence towards positive change.

The common element in successful prevention programs for men is the opportunity to participate in an experience where men are encouraged to honestly share real feelings and concerns about issues of masculinity and men's violence. The opportunity for men to hear the attitudes and views of other men is powerful, especially because it

empowers men who want to help and provides them with visible allies. This strategy encourages the majority of men to take the necessary steps to avoid perpetrating and to confront the inappropriate behavior of male peers.

**Are All Male or Mixed Gender Programs More Effective?** Research suggests that these goals can be accomplished most effectively with male facilitators in all-male groups. For example, Brecklin and Forde (2001) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of forty-three college rape prevention program evaluations and concluded that both men and women experienced more beneficial change in single-gender groups than in mixed-gender groups. This was also the conclusion reached in five other literature reviews of rape prevention programs that all recommended that rape prevention programs be conducted in separate-gender groups when possible (Breitenbecher, 2000; Gidycz, Dowall & Marioni, 2002; Lonsway, 1996; Schewe, 2002; Yeater & Donohue, 1999).

While there are advantages to programs facilitated by men, skilled female facilitators can also work very effectively with men. Women working with men need to be aware that men may view their leadership as reinforcing the assumption that violence prevention is a “women’s issue” not relevant to men and must also find ways to prevent participants from attributing honest dialogue simply to the presence of a female. It is also beneficial for men to see women and men co-facilitating in a respectful partnership. Examples of programs for men that have been developed and led by women include those by Hong (2000) and Mahlstedt (1999).

One of the main arguments for separate gender workshops is that the goals for violence prevention are different for men and women (Gidycz, Dowdall, & Marioni, 2002; Schewe, 2002). Despite this being true in some settings, it may be necessary or more appropriate to offer violence prevention in mixed groups. Trainers must still take into account the gender differences that make such separation desirable, avoid the polarization that can occur in mixed-gender groups, avoid potential victim-

blaming, not give information about victim-risk that could be useful to perpetrators, and avoid approaches that are blaming of men (Schewe, 2002). While mixed gender workshops have been evaluated as successful with boys in school settings, these programs have not been compared with similar programs offered in all-male settings (see Avery-Leaf & Cascardi, 2002 for an excellent review of this literature).

**Partnerships with Women and Accountability to Women.** Attention to men’s roles in preventing violence against women is only possible because of the decades of tireless work and sacrifice by female victim advocates, social activists, researchers, academicians, survivors, and leaders. These courageous women have successfully challenged society to take notice of this problem and to begin to fund efforts to solve it. Men’s work to end violence against women must include recognition of this leadership and must never be in competition with or at the expense of women’s efforts. Thus, prevention programs for men should be developed to exist alongside of victim advocacy, legal and policy initiatives, academic research, rape crisis and domestic violence services, and educational programs for women. Male anti-violence educators must recognize that we are accountable to the women who are the victims of the violence we hope to end, and must work to create effective collaborative partnerships and alliances that provide a role for women in men’s programs (Flood, 2003). To do this requires an understanding and exploration of men’s privilege, sexism, and other biases, and an openness to learning from women and to working with them as allies.

**Challenges to Men’s Involvement.** Finally, it is important to acknowledge that there are many challenges and barriers for men who do this work. Men who work to end violence against women are challenging the dominant culture and the understandings of masculinity that maintain it. Thus, male activists are often met with suspicion, homophobia and other questions about their “masculinity.” Men and women who feel threatened by this work often



discredit male activists efforts and persons (Flood, 2003; Stillerman, 1998). At the same time many men are grateful for the example set by male activists and for modeling a different way of being male. Men who do this work are also frequently and unfairly given more credit for their efforts than women who do similar work (Flood, 2001). Men engaged in violence prevention need to personally recognize these challenges and take responsibility to change these dynamics both personally and professionally.

### **Cultural Issues and Masculinities**

While men in North America may share some common socialization experiences and definitions of what it means to be male, there are also important differences in terms of race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, religion, and other identities that must be addressed in violence prevention efforts. In addition, there are cultural differences regarding the appropriate context for prevention including how violence should be addressed. Currently there is extensive literature documenting the need for culturally relevant and tailored programs in medical, psychological, and public health literatures, along with evidence for the ineffectiveness of approaches derived from dominant groups or paradigms. Providing culturally competent programming should not be considered optional, but is a necessity for effectiveness.

“Relevance” is a critical component of program success. It has been determined to be an important component of effective prevention programs and is discussed further in Part Two of this paper. Because men from different identities have different experiences, relevant programming must address these differences, including experiences of racism among men of color, of homophobia for gay, bisexual and/or transgender men, the effects of economic inequalities for working class and poor men, and the cultural context for violence prevention within different communities. As with every other issue, there is a danger of imposing definitions and understandings from more established violence prevention

efforts (which, like the larger culture, is predominantly white and middle class) upon other cultures and communities.

An example of the importance of culturally relevant programs comes from research on the differential impact of programs on men from different racial backgrounds. In one study, a generic race-neutral program was effective for European heritage men but not men of color, while a modified program with a co-presenter of color and relevant information (including statistics on violence in ethnic communities and dispelling of ethnically based rape myths) were effective for both groups (Heppner, Neville, Smith, Kivlighan, & Gershuny, 1999). In other research conducted on perpetrators from different ethnic backgrounds, differences were found in personality characteristics and motivations for perpetration that may have important implications for designing culturally sensitive prevention programs for men (Hall, Sue, Narang, & Lilly, 2000; Kim & Zane, 2004).

Violence prevention efforts need to acknowledge these kinds of differences and also correct stereotypes and myths about the prevalence of violence among different groups of men. Finally, men from different cultural groups have different experiences with the educational and criminal justice systems that may influence receptivity to violence prevention. Violence prevention efforts that are community based, sensitive to ethnic and class issues, and accountable to the larger community have been developed in many communities and show promise. All of the above strongly suggest the critical importance of developing programs that are either tailored to the needs of a particular group, or conducted in a way that is inclusive and welcoming of all backgrounds. A critical oversight is the lack of research examining the needs of gay, bisexual and transgendered men with respect to violence prevention programming.

### **Summary**

In recent years there has been expanded interest in developing programs and strategies that focus on

men's responsibility for ending violence against women. These programs create a safe environment for men to discuss and challenge each other with respect to information and attitudes about men's violence. The literature suggests that these programs can produce short-term change in men's attitudes that are associated with a proclivity for violence, encourage men to intervene against the behavior of other men, and in some cases reduce men's future violence. As these programs become more popular and as more men take leadership on this issue we are hopeful that the epidemic of men's violence against women will be significantly reduced and that all of our relationships will come closer to embodying ideals of respect, mutual empowerment, growth, and co-creation.

*Note:* Portions of this review were adapted from "Fostering Men's Responsibility for Preventing Sexual Assault" and "Working with Men to Prevent Sexual Assault," both written by the author in 2002.

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***In-Brief:***  
**Working with Men to Prevent Violence Against Women**

There is a growing awareness that men, in partnership with women, can play a significant role in ending violence against women. This has led to an increase in programs and activities that focus on men's roles in preventing violence against women. Men's anti-violence programs are informed by the understanding that violence against women hurts women and men and that men can have an important influence on reducing violence by changing their own attitudes and behavior and by intervening to prevent other men's violence.

This paper provides an overview of current efforts involving men in the prevention of violence against women. Part One discusses men's role in prevention, what is effective in men's prevention, and cultural issues and considerations in working with men. Part Two discusses best practices in prevention, provides an overview of different program modalities and formats, and reviews pedagogies that can be used in working with men to prevent violence against women.

Prevention programs can take the form of workshops that meet one or more times, social marketing and social norms marketing campaigns, and public events. These activities are based on the understanding that male intimate violence is gendered and they share a number of common assumptions: that men have a role in preventing violence against women, that men need to be invited to be partners in solving the problem, that small, interactive-all male groups facilitated by men are particularly effective, that positive anti-violence values and actions of men need to be strengthened, and that men must work in collaboration with women in these efforts.

The literature evaluating these programs is limited, with the majority of research conducted on sexual assault prevention programs for college students and dating violence programs for students in high schools and middle schools. The college literature suggests that for young adult men all-male programs facilitated by other men using an interactive discussion format are the most powerful form of intervention for changing men's violence-prone attitudes and possibly behaviors. Younger high-school and middle school dating violence programs offered in mixed gender contexts have been found effective in changing attitudes and behaviors, but these formats have not been compared with all-male formats to determine their relative efficacy as has been done with college men. There is also preliminary evidence supporting the efficacy of social norms media interventions to address men's violence.

It is important that men who provide these programs work to develop strong alliances and accountable relationships with women doing this work, and that they examine how male privilege and sexism may impact their leadership. It is also necessary that prevention programs be designed which are relevant to the variety of men's communities that exist based on ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and other identities. Successful prevention programs are comprehensive, relevant, intensive, incorporate positive messages, and may employ one or more of the following strategies: fostering empathy towards victims, changing individual men's attitudes and behaviors, teaching men to intervene against other men's behavior, and using social marketing strategies to foster positive norms.