



Behaviorally-Informed Strategies to Engage Men in Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls

A qualitative study and review
of behavioral science literature to
inform UN Women programming

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

REPORT

Behaviorally-Informed Strategies to Engage Men in Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls.

A qualitative study and review of behavioral science literature to inform UN Women programming

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Executive Summary

Globally, one in three women experiences physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives or both.¹ The Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) is working with UN Women to prevent and reduce Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). **This report aims to identify opportunities to apply behavioral science** –a growing body of evidence about how humans behave, as well as how context impacts our judgment and decision-making– **to engage men in LAC in VAWG prevention.**



Men are almost exclusively the perpetrators of VAWG.² **However, men can also be critical allies³ - or agents of change - in VAWG prevention.** Not perpetrating violence themselves is the first and most basic thing men can do to reduce the prevalence of VAWG.⁴ Yet, men can do more than not be part of the problem; they can be part of the solution.

This document identifies **potential target behaviors and barriers and proposes behaviorally-informed solutions to engage men** in VAWG prevention in LAC. To this end, it draws on two sources: 1) a literature review of the behavioral science and VAWG literature focused on barriers, facilitators, and successful interventions; 2) qualitative semi-structured interviews with men and experts who work with men in VAWG prevention in LAC.

It provides 22 recommendations informed by behavioral science to engage men in VAWG prevention. The recommendations are structured along four levels of the socio-ecological model⁵: individual, interpersonal, community, and societal. These are summarized, together with the barriers they aim to address, in Table 1 below.

Involving men is an increasingly common strategy within VAWG prevention initiatives in LAC. However, there is still little evidence on how to do so effectively. The recommendations in this report aim to inspire and support practitioners working with men in the region to increase the impact of their efforts. Throughout the report, there are boxes with practical recommendations for practitioners on applying each piece of evidence to their work.

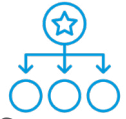
Table 1. Barriers and Recommendations along the Socio-Ecological Model

Level	Behavioral barriers	Recommendations to prompt men to take action
 <p>Individual</p>		<p>5.1.1 Associate men’s allyship to a positive self-identity 5.1.2 Capitalize on “moments of change” to engage men in VAWG prevention 5.1.3 Correct misperceptions about what others do or think about ally-like behavior 5.1.4 Encourage growth mindset and self-affirmation 5.1.5 Prompt men to identify their triggers and develop a plan to react in nonviolent ways</p>
 <p>Interpersonal</p>	<p>Socialization in a patriarchal society</p> <p>Status quo bias and loss aversion</p> <p>Fixed mindset</p> <p>Not taking responsibility for VAWG and omission bias</p> <p>Fear of backlash</p> <p>Lack of accessible information</p> <p>Perception of existing equality</p> <p>↓</p>	<p>Engaging men as bystanders</p> <p>5.2.1 Notice that VAWG is happening: Develop rules of thumb to identify VAWG 5.2.2 Notice VAWG is happening: Use hotspot mapping to identify dangerous environments and make them safer 5.2.3 Interpret the situation as something to be addressed: Prompt men to take women’s perspectives and build empathy between men and women 5.2.4 Assume a level of responsibility to intervene: Convey to bystanders that intervening is socially acceptable 5.2.5 Choose a form of assistance: Provide bystanders with clear instructions on what to do or say before, during and after perpetration</p> <p>Building equitable intimate relationships</p> <p>5.2.6 Build men’s skills to resolve conflicts nonviolently 5.2.7 Prompt men to commit to equitable relationships</p> <p>Helping men become better fathers</p> <p>5.2.8 Use planning interventions to encourage equitable division of child-rearing and domestic tasks 5.2.9 Motivate fathers to have an active role in the lives of their children by making the consequences of their actions salient and showing them their progress 5.2.10 Replace corporal punishment with non-violent discipline and provide rules of thumb to manage children’s behavior</p>



Community

- 5.3.1** Use influential messengers to connect with men and create spaces for reflection and peer learning
- 5.3.2** Engage community leaders to change social norms
- 5.3.3** Use edutainment to promote positive role models



Structural

- 5.4.1** Encourage organizations to commit to VAWG prevention
- 5.4.2** Allocate organizational resources to VAWG prevention and share power by default
- 5.4.3** Make reporting within institutions easy and safe
- 5.4.4** Build systems to mitigate the impact of decision-makers gender biases

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

1.1.1. The problem

Globally, one in three women experiences physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives, the majority at the hands of an intimate partner.⁶ The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 30% of women in the Americas have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner.⁷ These acts of violence can range from occasional experiences to long-term chronic abuse. Women also face harassment and violence in public spaces and, increasingly, online and through digital technologies.

Violence against women results in substantial direct and indirect costs, not only to survivors and their families but also to the broader society and the economy.⁸ In addition to the impact on women's health, education, and participation in public life, the economic costs include health care and legal services, lost productivity and potential salaries, and the full cost of holding perpetrators accountable.

Throughout the report, the phrase “violence against women and girls” (VAWG) refers to any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women or girls. This includes threats of such acts, coercion, and arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether in public or private life.^{9,10}

1.1.2. Why engage with men in VAWG prevention

Men are the main perpetrators of VAWG. Studies on violence perpetration show that men are responsible for the overwhelming majority of the acts of violence in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)¹¹ and the world.¹² According to a comparative study conducted in 12 countries in LAC, depending on the country, between 13.4 and 52.3 percent of women who have ever been in a relationship have suffered physical violence perpetrated by an intimate male partner.¹³

Men can be complicit in sustaining the social norms that legitimize VAWG.¹⁴ Men are half of the world's population and, in most contexts, hold the majority of

positions of power. As such, men have a crucial role in shaping, disseminating, and enforcing harmful norms around VAWG (e.g., norms condoning male authority over women and children). This is, without a doubt, the case for perpetrators. It is also true for men who do not exert violence themselves and do not actively support those norms but do nothing to challenge them.¹⁵

However, men can also be critical allies - or agents of change - in VAWG prevention. Not perpetrating violence themselves is the first and most elemental thing men can do to reduce the prevalence of VAWG.¹⁶ Yet, men can do more than not be part of the problem; they can be part of the solution. Men can **influence the behavior of others around them**, particularly other men¹⁷, whether it is through their role in families, the workplace, as bystanders, or in the multiple positions of power they hold in society.¹⁸ Men can also actively work to replace existing social norms with new ones.¹⁹ Finally, engaging men can **lessen the burden on women** to prevent VAWG.²⁰

This report focuses on **men as agents of change, or allies, in VAWG prevention.** Allies are defined as “members of dominant social groups (e.g., men, whites, heterosexuals) who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their social group membership.”²¹

This is a distinct strategy from targeting men as perpetrators. A separate body of literature studies programs and interventions that work with perpetrators and/or men at high risk of being perpetrators.²² Yet, the actions men undertake that actively or passively uphold norms and patterns of VAWG, beyond perpetration, are manifold. We hope this work sheds light on how to change those behaviors.

1.1.3. How behavioral science can help

This report explores how it’s possible to leverage behavioral science to engage men as allies in preventing VAWG in LAC. Male allyship involves a myriad of decisions and behaviors that men can undertake on a daily basis. From intervening to support a colleague that is being harassed to using positive discipline with children, to speak up in support of policies to combat VAWG, there are thousands of moments of choice men face in the course of their lives which, in the aggregate, contribute to reducing (or increasing) the prevalence of VAWG in society.

Behavioral science studies how humans make decisions and the factors that influence their behavior. As such, it offers a robust set of tools to identify and

influence critical, everyday choices and behaviors that men undertake that either contribute to or deter VAWG prevention efforts. One of behavioral science's main insights is that much of our behavior is driven by nonconscious mental shortcuts triggered by environmental cues.²³ For instance, we are heavily influenced by the behavior of those around us.²⁴ Similarly, when people think others are watching, they are more likely to engage in other-benefiting behavior.²⁵ Men's decisions regarding VAWG prevention can be influenced by these cues and shortcuts, for better or for worse. Understanding those influences can help UN Women and organizations working with men in LAC towards impactful changes to how their communications, processes, and services are delivered, increasing positive results.

1.2. Goal and objectives

The overall goal of our work with UN Women is to **identify opportunities to apply behavioral science to engage men in LAC in VAWG prevention**. Findings from this engagement will inform policy, program, campaign, and service design. To reach this goal, the report aims to:

1. Explore the current context around male participation in VAWG prevention efforts;
2. Conduct a behavioral diagnosis of barriers and enablers for the involvement in VAWG prevention;
3. Develop behaviorally-informed recommendations to improve male participation in VAWG prevention.

1.3. Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured into four sections:

- Principles in engaging men in VAWG prevention - outlines the underlying principles that guide the development of this report;

- Methodology - details the process for conducting the literature review, qualitative research, and triangulation of data;
- Qualitative findings - summarizes key themes from qualitative interviews with men and experts in VAWG; and
- Recommendations for behavior change along the socio-ecological model - identifies behavior change interventions to engage men in VAWG prevention along four levels: individual, interpersonal, community, and societal.

2. Principles in engaging men in VAWG prevention

This section outlines the underlying principles from academic and grey literature that guide the development of this report. First and foremost, efforts to engage men should be understood as a **component of a comprehensive strategy to end VAWG**. It should **always align with the broader goal of promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.**^{26 27}

Efforts to engage men in VAWG prevention **should never:**^{28 29 30}

- **Dilute the feminist agenda.** Engaging men in VAWG prevention is not an end in itself, and it should be seen and assessed as a means to achieve greater gender justice. For instance, while programming targeting men may highlight men's losses driven by gender inequities and the potential benefits of a more equal society, it should not do so without acknowledging that women are harmed the most by current inequities.
- **Reinforce notions of gender as binary and patriarchal masculinity,** or the ideas and practices that emphasize the authority of men over women. For example, strategies to engage men must refrain from appealing to patriarchal masculine identities, such as "real men" or "warriors."
- **Decrease funding for women's services;**³¹ or
- Marginalize or diminish women's voices and leadership in VAWG prevention work.

Instead, work to engage men in VAWG prevention **should:**

- **Go beyond individual men and boys.**^{32 33} It should build towards changes to formal and informal institutions - particularly social norms on masculinity. Additionally, strategies for working with men must be coordinated with strategies for working with women, who can also uphold patriarchal gender norms, so that coherent messaging and interventions complement each other.
- **Consider an intersectional perspective,** acknowledging that men's opportunity and capacity to engage in VAWG prevention is impacted by additional aspects of

their cultural identity, such as their race, class, or sexuality, among others.³⁴ Efforts to engage men in VAWG prevention should be aligned with the broader goal of promoting social, racial, and economic justice.

- **Meet men where they are on the allyship spectrum of being an ally.**^{35 36 37 38} Acknowledge that strategies for men who already attend bystander training will differ from strategies for men who do not believe VAWG exists. To that end, we encourage organizations to adapt strategies for men along the entire spectrum rather than implement one-size-fits-all solutions.

3. Methodology



To identify potential target behaviors, barriers, and behaviorally-informed solutions, this engagement drew on two distinct sources: 1) a literature review and 2) qualitative interviews with men and experts who work with men in LAC. This section briefly summarizes these methods and how they are used in this report.

3.1. Literature Review

This literature review drew on three primary sources:

- Behavioral science literature specifically focused on VAWG prevention;
- Behavioral science literature from other policy domains where there are analogous barriers;
- Broader VAWG literature on prevention programs, which may not be categorized explicitly as behavioral interventions but that build on learnings from behavioral science.

Academic search engines were used, and literature that employs rigorous testing and evaluations (in particular, Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) and quasi-experimental impact evaluation methodologies) was prioritized.

3.2. Qualitative Interviews

In collaboration with UN Women, and an external qualitative consultant, BIT conducted and analyzed 26 semi-structured interviews with men (n=12) and experts who work with men (n=14) in LAC. Participants were selected to speak to men who were experienced in VAWG prevention.³⁹

The objectives of these interviews were to:

- Explore the context around the participation of men in the prevention of VAWG in LAC.

- Understand attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors towards VAWG prevention.
- Understand behavioral barriers and enablers for participating in VAWG prevention.

Section 4 outlines findings regarding the current landscape of VAWG prevention initiatives and the barriers and motivations men face to engage with them. Section 5 triangulates this qualitative data with the literature to develop behaviorally-informed recommendations for organizations working with men in VAWG prevention.

3.3. Scope of the report and limitations

This report aims to provide policymakers and practitioners with a foundation for new ideas and approaches to consider when working with men on VAWG prevention. These ideas should be developed further by adapting them to specific contexts, and most importantly, rigorously evaluating their impact. Effectively engaging men in VAWG prevention will require a holistic approach that considers the many ways men can contribute or reduce the prevalence of violence. The goal is to spark innovative thinking and action in an area where the evidence to date is scarce.

The findings gathered in this report on the VAWG prevention landscape are not an exhaustive study of all the initiatives currently implemented by organizations working with men on violence prevention in LAC. Similarly, though insightful, the qualitative findings are based on a sample of 26 interviews, which was not meant to represent all the potential behaviors and barriers for change that men and organizations face in the region but rather to explore the range and diversity of experiences. Readers are asked to assess the findings and recommendations below under such light and conduct further context-specific research on their behavior change objectives before implementing a given intervention.

4. Qualitative findings

In this section, we discuss key themes from the qualitative semi-structured interviews with men and experts⁴⁰ in VAWG prevention. These findings provide context for our recommendations by detailing attitudes and perceptions towards VAWG, characteristics of VAWG prevention programs, and barriers and facilitators to participation in VAWG prevention.

4.1. Current VAWG prevention landscape

4.1.1. Women are becoming more empowered

Change is happening. Both groups of interview participants - men and VAWG prevention experts - agree that in more recent years, especially among younger generations, relationships between men and women have evolved: for instance, there is generally more awareness and discussion around the concepts of equality, VAWG, masculinity, and gender dynamics. Men are noticing changes in women and relationship dynamics; in particular, women are becoming more empowered to speak up and stand up for themselves.

They “are no longer so submissive, they talk back.” One male participant highlights that this is a significant change, “especially in [Chile] where the woman was always the one who gave in to the pressure of the man, now I see a woman who has been empowering herself a little in her relationships” (Interviewee 7).

4.1.2. Harmful gender stereotypes and machismo culture are still prevalent

Despite this increased awareness, some participants feel that change is mostly surface level and has not improved relationship dynamics. Instead, men may simply be more careful about what they do or say because of increased social sanctions:

"Now, relationships between men and women are a bit more guarded because they [men] have coexisted with the feminist movement and are aware of the topic of gender-based violence, so they are more attentive... Equality is not yet possible, but they are trying. An example of this is when they say, 'Look, I can't do it because they're watching me.'" (Interviewee 6)

In other words, men may not be internalizing new norms, but rather changing their behaviors to avoid judgment.

Gender stereotypes and machismo culture are still incredibly prevalent in rural areas, among older men, and within specific professions, such as engineering. One participant describes the sexism women face in the civil engineering field:

"they do not like women to practice civil engineering in the field - in fact, my boss has told me flat out that a woman is not allowed on the field. He hires women for office work." (Interviewee 12).

4.1.3. Participation in VAWG prevention is most impactful when intrinsically motivated

When it comes to participation in VAWG prevention programs and allyship, both experts and men generally agree that the majority of men get involved in programs when they are in crisis – they are either court-ordered or are attempting to improve their strained relationships with their partner or children:

"In general, adult men are quite reluctant to activate preventative measures...They do it when they are in crisis, in personal situations in which they realize that they have crossed certain boundaries in their relationships and that this has effects [for example], demand for divorce, or if they end up alone" (Expert 5)

Unsurprisingly, men who voluntarily seek out prevention opportunities outside of crisis tend to be more open to behavior change than forced ones. Participants attributed this to the ability to recognize violence, which ultimately increased their **intrinsic motivation** or the act of doing something without an external reward:

“The men who came by their own free will were more inclined to reflect on the issues of violence because they recognized the violence in their lives. The men who arrived with a fiscal order were reluctant to work with us. Out of the eight sessions we had, it took four sessions for them to recognize violence” (Expert 9)

Recognition of violence, which may help increase intrinsic motivation, is discussed in more detail in Section 5.2.

4.1.4. VAWG prevention programs focus on providing judgment-free spaces for men

Participants overwhelmingly mention the use of workshops and facilitated sessions to bring men together for VAWG prevention programs. They describe these formats as safe spaces for men to discuss topics openly, without fear of judgment or pressure to say the right things. Programs try to:

“give men structured, systematized, non-stigmatizing information. At the same time, it has to do with the approach; If I accuse men of being mean or violent, then they are going to leave me, but I try to understand where their questions are coming from empathetically” (Expert 5).

In this way, program facilitators aim to frame men as potential allies rather than perpetrators.

Most of the programs mentioned focus on preventing perpetration rather than promoting allyship, and this is consistent with the scarcity of evidence around engaging men in allyship efforts.

Program content often involves 1) building awareness and knowledge about masculinity, gender inequities, and VAWG and 2) providing men with practical tools and skills to implement in their daily lives. For instance, one interviewee who was taught about emotional regulation shared that:

“in this program, I learned to detect and manage my emotions, and listen to my body...By listening to my body, I can detect if I am about to be violent with someone and prevent it” (Interviewee 2).

Another expert shared a tool called the:

“My Equality Plan,” which he uses at the end of his sessions to help men *“write three concrete ideas each week to prevent violence or strengthen relationships”* (Expert 5).

By empathetically deconstructing masculinity and providing practical tools and skills for men to use, programs help men feel less alienated and that they can -and should- have a role in prevention.

4.2. Barriers to participation in VAWG prevention

This section presents factors that men and experts believe hinder men’s participation in VAWG prevention. Each of these factors - or barriers - also includes potential behavioral explanations, where key concepts are highlighted in **bold**.

Socialization in a patriarchal society

Experts and men overwhelmingly brought up attitudes, beliefs, and **social norms** that stem from being socialized in a patriarchal society, where men are considered to be naturally superior to women. The “natural” aspect is key, as it demonstrates how ingrained and normalized these beliefs can be. Normalization also explains why harmful acts against women and girls may not actually be considered “violent,” but rather behaviors that men are expected to perform to retain their status in society:

Interviewer: *Do you think that the majority of men condemn this daily violence, or not?*

“They do not; it has become so routine that people think it is normal. As an example, among young people, what I have seen is that they send photos of naked girls, and they see it as something normal. I think it’s disrespectful, but it’s become so common that they don’t see it as something bad” (Interviewee 5)

Multiple studies show the connection between social constructs of patriarchal masculinities⁴¹ and VAWG.^{42,43} Among the harmful aspects of patriarchal masculinity is the need for men to continuously prove manhood, not showing emotional vulnerability, the legitimization of power and control over women, blaming women for VAWG, and conceptions of male sexual desire as uncontrollable.⁴⁴

Status quo bias and loss aversion

Beyond ingrained attitudes, beliefs, and norms, failure to engage in VAWG prevention may also be explained by **status quo bias**, which occurs when 1) people do not take action in an attempt to keep things the same⁴⁵ or 2) stick to choices that have been previously made.⁴⁶ Status quo bias in a patriarchal society means that men prefer to look past VAWG or gender stereotypes. This is consistent with **loss aversion**, or the idea that people dislike losses more strongly than they like gains of equal value.⁴⁷ In this case, where men often think of gender equality as a loss of power or control, they are more likely to stick to the status quo:

“They are not willing to lose their privileges or are not willing to show sensitive masculinity because of the authoritarian position they have within their groups....In my group of friends, when someone says, ‘We [my wife and I] are making decisions together, we are seeing how we spend money together,’ some say ‘you are serving your wife, she needs to work for you, you are not man enough’” (Interviewee 11)

Fixed mindsets

The fact that VAWG is rooted in structural barriers and societal norms may be an excuse for men to do nothing. In other words, if men believe that VAWG is a matter of socialization, they may think that it is too late to change their behaviors. To that end, if men perceive their qualities as unchangeable - a state referred to in psychology as a **fixed mindset** - they will try to prove themselves correct over and over rather than learning from their mistakes.

Not taking responsibility for VAWG

Men often consider that women's rights and gender issues only pertain to women, not men. An expert highlights that:

"when we talk about gender, [men] believe that we are talking about women, and [that] when we talk about women we are talking about feminism...that profoundly alienates men" (Expert 2).

Inaction is further compounded by **omission bias**, or the tendency to judge harmful inactions (e.g., doing nothing to address VAWG or gender norms) as better than harmful actions (e.g., committing VAWG or making misogynistic comments),⁴⁸ even if they result in similar outcomes.

Fear of backlash

Men worry about how others might react to outspoken allyship - whether in response to an action they take in the moment or perceptions of their image. Many men and experts alike highlight that masculinity and sexuality may be questioned if men speak up. This is especially prevalent in all-male friend groups when a man challenges sexist practices, friends may marginalize or bully him:

"When I started all of this, many men in Mexico made fun of me, laughed at me, and called me names. They saw me as a traitor to the male cause, so little by little, I learned to listen and understand that it was not me that they attacked, but that they defended a cultural style." (Expert 5)

This fear of backlash very often stops men from stepping in as bystanders or pursuing more allyship roles. This may be explained by **normative social influence**, or the tendency to fit in out of fear of judgment⁴⁹ - in this case, public or outward acceptance of violence and harassment without a private belief that it is actually acceptable.

Lack of accessible information

Both groups of interviewees used a noticeable amount of jargon and academic language during their interviews. While it is unclear whether this is the level of vocabulary they use on a daily basis - in their work and in everyday life - it is possible that the VAWG prevention space may appear inaccessible to the general public, especially those outside the urban middle class:

“gender and masculinity issues remain in certain urban spaces, in this case, young people, middle class, university sectors.... they use very elevated or academic language...[it] does not reach [men], it does not say anything to them” (Expert 3).

Perception of existing equality

Availability heuristic is the tendency for people to judge the frequency of an event or behavior based on how easily it comes to mind.⁵⁰ This may explain why men, who have more recently witnessed societal changes (e.g., more women in public office, positions of power, working, etc.) may think that VAWG is not an issue anymore. They see a few strong examples of women in power or men who have been held accountable for VAWG and assume that it is more frequent than it is in reality.

4.3. Facilitators to participate in VAWG prevention

While less frequent, both groups of participants mention two possible facilitators to male involvement in VAWG prevention:

- **Social influence:** Men and experts mentioned the importance of positive **social referents** - family members, peers, or partners - for setting healthy examples of relationships between men and women. For instance, men raised in feminist households are more likely to work against the patriarchy actively. One expert noted that men *“who are more involved in [VAWG prevention] issues are men who have been very close to women who have been role models for other women or who*

have faced complex circumstances and have gotten ahead” (Expert 5). This makes sense since people constantly take cues from others around them to define their own behaviors. These social referents can be vital in providing behavioral cues for people, especially when it comes to norm changes.

- **Moments of change:** Timing matters when it comes to behavior change. As mentioned above, men tend to enter VAWG prevention programs or explore allyship when they are in crisis or experience fundamental changes in their lives (e.g., starting a family). This aligns with a phenomenon called the **fresh start effect**⁵¹, which explains why temporal landmarks - for example, the start of a new year, birthdays, getting married, or moving - can motivate people to build new habits.

5. Recommendations for behavior change interventions along the socio-ecological model

Recommendations are structured according to Bronfenbrenner's⁵² ecological model, and identify behavior change interventions to engage men in VAWG prevention along four levels: individual, interpersonal, community, and societal. These levels represent different entry points for work with men concerning policy, program, or service design. Interventions at one level impact every other level - acting at all levels is necessary to sustainably engage men in VAWG prevention.

These levels are depicted in Table 1 below and then describe their roles in relation to men's allyship. A non-exhaustive list of target behaviors is outlined at each level- the actions men can undertake to prevent VAWG. These target behaviors were drawn from the literature and the qualitative data, and are examples of the actions participants believe men should take to show allyship. The potential behavioral interventions to prompt action is also listed.



The behavioral recommendations proposed are informed by 1) behavioral science literature and 2) broader VAWG prevention programs that may not be specifically categorized as behavioral interventions but build on learnings from behavioral science. The existing evidence on VAWG prevention supports some of these solutions - where this is the case, examples of interventions to engage men in VAWG prevention that leverage these strategies are provided. For others, evidence from other policy areas is drawn in an effort to suggest new and innovative ideas that have yet to be evaluated in this context but could potentially bring about a positive social impact.

Practitioner tip

Throughout the recommendation section, boxes with tips for practical application are included. Although they are called "practitioner tips," these can be used by any organization that wants to address VAWG, not just those that already work in the space.

The target behaviors and behaviorally-informed solutions focus on the proactive steps men can take to prevent VAWG, rather than the behaviors they should refrain from to not contribute to or perpetuate VAWG. The choice to focus on engaging men in prevention efforts rather than reducing re-offending is intentional. While there is a large body of literature and work done with (potential) perpetrators^{53 54 55}, the evidence on what works to engage men in prevention efforts is scarcer. As such, there is untapped potential in understanding how to engage men as allies.

Table 2. Illustrative Target Behaviors and Solutions along the Socio-Ecological Model

Level	Illustrative target behaviors: What can men do?	Behavioral barriers	Recommendations to prompt men to take action
 <p>Individual</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openly support VAWG prevention and response • Hold other men accountable for their actions and inactions in addressing VAWG (for example, victim-blaming or VAWG normalization) • Challenge gender inequities (for example, gender stereotypes) • Be receptive and respond empathetically to women’s experiences of VAWG and gender discrimination 	<p>Socialization in a patriarchal society</p> <p>Status quo bias and loss aversion</p> <p>Fixed mindset</p>	<p>5.1.1 Associate men’s allyship to a positive self-identity</p> <p>5.1.2 Capitalize on “moments of change” to engage men in VAWG prevention</p> <p>5.1.3 Correct misperceptions about what others do or think about ally-like behavior</p> <p>5.1.4 Encourage growth mindset and self-affirmation</p> <p>5.1.5 Prompt men to identify their triggers and develop a plan to react in non-violent ways</p>
 <p>Interpersonal</p>	<p>Bystanders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take action to dissuade the perpetrator and to support the survivor <p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interact with partner equitably • De-escalate conflict without using violence <p>Parenting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divide child-rearing and domestic tasks equitably • Manage a child’s behavior through positive reinforcement and non-violent discipline 	<p>Not taking responsibility for VAWG and omission bias</p> <p>Fear of backlash</p> <p>Lack of accessible information</p> <p>Perception of existing equality</p>	<p>Engaging men as bystanders</p> <p>5.2.1 Notice that VAWG is happening: Develop rules of thumb to identify VAWG</p> <p>5.2.2 Notice VAWG is happening: Use hotspot mapping to identify dangerous environments and make them safer</p> <p>5.2.3 Interpret the situation as something to be addressed: Prompt men to take women’s perspectives and build empathy between men and women</p> <p>5.2.4 Assume a level of responsibility to intervene: Convey to bystanders that intervening is socially acceptable</p> <p>5.2.5 Choose a form of assistance: Provide bystanders with clear instructions on what to do or say before, during, and after the perpetration</p>



- Teach children to reject pro-violence ideas and to respect women
- Teach and exhibit good emotional regulation skills. Identify and address mental health issues when needed



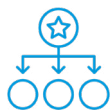
Interpersonal

- Challenge norms that perpetuate VAWG in their speech and actions
- Create protective environments that discourage VAWG



Community

- Use positions of power to enact laws and policies to prevent and respond to VAWG and to promote gender equality more broadly
- Allocate resources to efforts to end VAWG
- Support females in reaching positions of power



Structural

Socialization in a patriarchal society

Status quo bias and loss aversion

Fixed mindset

Not taking responsibility for VAWG and omission bias

Fear of backlash

Lack of accessible information

Perception of existing equality

Building equitable intimate relationships

5.2.6 Strengthen men’s skills to resolve conflicts nonviolently

5.2.7 Prompt men to commit to equitable relationships

Helping men become better fathers

5.2.8 Use planning interventions to encourage equitable division of child-rearing and domestic tasks

5.2.9 Motivate fathers to have an active role in the lives of their children by making the consequences of their actions salient and showing them their progress

5.2.10 Replace corporal punishment with non-violent discipline and provide rules of thumb to manage children’s behavior

5.3.1 Use influential messengers to connect with men and create spaces for reflection and peer learning

5.3.2 Engage community leaders to change social norms

5.3.3 Use edutainment to promote positive role models

5.4.1 Encourage organizations to commit to VAWG prevention

5.4.2 Allocate organizational resources to VAWG prevention and share power by default

5.4.3 Make reporting within institutions easy and safe

5.4.4 Build systems to mitigate the impact of decision-makers gender biases

5.1. Individual level

At the individual level, the report outlines behaviorally-informed solutions that address personal factors that may decrease (or increase) the likelihood of men acting as allies in VAWG prevention. These include attitudes and beliefs around VAWG but also factors that may mediate whether men take action or not in the face of situations they disagree with, such as their level of self-efficacy.

5.1.1. Associate men's allyship to a positive self-identity

Self-identities refer to how people think of themselves, their attributes, and their values.⁵⁶ People like to see themselves in a positive light⁵⁷ and act in ways that are consistent with that positive view of themselves.⁵⁸ Therefore, associating the actions seeks to encourage a positive self-identity, which can be a powerful strategy to change behavior.

The men that were interviewed as part of this study felt that VAWG prevention programming often calls them out, not in:

"I feel that sometimes there are campaigns that stab a man a lot, and that's why sometimes I kind of turn the page" (Interviewee 12).

Experts working with men in the region also highlighted men feeling like they do not belong in VAWG prevention efforts as a barrier to engagement

"Another obstacle has to do with men who very consciously say: I do not believe in the issue of equity or equality, that is a feminist issue" (Expert 6).

The evidence to date, particularly regarding sexual harassment in the workplace or educational settings, points to the perils of approaching men as potential perpetrators and the benefits of addressing them as potential allies. A study analyzing the outcomes of 805 private sector employers in the United States who introduced sexual harassment training over 32 years⁵⁹ found that employee training, which often emphasizes forbidden behaviors and sanctions, showed adverse or no effects. On the contrary, manager and bystander training, which highlighted the positive actions that employers

can take against sexual harassment, was associated with an increase in the proportion of women in managerial positions.

Interventions with youth⁶⁰ and children⁶¹ focused on fostering positive notions of masculinity have shown promising results in preventing VAWG and promoting helping behavior. In a different setting, but under the same logic, BIT worked with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to develop a light-touch SMS campaign to reduce intimate-partner violence in Liberia. Participants received encouraging messages and tasks during a 30-day challenge fostering a 'Modern Man' identity. The goal was to promote equitable attitudes and behaviors among participating couples and to reduce the incidence of violence as a result. A rigorous evaluation of the intervention's impact is currently underway.⁶²

Practitioner tip #1

VAWG prevention practitioners should aim to associate allyship with and appeal to positive identities. Allyship should be framed in a way that makes men feel better about their actions - taking part in violence prevention should be attractive, not accusatory.

Being an ally can be uncomfortable. This section includes interventions aimed to help men feel comfortable being uncomfortable. It does not suggest that interventions should downplay men's role as the main perpetrators of violence. Instead, it suggests programming aiming to engage men should also emphasize how they can be a force of good to address VAWG.

5.1.2 Capitalize on “moments of change” to engage men in VAWG prevention

Moments of change may facilitate participation in VAWG prevention programs due to the **fresh start effect**.⁶³ Interviewees highlighted how men often engage in VAWG prevention when they experience a sudden change in their life:

“Men enter any process of reflection as a product of a crisis. I'm not just referring to violence, but also parenting, family, sexuality, aging, etc. It is a crisis that triggers the search for possible answers.” (Expert 9).

Several interviewees highlighted fatherhood as one of the life changes that may prompt men to engage in VAWG prevention noted:

“I see it especially with fathers of girls, young people, adolescent girls; they have that kind of transition, and they see the issue of machismo from another perspective, from that of a father, and that’s important too”. (Interviewee 7).

This is consistent with the evidence that male legislators change their voting patterns after having a daughter, in particular, that they are more likely to support legislation in favor of reproductive rights.⁶⁴

Practitioner tip #2

VAWG prevention practitioners could capitalize on the window of opportunity that these temporal landmarks pose to intensify their outreach efforts. For example, when men register their residence with a new municipality or become fathers, they could be an appropriate moment to prompt them to engage with local VAWG prevention initiatives.

5.1.3. Correct misperceptions about what others do or think about ally-like behavior

Social norms are informal rules or expectations of behavior that individuals in a group tend to follow because they believe that most people in their reference group follow those same (descriptive) rules or that people in their reference network think they should be followed (prescriptive).⁶⁵

The literature on *changing* social norms around VAWG - what is common or acceptable behavior in a social group - is reviewed at length in the section on community level interventions. This section focuses on interventions that aim not to change social norms themselves, but to correct misconceptions about them - people’s incorrect estimates about the proportion of their peers who adhere to a given social norm. These interventions are highly effective to change behavior, since researchers have long observed that people take the behaviors and attitudes of others into consideration when deciding how to act.⁶⁶

This is supported by the findings of qualitative research - an overwhelming majority of interviewees reported that “what other people would say” was a key determinant of their behavior and one of the main reasons men abstain from engaging in VAWG prevention efforts.

“[Interviewer: What do you think are the barriers, the obstacles that prevent men from *engaging in violence prevention*?] – *The “what others may say”* (Interviewee 5)

“There is the obstacle of beliefs, ridicule, the feeling of no longer belonging to a group because of having a different opinion. There is the obstacle of prejudice, of what it will mean that others see me differently because I think differently” (Expert 10)

Men may overestimate how many peers hold a negative view, such as victim-blaming, or underestimate how many people would find a desirable behavior, like intervening in case of violence, acceptable. This, in turn, affects people’s behaviors as they try to conform to what they perceive as socially acceptable, even if their private views are in disagreement with what they believe to be the norm. When misperceptions about social norms are widespread, **pluralistic ignorance** takes place.⁶⁷ Under pluralistic ignorance, the majority of a group continues to adhere to a social norm, even if they privately reject it, because they erroneously believe everyone else supports it.

Correcting men’s misconceptions about social norms by clarifying the true social norm can encourage positive behavior change. A study in Saudi Arabia sought to correct misperceptions of social norms by explaining that the vast majority of young married Saudi men privately support their wives working outside of the home, contrary to their prior beliefs that other men would be against this practice. This messaging intervention increased married men’s willingness to let their wives join the labor force, as measured by their costly sign-up for a job-matching service and the likelihood that wives would apply for jobs outside the home.⁶⁸

Practitioner tip #3

Where men may underestimate the prevalence of positive behaviors - e.g., intervening as a bystander in the face of VAWG - or attitudes - e.g., the proportion of men who condemn VAWG - practitioners should aim to correct those misperceptions, encouraging men to conform to the widespread positive behavior or attitude. On the flipside, VAWG practitioners should avoid highlighting negative behavior as common - e.g., statements such as “most men do nothing in the face of VAWG.”

5.1.4. Encourage growth mindset and self-affirmation

Being an ally is not a one-off behavior, but rather something men should practice daily. Learning how to be an effective ally is likely to require men to face situations and practice skills they are not familiar with or feel comfortable with.

“Being uncomfortable in the sense of questioning the violence of other men, or of making people think, I think that is very important, I think that it is necessary to break that network of male complicity” (Expert 3)

To improve and persist in their efforts to prevent VAWG, men should overcome the idea that sexist and violent behavior is solely driven by socialization or education, and therefore cannot be changed in adulthood, described above as a fixed mindset (see Section 4.2). Rather, they should be encouraged to adopt a **growth mindset** or the belief that their skills and traits can improve with work and effort.⁶⁹

Mostly studied in the field of education, interventions to promote growth mindsets often involve teaching participants about the malleable nature of intellectual abilities and the potential to improve them through training. People who have growth mindsets tend to work harder, use more effective learning strategies, and achieve better results.⁷⁰ Interventions targeting men should prompt them to conceive their own behavior in regards to VAWG as malleable - not a result of the upbringing or social context - but something they can change through practice. It must be noted that a fundamental underlying assumption of growth mindset interventions is that the person *wants* to achieve a given behavioral goal. Therefore these interventions should either target men who already have clear goals regarding their all-like behavior and need support in following through or otherwise be accompanied by a goal definition process.

Another strategy that may help men feel more comfortable adopting new behaviors is **self-affirmation**. If a person finds an environment or activity threatening to their positive view of themselves - as may be the case if men are asked to change their own and challenge others' sexist or violent behavior - this will lead to psychological discomfort and low motivation and engagement.

“Yes, because I believe that a stronger temperament, less sentimentally open, like treating and approaching the issue towards women, more rigidly, not like a man like who is not open to those spaces” (Interviewee 12)

Self-affirmation theory upholds that if individuals reflect on values that are personally relevant to them, they are less likely to experience distress and react defensively when confronted with information that contradicts or threatens their sense of self.⁷¹ Values affirmation exercises typically involve reflective writing tasks. For instance, participants might be asked to write about their top-ranked personal value for a few minutes before completing a task.⁷²

Evidence suggests that values affirmation exercises can prevent men from feeling the need to prove they adhere to conceptions of patriarchal masculinity.⁷³

Practitioner tip #4

VAWG practitioners can incorporate content directed at i) making salient to men the changeable nature of their behaviors regarding allyship; and ii) helping men overcome identity threats by introducing values affirmation exercises into their programming.

5.1.5. Prompt men to identify their triggers and develop a plan to react in nonviolent ways

A recurrent theme in the qualitative research with men and experts in the region and the evidence on VAWG prevention interventions was the effectiveness of identifying what situations or events may trigger them to behave violently and developing **“if-then” plans** to behave differently. There is a large body of research on how planning for a given behavior makes people more likely to follow through.⁷⁴ A complementary strategy men reported was taking time to cool down in order to respond rather than impulsively react to a given situation. These strategies help counteract a tendency known as the hot-cold **empathy gap**⁷⁵, by which it can predict how heightened emotional states (e.g., being angry or in pain) will impact people’s behavior at the moment.

“In this program, I learned to detect and manage my emotions, know how to listen to my body when I am about to exert violence on someone. Based on listening to my body, I can detect if I can be violent with someone and prevent it. Another tool that I learned is the ‘retreat,’ or a ‘time out’” (Interviewee 2)

“What we always promote is this issue that you previously have the signal of ‘time out or retreat from your partner or with the people who are there, so that when you know that you are upset, you can signal them and go for a walk or relax ... and return

when you are calmer, and if the other party is willing to listen to you then you can resume the dialogue” (Expert 5)

These strategies align with a common psychological intervention - **cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)**. CBT has been used to change the behavior of physical abuse perpetrators, yet the evidence is still scarce to conclude its efficacy.⁷⁶ Outside of clinical settings, interventions aimed to prevent crime more generally^{77 78}, and VAWG specifically⁷⁹ has integrated CBT elements with promising results.

CBT pertains mainly to preventing perpetration - prompting men to refrain from negative behaviors. However, some of its core strategies, such as identifying triggers and planning for behavior change, can also be leveraged to promote ally-like behavior. Men may work to identify situations in which they can be active allies - for example, when a coworker makes sexist comments - and plan how to react - for instance, have ready a few potential responses to challenge him/her.

Practitioner tip #5

VAWG practitioners should try to incorporate key components of CBT - helping men identify triggers or opportunities for ally-like behavior and develop plans for how to act when those situations arise - to help men develop new habits.

5.2. Interpersonal level

At the interpersonal level, behaviorally-informed interventions that target the network of close relationships and interactions that may increase or decrease the likelihood that men engage in VAWG prevention is included. Three types of interactions or relationships where men play a key role in VAWG prevention: men as bystanders, as partners, and as caregivers are covered. For each of these areas, there is a large body of literature on effective interventions. Rather than providing an exhaustive review of this literature, behavioral insights that reflect the leveraging of successful interventions and that could be applied more widely are highlighted.

Engaging men as bystanders

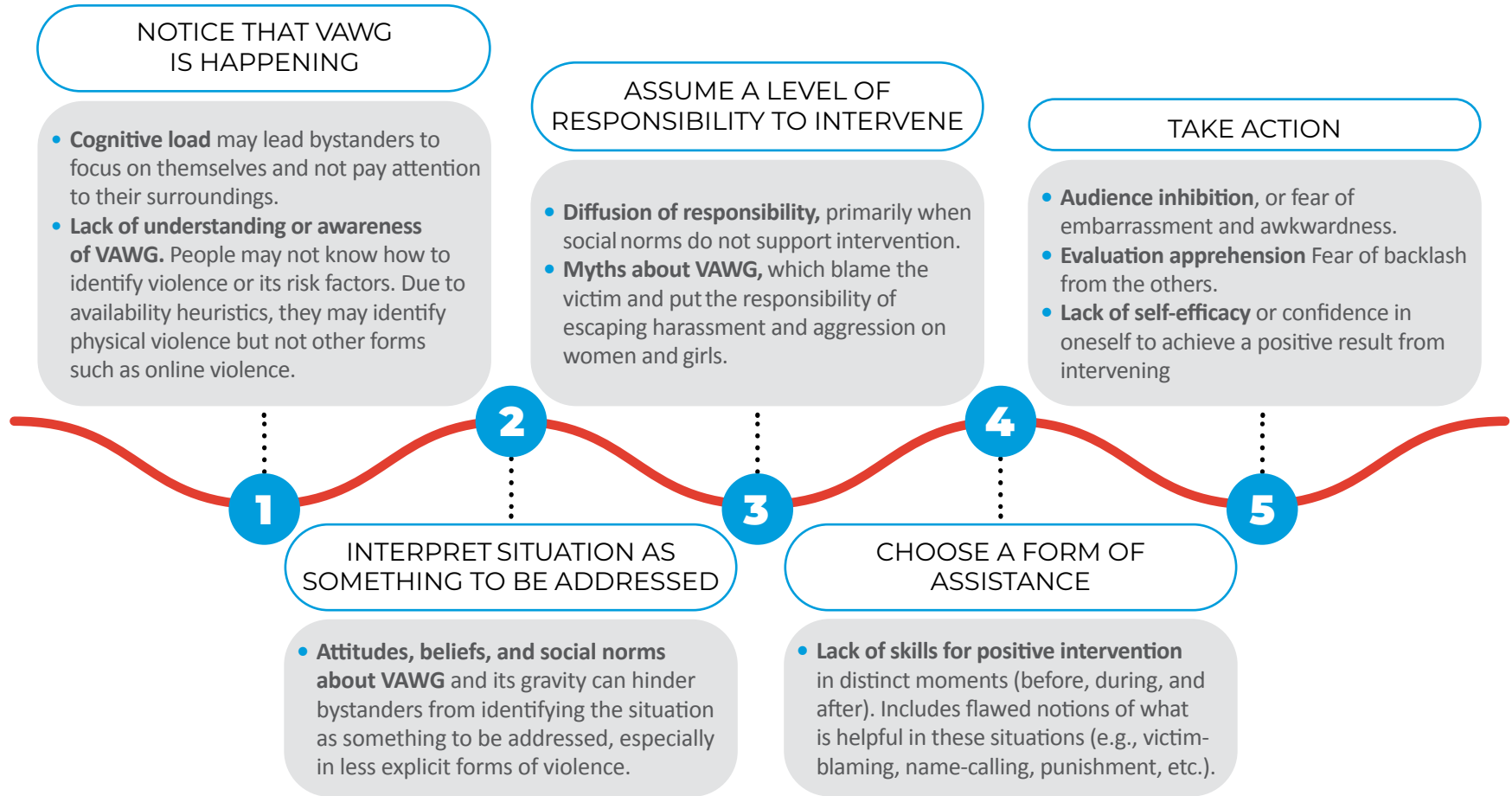
When VAWG occurs, there may be an “audience” of bystanders. Bystanders are those who witness or are aware of a situation related to VAWG but are not the direct perpetrators. Bystanders do not need to be immediately present at the moment of violence perpetration; they might be friends, neighbors, acquaintances, or other community members who witnessed situations of violence before, during, or after it was perpetrated. In any case, they can be crucial actors to prevent violence and directly intervene both with the survivor and perpetrator. Successful interventions can take the form of offering support and protection for the survivor, discouraging the perpetrator, and shaping community perceptions (e.g., demonstrating that VAWG is unacceptable).

Engaging bystanders as a VAWG prevention strategy emphasizes that acting against VAWG is everyone’s responsibility. On the contrary, interventions that target survivors create a further burden on women who are already in precarious, stressful, and dangerous situations. However, when women try to confront perpetrators, they can be viewed negatively, and their actions can be interpreted as self-interested or biased.⁸⁰ This makes it easier for perpetrators and others to dismiss their claims. Promoting bystander intervention also places responsibility for VAWG prevention on the community and encourages them to take ownership and bolster action.

Deciding to intervene as a bystander is a complex and challenging process. The Situational Model of Bystander Intervention⁸¹ describes the steps and associated barriers that a bystander has to overcome to intervene. This model has often been applied to intervene in cases of different forms of sexual violence.^{82 83}

The following graphic (Figure 1) describes the process bystanders go through when deciding to intervene (adaptation of Latane and Darley’s Situational Model of Bystander Intervention).⁸⁴ The steps include: 1) noticing the event; 2) interpreting the event as something to address; 3) assuming a level of responsibility for acting; 4) choosing how to help; 5) taking action. During each step of this process, bystanders face unique barriers, and there are ideas of behavioral solutions aimed to address several of those barriers listed below.

Figure 1. Steps and behavioral barriers to intervening in cases of harassment and violence



5.2.1. Notice that VAWG is happening: Develop rules of thumb to identify VAWG

The first step that bystanders must undertake to intervene is noticing that VAWG is happening. This might be prevented due to the **availability heuristic**, which refers to a mental shortcut that leads to evaluating the chances of something happening based on the ease with which examples come to mind.⁸⁵ As such, bystanders might only identify as VAWG the forms of violence most commonly depicted in the media, such as physical violence. Other forms of violence, such as psychological or economic violence, might go unnoticed. This was supported by findings in the qualitative interviews conducted with men, in which the vast majority of participants agreed that many forms of violence “*are not visible*” to them:

“I think it is necessary for them to recognize and make visible the violence they have experienced so that they do not perpetuate it, because if they do not see it, if they do not identify it, they will easily perpetuate it” (Interviewee 3)

To overcome this, programs aimed to engage bystanders should include specific tools to support bystanders in identifying VAWG. They could provide bystanders with **rules of thumb** to identify VAWG, a form of simplification that is especially helpful under conditions of stress and uncertainty.^{86 87} For example, this could take the form of pointing out the different characteristics that an act of VAWG could take, including applied examples. Programs should emphasize depicting and helping men identify often invisibilized forms of violence within their content.

The programs Green Dot⁸⁸ and Bringing in the Bystander⁸⁹, both of which have been found to reduce college sexual harassment, include as part of their curriculum modules to help college students identify sexual harassment and assault.

5.2.2. Notice VAWG is happening: Use hotspot mapping to identify dangerous environments and make them safer

Evidence shows that modifications in the physical environment (for example, offices, streets, alleys, etc.) can decrease rates of sexual violence.⁹⁰ One way to do this is by using **hotspot mapping**, or an evidence-informed technique that helps determine where people feel safe and unsafe in a community.⁹¹ To create the maps, participants

are asked to identify spaces in a community that are “hot” (high risk) and “cold” (low risk). By clearly identifying specific “hot” spaces, targeted interventions can be developed to increase safety.

An example of such a strategy being used successfully is a school-based intervention called *Shifting Boundaries*⁹². The program included a hotspot mapping component, which fed into school protocol revisions; temporary building-based restraining orders to reinforce boundaries between survivors and perpetrator, poster campaigns; and increased staff monitoring. Evaluations of *Shifting Boundaries* found that the intervention reduced peer sexual violence perpetration by 40% and sexual harassment perpetration by 34% among middle school students in New York City.⁹³

Practitioner tip #6

VAWG prevention practitioners could collaborate with women to create hotspot maps. Bystander messaging could be placed in “hot” areas to remind men 1) to be more cognizant of potential violence and 2) of steps they should take to intervene when necessary.

5.2.3. Interpret the situation as something to be addressed: Prompt men to take women’s perspectives and build empathy between men and women

As described in the barriers section, men often feel that VAWG prevention is a women’s or feminist issue that does not involve them. This was supported by the qualitative data collected. Among the participants interviewed, only men who had participated in programs and groups for violence prevention felt the need to get involved; the rest of them did not see VAWG prevention as an issue that directly involved them (with the exception of one man who took a more active role after having a daughter).

Empathy might be one of the keys to embedding a sense of responsibility and ownership in men, promoting them to take more active prevention behaviors. Evidence shows that empathy towards survivors has an indirect impact on prosocial responses in helping survivors of VAWG, as well as reducing the possibility of perpetration.⁹⁴ A recurring theme in our qualitative research with both men and experts was that building empathy amongst men is crucial to engage them in VAWG prevention initiatives and encourage them to intervene as bystanders. This includes:

“recognizing one’s privileges, and relating to other’s life stories (Interviewee 10)”.

“Spaces to externalize these experiences with the violence that they have committed helps to identify that violence is bad. If it has hurt you, do you want to eat that damage? Do you want to inflict the same damage on others? So I think that helps”
(Interviewee 3)

“I always expressed to them the need of being more empathetic, putting yourself in the other person’s place ... I’ve always said ‘what would you think if they did the same to you?’ If it were your mom or your sister? Would you like another man to be cat-calling her?” (Interviewee 2)

Empathy can be generated by **affective perspective getting**, which is the ability to make inferences about others’ emotions and feelings.⁹⁵ Understanding the perspective of a stereotyped group can increase empathy and liking while decreasing prejudice.⁹⁶ Evidence suggests that emotional engagement or connectedness with the target of VAWG can be an important factor in predicting prosocial responses and preferences for prosocial information seeking,⁹⁷ support for public health initiatives to help victims of VAWG, and behavioral intentions towards engaging in protective actions to help victims of VAWG.⁹⁸

Regarding the strategy through which this should be carried out, there is evidence that **perspective getting**, which is hearing about the experiences of an outgroup member from them or others, can be more effective than **perspective taking** in shifting exclusionary attitudes.⁹⁹ Perspective-taking involves imagining experience from the perspective of an outgroup member (traditional), recounting it to another (vicarious), or recalling a similar experience (analogical). Although this strategy might be effective in increasing the perception of understanding out-group perspective, evidence suggests it might not lead to an accurate view of such perspective.¹⁰⁰ A way to implement perspective-getting, would be to have participants listen to an ingroup friend tell a story about the experiences of their friend in the outgroup.¹⁰¹

Practitioner tip #7

VAWG prevention practitioners can integrate affective perspective-getting into their programming to develop empathy with survivors of VAWG. This could take the form of narratives and case-based scenarios.

5.2.4. Assume a level of responsibility to intervene: Convey to bystanders that intervening is socially acceptable

As described in the previous section, social norms interventions that communicate the majority's behavior - and correct people's misperceptions about the prevalence of a given behavior - are a powerful lever to change behavior.

There is evidence that interventions based on social norm messaging can promote bystander intervention. In one BIT bystander trial conducted at the University of Melbourne, a series of majority social norms emails increased the number of men and women actively bystander against sexual harassment by approximately one-third compared to the control group. These majority social norms emails emphasized that most people in the University say they would intervene if they saw sexism and sexual harassment on campus.¹⁰² As a result, after two months, more students in the treatment group reported having intervened in cases of sexual harassment. Many other college-based interventions have used the bystander-intervention approach with successful results. Some of the most notable ones are *Bringing in the Bystander*¹⁰³, *The Men's Workshop*^{104 105}, and *Green Dot*.¹⁰⁶

Bystander interventions aimed to change perspectives of what others do or can do have also been implemented in the realm of public transportation. BIT collaborated with BRAC University to place posters in buses that addressed barriers to bystander intervention and provided timely nudges to passengers. One of the key messages in the posters is that bystanders were not alone in intervening against sexual harassment. In particular, the posters prompted passengers to let the driver know about harassment happening on the bus. An RCT showed that these posters effectively improved attitudes towards victims of sexual harassment and increased the proportion of passengers who said they would involve the driver if they witnessed an act of harassment.¹⁰⁷ Future interventions targeting bystanders can also consider prompting men to include others who may be able to help.

5.2.5. Choose a form of assistance: Provide bystanders with clear instructions on what to do or say before, during, and after the perpetration

Studies have shown that even when wanting to intervene in favor of others, bystanders may fear the perpetrators' retaliation, as well as the embarrassment and awkwardness

of the interaction. Failing to act for fear of embarrassing oneself in front of others is called **audience inhibition** and is strongly influenced by the local and group-specific norms towards intervention.¹⁰⁸ Bystanders might face audience inhibition when trying to approach a survivor of a case of VAWG, as they might fear the victim's reaction. This was supported by our interviews with men, which highlighted the potentially difficult conversations. As stated by one of the participants:

"[They say] "Oh no, I better not get involved," and look the other way. ... Sometimes embarrassment, fear about what others may say is what prevents a person from acting" (Interviewee 5)

Similarly, **evaluation apprehension**¹⁰⁹ refers to the phenomenon by which knowing that others are going to assess their performance or judge them in any way may induce anxiety out of fear of receiving a negative evaluation or feedback. Bystanders might feel negatively judged or perceived by their community if they transgress social expectations about what should be handled in the private and public domains.

In the qualitative interviews, fear of negative backlash was a dominant issue among men. Men mentioned that this issue was mostly a problem within their reference network - the group of men in their friend group and community; as stated by a participant:

"What are people going to say if you get involved?" (Interviewee 5).

He identified that backlash usually takes place when someone calls another out, sends a positive message supporting gender equality, or speaks about sharing decision-making power within their own household. Some of the ways this manifested were through teasing, bullying, and insulting.

"I have some WhatsApp groups, as I already told you, different ones, and I am the weird one when I make these types of comments, of equality, or the 8M [8th of March, International Women's Day] arrives, and I post something related to that, and what I receive is either indifference or [aggressions]; any reflection on equality, doing something to change that narrative, is not welcome." (Interviewee 1)

“I also believe that the issue is friend’s groups (...) then in the groups of friends the first thing is ‘ah but be careful because she is relating to more people, she is talking to more men, there is infidelity there’” (Interviewee 11)

Therefore, it is critical to provide easy-to-follow instructions on how to accurately and assertively intervene and call out acts of sexism and violence. People are more likely to comply with a request when the action being requested is simple, straightforward, and stands out.¹¹⁰ A clear call to action can help reduce bystanders’ cognitive load when trying to figure out what to do in stressful or complex situations or when they fear others’ reactions. It can also support bystanders in identifying forms of assistance that minimize the risk that intervening may pose to their own safety,

Evidence suggests that using case-based scenarios and providing concrete advice on effective ways to intervene can be very powerful in promoting different forms of bystander intervention among diverse populations. For example, the program *Bringing in the Bystander* mentioned above uses this strategy to prevent college sexual assault. The program presents concrete examples and situations from campus life and then guides students on choosing safe and positive ways to intervene (e.g., how to support a friend after they reveal that they are a survivor of violence).¹¹¹ Likewise, in Tanzania, a set of ads (radio, banners, posters) instructed people precisely on what to say to divert older men when they witnessed them preying on young women. An evaluation of this intervention showed a strong relationship between exposure to these ads and people’s willingness to stand up and help.¹¹²

Finally, this strategy has also been used to promote de-escalation of domestic violence as it occurs. The Bell Bajao (*Ring the Bell*) Campaign in India encouraged people to intervene when they heard domestic violence in their neighbor’s home by ringing their doorbell (using domestic excuses as asking for a cooking ingredient).¹¹³ These forms of intervention are both safe for the bystander, and reduces their apprehension around backlash to their intervention.

Practitioner tip #8

VAWG prevention practitioners could develop clear rules of thumb of how to identify and intervene accurately in different types of situations, as well as how to respond to the negative backlash. This could be delivered through skills practice in which men must engage with different scenarios.

Building equitable intimate relationships

Most violence committed against women occurs in familial and intimate relationships. The World Health Organization estimates that 30% of ever-partnered women have experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).^{114 115} Poor emotional regulation, conflict management, and communication skills; hostility or conflict in the relationship; and separation are all relationship-level risk factors for IPV perpetration and victimization.¹¹⁶¹¹⁷ Interventions that address these risk factors aim to build protective habits by embedding behaviors and skills that help prevent conflict escalation in relationships and enable a more equitable partner dynamic. Strategies to engage men as allies in interpersonal relationships can take inspiration from successful primary prevention approaches that teach healthy relationship behaviors. There are several programs involving men that have shown promising results¹¹⁸. However, since involving men in these approaches is still a relatively new development, there is room for further evaluation in this space.

5.2.6. Build men's skills to resolve conflicts nonviolently

Non-violent conflict resolution strategies are central to preventing IPV. However, some couples may lack the communication and emotional regulation skills to de-escalate conflict when it occurs. Interventions that work with couples to successfully prevent violence often focus on building specific skills to address relationship conflict, from coping skills to decision making¹¹⁹. The expert interviewees we spoke to frequently referred to building skills such as anger management, conflict resolution, and healthy communication skills as central to preventing VAWG through work with men:

“Among the skills we consider to be fundamental [to preventing VAWG] are empathy, the ability to manage conflict, the topic of anger management is very important, and above all self-reflection” (Expert 3)

Having the motivation and ability to communicate in a healthy way in their lives is a key way that men can be active, conscious allies in their day-to-day interactions. Additionally, we theorize that building healthy communication skills may increase men's efficacy as allies more broadly. Firstly, learning these skills may enable men to better recognize in other people the more subtle forms of violence that can develop

into physical violence in themselves and others. It may also allow them to better navigate difficult situations with other men when de-escalating violence. It may prompt them to become advocates for other men to participate in similar programs and normalize their involvement. And finally, they may be able to pass these skills on to others in their life, such as their children, family members, and friends.

Behavior rehearsal involves giving couples the opportunity to practice the skills they have learned in a roleplay or gamified scenario, ideally with supervision. As one interviewee, who had taken part in an anti-violence program, identified:

“Sometimes people study for the exam when they should really be studying to learn, so it’s like you read it and ‘that’s that, I won’t look at it again; if we don’t put it into practice, it’s going to be in vain” (Interviewee 5).

Research shows that decision-making is poorer and relies more on heuristics when in a heightened emotional state.¹²⁰ Rehearsal strategies attempt to counteract this - by embedding behaviors and habit forming, they help couples to avoid returning to negative communication strategies when in a ‘hot’ emotional state.

Behavior shaping and rehearsal is a core component of many **Behavioral Couples Therapy (BCT)** programs¹²¹ and has been applied in several successful programs to prevent VAWG.¹²² For example, as part of the *Indashyikirwa* program, based in Rwanda (described in the community section below), couples were given ‘take home’ activities after each session to apply what they had learned.¹²³ Further examples include the Premarital Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP). PREP is a US-based intervention that focuses on teaching couples skills designed to promote effective conflict management. In multiple RCTs, PREP has been shown to have long-lasting effects on rates of physical and psychological violence in relationships.¹²⁴

Practitioner tip #9

Teaching men skills related to healthy communication, such as conflict resolution and emotional regulation, can help them be better allies. Providing opportunities for behavior rehearsal in a supervised setting can contribute to embedding these skills, so they are ready to be used in more complicated or emotionally challenging situations.

5.2.7. Prompt men to commit to equitable relationships

A **commitment device** is a tool used to self-impose restrictions on one's future behavior. Commitment contracts are a version of this technique in which an individual signs a written document committing to doing - or not doing - a specific action. Some successful couples therapy or skills-building programs have used informal contracts as a commitment device.¹²⁵ This technique has also been effective across a range of contexts, from smoking cessation¹²⁶ and saving money¹²⁷ to reducing procrastination.¹²⁸

In the context of relationship interventions, these commitment contracts are often called "no-harm contracts." In these contracts, individuals or couples agree not to harm one another in any way for the duration of the program. This technique can be considered controversial if a couple is high-risk or violence occurs in the relationship¹²⁹. However, in our context, commitment contracts should go beyond no-harm and serve more as a public declaration of allyship and a moral commitment to upholding equitable, supportive values in the relationship. In a non-relationship context, there are many examples of public commitment to allyship, such as the "no 'manels' pledge". This campaign encouraged organisations to commit to including at least one woman in all panel discussions, and was supported by multiple sector-leading organizations.

This technique was referenced by some of the interviewees in the qualitative enquiry. One participant gave an example of how he had used it in his personal life, recounting:

"I yelled at a female friend because I was annoyed that she had arrived late. Later, when I had calmed down, I asked her if I could talk to her about what had happened, she said yes, and I said, "You know what? I'm scared that I might lose something important to me - your friendship - because I yelled at you, and so I'm promising not to yell at you again" (Interviewee 2)

An expert interviewee reported the success of using commitments and planning:

"In the group work, we include a tool called "my equality plan," and after that session, 'what would you add today,' three ideas... how to not exercise violence or how to strengthen your connections in the coming week, right? "Well, I'm going to listen to my partner more" "And how are you going to do that?" "Okay, well, I'm going to put some time aside to spend with her." We help them to refine it nicely."

“Another tool we use comes from “Education for peace,” and it’s “My love and good treatment contract.” What can I do? Something nice for me, for my partner, for my family, or for my friends, depending on the context. They’re little tips that anyone can take part in and, regardless, we can work on them together as a group to make them effective actions.” (Both Expert 5)

Commitment devices can be designed to be especially effective by incorporating other behavioral insights. For example, setting near-term, achievable goals at the start of a longer-term plan, e.g. ‘I will take the kids to school one day this week’, as part of a broader commitment to supporting more with childcare tasks, can help create a sense of progress and achievement which motivates the user to continue. This phenomenon is known as the Goal Gradient Hypothesis.¹³⁰ Other suggested modifications include leveraging social networks and incorporating feedback mechanisms to reward positive and penalize negative behavior.¹³¹

Practitioner tip #10

VAWG practitioners can use devices such as commitment contracts to encourage private or public adherence to equitable relationships. Since this entails not a one off behavior, but a series of ongoing behaviors, pairing a commitment device with other behavioral motivators such as rewards and social feedback can make them especially effective.

Helping men become better fathers

Men can be important allies in preventing VAWG through their role as fathers. A father is a powerful influence in a child’s life, and the explicit and implicit messages he conveys about violence can have a lasting impact. Other factors, such as providing nurturing care, modeling and teaching socio-emotional skills, and instilling beliefs about power and gender equality, are ways that fathers can contribute to their children’s lives that may be protective against both perpetration and victimization of VAWG in their future relationships. A child’s exposure to IPV can raise the risk of subsequent girls’ victimization and perpetration in boys, as can exposure to violence against children (VAC).¹³² As such, allyship work that may also function as IPV prevention, and strategies to reduce or prevent violent discipline, can contribute to breaking this cycle of intergenerational violence.¹³³

There is some evidence to suggest that fatherhood, and the transition into this stage in life, could be a powerful and unique opportunity to engage with men on the subject of prevention of VAWG, due to changes in attitudes that can accompany significant life-course events, described in section 4.2 as the fresh start effect.¹³⁴ This phenomenon was referenced by one interviewee, who noted:

"I see it especially with fathers of girls, young people, adolescent girls; they have that kind of transition, and they see the issue of machismo from another perspective, from that of a father, and that's important too" (Interviewee 7).

5.2.8. Use planning interventions and reminders to encourage equitable division of child-rearing and domestic tasks

Equitable participation in domestic tasks, including child-rearing, is an important way for men to model healthy relationships, participate in their children's development, and support their female partners. However, patriarchal gender norms often assign responsibility for these tasks to mothers and women. In LAC, it is estimated that women are still responsible for around 80% of household chores.¹³⁵

Many of the men interviewed acknowledged the household as a key space for men to enact their allyship through behavioral and attitudinal changes. Additional insights provided by interviewees included an emphasis on the **framing** of men's participation in domestic tasks. Framing effects describe how changes in the way a message is worded or presented can affect how it is received.¹³⁶ In this case, interviewees emphasized that changes in the way participating in housework is framed were necessary for long-term attitudes; rather than simply encouraging men to take up housework as a "helping" behavior, they reiterated the importance of men understanding that domestic tasks are a joint responsibility. As one interviewee put it:

"I make a distinction here between 'taking part' and 'these are my obligations too,' which is different to saying 'I'm going to support my partner,' which is like saying 'it's your job, but I'm helping you'" (Interviewee 2).

However, another interviewee noted that attitudinal changes must go hand-in-hand with behavioral changes so that they are not perceived as empty promises:

“When we ask the partners, “Why are you annoyed by these changes in your partner?”, they’ll say, “Well, because he doesn’t do anything around the house, he just tells me things are different now, that now he’s egalitarian, now he’s respectful and democratic, but he doesn’t do anything concrete in the house.” So, one of the problems we’ve observed is that it’s easier to establish a discourse than practical changes” (Expert 9)

Program P and REAL Fathers are examples of programs that encourage equitable partnerships.^{137 138} Both encourage shared decision-making, collaborative problem-solving, and communication skills between male and female caregivers, contributing to more gender-equitable relationships. Program P facilitates group discussions and guides parents to question restrictive gender norms that negatively affect their health, their relationships, and their children’s opportunities in life.¹³⁹ A 2008 RCT evaluating Program P in Rwanda showed that almost two years after participating in the program, men were nearly half as likely to use violence against their female partners and spend almost one hour more per day doing household chores.¹⁴⁰

Commitment contracts and planning interventions are mechanisms that can increase the efficacy of these interventions. Studies have shown that even couples that intend to divide household and caregiving tasks equally tend to default to mothers doing more than fathers in practice.¹⁴¹ This is reflective of a broader behavioral phenomenon; in general, people are poor at predicting the future and often do not follow through with a behavior even if they intend to (known as the intention-action gap).¹⁴² **Planning interventions** respond to this problem; by encouraging parents to make an early plan, evidence shows that they will be more likely to stick to their intended behaviors in practice.¹⁴³

Planning interventions can be enhanced if plans turn into commitments, and they are reinforced with reminders and feedback loops. For example, the Parents and Children Together (PACT) Intervention increased the number of minutes parents spent reading to their children by combining **commitment devices, reminders, and social rewards**.¹⁴⁴ Participants in the treatment group spent almost twice the time reading with their children as parents in the control group.

Practitioner tip #11

VAWG practitioners can promote a more equitable distribution of child-rearing and household work by helping families develop concrete plans and reinforcing them through commitments, reminders, and rewards.

5.2.9. Motivate fathers to have an active role in the lives of their children by making the consequences of their actions salient and showing them their progress

Showing people the impact of their actions, both positive and negative, has been repeatedly shown to be a strong motivator for prosocial behavior.¹⁴⁵ Although it has not been evaluated as a standalone intervention in a parenting context, informing parents about the impact of their behavior on their children has been used as a technique in several successful parenting interventions.

The REAL Fathers program in Uganda and in Rwanda used fatherhood as an entry point for discussions about violence and, in particular, the impact it has on children.¹⁴⁶ For example, one session involves a perspective-taking exercise in which fathers learn about the way their children feel when their parents communicate negatively, as well as about the long-term effects of this on children. In another exercise called “Things your child needs to hear you say,” fathers are encouraged to use affirmative words to build their children’s self-esteem¹⁴⁷. An RCT found that participants in the REAL Fathers program self-reported decreased harsh discipline of young children; decreased IPV perpetration; increased positive parenting practices; increased parent-child interactions; and increased use of family planning.¹⁴⁸

Many of the men we spoke to, both experts and program participants, mentioned the importance of understanding the positive and negative consequences of their actions as a motivator for men to change. This was especially relevant in the context of fatherhood. One man identified this realization as one of the most transformative aspects of participating in an anti-violence program, stating:

“I liked the topic about costs and consequences and effects because often we are self-centered and we don’t think about the repercussions, the impact that our actions have on our environment with children, partners, parents and friends” (Interviewee 3).

Another interviewee, who had participated in an anti-violence program and now acts as a facilitator, identified coming to terms with the consequences of one’s actions as the key factor in men changing their *machista* attitudes. He said:

“Being able to realize the harm you cause, the impact of your actions, of being able to witness that, to witnessing it in others, to be able to support others to understand

that too, to face up to themselves and say, “yes, I did that, and it led to this effect on my children, this effect on my parents, this effect on my partner” and being able to connect that” (Interviewee 1).

It is important to caveat this recommendation by saying survivors of violence should not be asked to personally provide accounts of how these experiences have affected them, as this may risk revictimization. Instead, men can be asked to reflect on their own past behavior, engage in perspective-taking exercises, or consider the evidence from research in the field.

Additionally, **framing** these conversations carefully can allow men to see not only that they can cause great harm but also that they can make a huge positive contribution in the lives of others. Seeing your progress has been found to be a powerful motivation to continue working towards a goal that may at times be challenging.¹⁴⁹

“... in that deconstruction, although there are many losses of power, there are also gains, there are freedoms that are acquired. So, I think it is important to make it visible; I think I could say that there is fertile ground for men to continue advancing in their process ...” (Interviewee 13)

Practitioner tip #12

Showing fathers the impact that their behavior, both positive and negative, can have on their children can be a significant motivator for change. Using research evidence, anecdote, and thought exercises can prompt fathers to adopt new habits while seeing their progress has the potential to help them persevere.

5.2.10. Replace corporal punishment with non-violent discipline and provide rules of thumb to manage children’s behavior

Evidence shows that **substituting a behavior** is more manageable than completely eliminating it¹⁵⁰. This can be a helpful perspective when trying to change parenting behaviors. For example, in the case of conflict de-escalation, several successful relationship-focused interventions have taught the use of timeouts.^{151 152} The qualitative evidence shows that both expert and participant interviewees referred to these techniques as effective. In a timeout strategy, either one or both couples

walk away from a conflict situation and agree to temporarily cease discussing the argument. Additional parameters, such as a responsibility on the part of the partner who instigated the timeout to pick up the discussion later, or an agreed time and place to return to the discussion, are also necessary to ensure the timeout is not used as a means to shut down or avoid attempts at resolution.¹⁵³

Another complementary technique is **rules of thumb**. Rules of thumb - such as always taking a timeout when feeling angry or never raising voices - can be effective in complex situations because of their simplicity, as this reduces the cognitive load in the triggering environment. Something identified by interviewees around parenting was that, as a rule of thumb, parents should make clear to their children that violence is unacceptable in any circumstance.

"We would have to educate the children and make them see that this is not normal. Hitting a girl or hitting a boy is not normal; you shouldn't do those things. From a young age, it is practically said, "you are a man, don't cry," that's not right, "women do nothing but cry" (Interviewee 5)

Two examples of how this has been applied in practice are MaPa (Philippines) and Triple P (US and global), two programs that teach parents to use non-violent discipline methods^{154 155}. These programs each provide rules of thumb and substitution methods to help parents replace spanking with more constructive discipline methods such as "offering positive non-verbal attention through body language, ignoring capricious requests for attention, and redirecting children's attention when they are about to misbehave."¹⁵⁶ A recent RCT of the MaPa program based in the Philippines found a 53% reduction in physical child punishment in the treatment group.¹⁵⁷ Triple P has been evaluated on multiple occasions in various cultural settings and has repeatedly been found to be effective at reducing harsh discipline and child abuse.^{158 159 160}

5.3. Community level

At the community level, behaviorally-informed interventions that challenge community - rather than individual - characteristics, such as norms that perpetuate VAWG have been included. Community level approaches can influence individual behavior by creating

environments that promote positive behaviors or discourage negative ones. In particular, we consider how allyship can be more integrated into spaces where social relationships occur (e.g. neighborhoods, schools, and workspaces). Many of the solutions at the community level are related to changing social norms that legitimize VAWG. These are rooted in the concept of patriarchal masculinity, explained in further detail in the Appendix.

Note that this section focuses heavily on changing community norms, as a way to change individual attitudes and behavior. This contrasts with the rest of this report, which focuses on directly addressing the behavioral barriers that prevent male allyship.

5.3.1. Use influential messengers to connect with men and create spaces for reflection and peer learning

When attempting to challenge embedded societal norms, it can be helpful to consider who is influential and trusted in the target community. Social referents, or socially influential peers whom individuals look to for cues, can be excellent messengers for norms changes.

One example of using respected messengers in practice is the Coaching Boys into Men program. The program is based on the premise that sports coaches are a highly influential messenger among their athletes.¹⁶¹ The program trains coaches to deliver an anti-violence curriculum to their athletes, focusing on boys, that aims to disrupt the link between aggression and masculinity and teach healthy and respectful relationships. An RCT conducted over three years found that participants in the program were more likely to intervene when witnessing violence or harassment and had higher intent to intervene. At a one-year follow-up, participants also reported a lower incidence of violent behaviors.

In interviews with men currently working in VAWG prevention in LAC, the subject of **influential messengers** was raised frequently. One point several interviewees made was that men tend to respond better to this messaging when it comes from other men. Further, men also highlighted the role of influential messengers in creating spaces where men can feel comfortable acknowledging their violent behavior.

"I had the opportunity to do a pilot program here with violent male offenders [...] in general none of them recognized why they were there, but there was one guy who was the biggest, the toughest, the strongest, and he had like the alpha male role there. At some point, something we were doing got to this alpha guy, and he softened, and on the last day [...] he took the floor, and he said, "You know what? It was me who did wrong. I realize now that it was me who did wrong." And when this guy started to get into the discussion, the others started to get into the discussion; when this man gave permission to call it another name, he changed the story for the whole group" (Expert 2)

Additionally, not only speaking to other men but also witnessing their success was noted as a powerful influence on other men.

"The progress in my house, the happiness that I radiate every time I talk to them, every time I speak, I think is louder than words and talking about these issues because they realize that I am successful with my way of thinking; leaving that machista circle has been positive; we are building a life together, and it is working for me, and they are noticing it because words are good, but witnessing the progress of a family that thinks this way is unique." (Interviewee 11)

5.3.2. Engage community leaders to change social norms

Influential social referents can also impact entire communities. Often, discussions begin in small groups but expand through community outreach to achieve the critical mass that helps bring about norm change. Sometimes this happens naturally, but it has also been deliberately leveraged by several programs; often, these influential peers are selected and trained as a way of disseminating behavior change among target groups. Notably, when a norm exists because it is helpful to a subset of influential people, engaging those in power is not only beneficial in changing that norm, it is required.

An example of how influential social referents can be engaged from the qualitative work is religious leaders.

"It's a controversial topic, but religion and ideology are some of the biggest barriers that I have come up against, with community leaders who are leaders in their churches. Suppose we start talking about gender equity, equality, decision-making; they would say, "the woman born from the rib of the man, and in the Bible it says that she has to be directly tied to her husband." It's a barrier I've faced, and it's difficult, it's a complicated barrier, and since people spend time being educated in churches, it's complicated to change these people's way of thinking" (Interviewee 11)

"Since 2019, we've been working with faith leaders, men who work in faith-based organizations and some ecclesiastical institutions, because their use of religious discourse - we've been saying it from the start because we are also a faith-based organization - if we don't manage to dismantle these sacred cultural scripts, we won't get very far, because what we build up in social spaces, religious discourse can knock down with a feather. They can disqualify or delegitimize a lot of what we're suggesting" (Expert 6)

Leveraging the influence and social capital of community leaders such as faith leaders can have a significant impact on a program's success. For example, *SASA!* is a **community mobilization** intervention aimed at changing norms around the acceptability of intimate partner violence¹⁶². As part of the program, community activists are trained to facilitate discussions, activities, and advocacy focused on relationships between men and women and how power can be misused. These activists first engaged their friends and families and then expanded outwards through public events, door-to-door conversations, posters, and soap operas. The results of an RCT showed *SASA!* was associated with reported lower levels of social acceptance of IPV, higher acceptance of the belief that women can refuse sex, lower levels of physical and sexual IPV in the past year, and higher levels of belief that IPV would garner a community response, on a survey conducted four years after it began.¹⁶³ *Indashyikirwa*, a program implemented in Rwanda, builds on the *SASA!* curriculum and has shown similarly positive results.¹⁶⁴ *IMAGE* is another example of a program that uses peer leaders to enable community mobilization and which has been found to positively shape survey-reported views on women's empowerment, IPV, and HIV.¹⁶⁵

In LAC, one component of Instituto Promundo's *Program H*¹⁶⁶ in Brazil consisted of community workshops and campaigns for young men ages 14-25. For six months, participants attended fourteen 2-hour weekly sessions. Impact evaluations found

that these community workshops and campaigns increased participants' support for equitable gender attitudes, a decrease in (self-reported) sexually transmitted infection cases and increased use of condoms.¹⁶⁷

Practitioner tip #13

Practitioners can mobilize communities by engaging and training influential community figures, such as religious leaders. These figures can then take an active role in engaging other community members in the further dissemination of the target messaging and behaviors.

5.3.3. Use edutainment to promote positive role models

Educational entertainment (or edutainment) through channels such as radio or comics can promote desirable social norms. Combining role modelling - characters acting in positive ways to offer concrete examples of good and bad behavior - and an entertaining story can help catalyze positive behavior.

In South Africa, one season of the television series *Soul City* focused on promoting social norms against violence (e.g., encouraging bystanders to act). An evaluation found exposure to *Soul City* increased calls to a helpline, knowledge about violence and intervening against violence. *Sexto Sentido* in Nicaragua is another example of successful edutainment intervention.^{168 169} The telenovela was broadcast on commercial and local stations and depicted complex topics like sexuality, sexual harassment and abuse, coercion in teen relationships, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking. An evaluation of the program found that participants scored better on the index of gender attitudes and on stigmatizing attitudes. In Brazil, edutainment also reduced teenage pregnancies, especially among women of low socioeconomic status,¹⁷⁰ and led to the improvement of gender norms and girls' school enrollment in India.¹⁷¹ A systematic review of edutainment interventions found a significant effect on health behaviors, depending on the exposure period.¹⁷²

The use of edutainment, or media campaigns and messaging more generally, emerged in our qualitative findings. For example, one interviewee spoke of the opportunities and challenges of the method, saying:

"We work a lot with the strategy of 'edutainment.' We create TV series with content about preventing machista violence, content with diverse families, about paternity,

etc. We have two series, one called “Solo para machos” and another one called “Hombres,” which are on the CISTAC Facebook channel because it’s complicated to get on TV [...] it has to generate viewers, you have to do publicity, you have to respond to mass consumerism” (Expert 9)

Another interviewee touched on the possible uses of popular media in his local context:

“For example, if you are going to do a campaign, you could create a message in a local language [...] and put it on community radio because community radio is listened to by all communities. That way, you make sure that your message will be broadcast frequently, and I think it is one of the mediums where many key messages can be included that isn’t so expensive. As I told you, my song [a reggaeton song produced as part of an anti-violence campaign], for example, is being played at the national level, but also in communities, in the municipalities, so I do think this type of communication is a good one” (Interviewee 11)

Practitioner tip #14

Media can be a powerful mechanism to reach large proportions of a target community. Edutainment, entertainment with an educational message, can influence attitudes and behaviors, especially through role modeling. Practitioners can use edutainment interventions to model the desired behaviors and attitudes for men to have around allyship.

5.4. Societal level

At the structural level, behavioral interventions that create a climate where violence is discouraged and allyship is encouraged are presented. Important factors at this level include health, economic, educational, and social policies that help maintain economic or social inequalities between groups in a society.¹⁷³ Other risk factors for violence and barriers to demonstrating allyship at this level include weak legal systems, armed conflict, political instability, and social and cultural norms (discussed in more depth in the community section above).¹⁷⁴ While laws and regulations are not enough to change

behavior, they are often necessary to enable change. This section goes beyond allyship and focuses on power structures that may have the ability to leverage their influence to address the structural factors that contribute to VAWG.

5.4.1. Encourage organizations to commit to VAWG prevention

As discussed in Section 5.2, **public commitments** are a common and effective strategy used to reduce traditional or prevalent social practices. The greater the cost of breaking a commitment, the more likely people will stick to it.¹⁷⁵ At an organizational level, commitments can be used to publicly condemn violence and commit to VAWG prevention and allyship.

However, it is not enough for organizations to commit to vague public statements around VAWG prevention. Instead, organizational commitments should be concrete and actionable. Otherwise, a tendency known as **moral licensing**, by which people can tap into good deeds they have done in the past to preserve their positive self-image in the face of bad behavior, can take place.¹⁷⁶ This may generate a complacent “we are already doing enough” mentality. For example, there is evidence that diversity training can backfire, as it may lead organizations to believe they have already addressed the problem.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, one study found that when people establish their lack of racial prejudice, they are more likely to make discriminatory decisions.¹⁷⁸

There should also be a mechanism to hold organizations **accountable**. People are usually more likely to engage in positive behaviors when they think that they are being observed by others and believe those behaviors may be reputation-enhancing.¹⁷⁹ For allyship, transparency about gender inequities (for example, in workplaces, about the gender pay gap, the proportion of women in leadership positions, or reports of sexual harassment) can put pressure on organizations to address structural factors that contribute to VAWG. A study in a U.S. company found that introducing transparency and accountability around performance-based rewards contributed to closing the gap in monetary rewards between U.S.-born white men and women, ethnic minorities, and non-U.S.-born employees.¹⁸⁰

Practitioner tip #15

VAWG prevention practitioners could develop organizational commitment toolkits. These commitment toolkits could include clear and concrete templates and examples, along with strategies for accountability.

5.4.2. Allocate organizational resources to VAWG prevention and share power by default

Having women in decision-making roles and allocating resources to prevent VAWG and broader gender equality is key to creating an enabling environment for protection and allyship.¹⁸¹ Creating **defaults** in funding for VAWG prevention and gender equality can help when there are many competing priorities and the potential for changes in organizational leadership. Similarly, defaults can be used to mandate the representation of female decision-makers. Because defaults do not require any effort on those in mandatory or decision-making positions, they can be a simple but powerful tool when there is typically inaction¹⁸² (e.g., not allocating funding to VAWG prevention or not nominating women to leadership positions). This type of automatic allocation of resources and power shows support for VAWG prevention and, through the power of inertia, can help those making decisions in public and private sectors (often men) take sustained action to prevent VAWG and promote gender equality.

A seminal study in India found that the introduction of gender quotas across Indian village councils not only weakened gender stereotypes, leading residents to see women as more effective leaders, but also made it more likely that villages who had been exposed to a female leader would elect women again.¹⁸³ Another study examined the consequences of mandated female representation and found that Indian village councils that included women invested more in solutions that addressed women's concerns (e.g., drinking water and roads in West Bengal and drinking water in Rajasthan).¹⁸⁴ This suggests that gender does influence policy decisions; in this case, because women were part of the village council, decisions better-reflected women's preferences.

Practitioner tip #16

Practitioners working to engage men in VAWG prevention could collaborate with other organizations to advocate for defaulting women representation in leadership roles (whether it is in public, private, or civil society organizations), as well as for allocating funds to VAWG prevention and gender equality each year.

5.4.3. Make reporting within institutions easy and safe

In the workplace and in educational institutions, sexual harassment is often underreported both by those harassed or bystanders. This perpetuates gender inequality and VAWG by hiding the full extent of sexual harassment, not holding perpetrators and leadership accountable, and allowing harassment to occur without consequence. A solution to this is to make reporting instances of sexual harassment easy and safe. For example, organizations could:

- Provide clear and straightforward signposting to reporting channels,
- Define “harassment,”
- Offer different options for reporting (formal Human Resources, informal peer routes, or online options),¹⁸⁵
- Reframe reporting, so it is clear that witnesses of sexual harassment - especially men - are also responsible for reporting, and
- Simplify the filing process and limit the information requested.¹⁸⁶

5.4.4. Build systems to mitigate the impact of decision-makers gender biases

Men in positions of power are affected by heuristics and biases. These biases may lead them to take actions that run counter to VAWG prevention and gender equality more generally. Organizations should aim to set up mechanisms to mitigate the extent to which these biases negatively impact decision-making.¹⁸⁷

One of the factors that organizations aiming to prevent VAWG should be aware of is **attention cascades**¹⁸⁸ or the fact that certain policy issues are at times more salient to decision-makers, even if the importance or the urgency of the issue has not changed. If current events bring an issue to the top of the policy agenda, decision-makers may jump to solutions that come to mind easily, even if they may have overlooked the same problems when they were slowly building up.

For example, very salient cases of VAWG often drive reforms to apply harsher sanctions to perpetrators, such as longer prison terms - a relatively easy to implement solution, as opposed to pursuing effective prosecution or longer-term interventions to change social norms. This is the case even when there is evidence that incarceration does not only not deter VAWG but actually increases the likelihood that an incarcerated offender perpetrates VAWG in the future.¹⁸⁹ Organizations working with men to prevent VAWG should invest in developing evidence-based programming so that when windows of opportunity arise, they are ready to provide rigorous solutions to pressing policy issues. Further, they could establish safeguards, so that when decision-makers need to adopt measures fast in the face of pressing issues, they are required by default to provide a minimum threshold of supporting evidence for the policy solution proposed.

Furthermore, both organizations and individual men in positions of power should be wary of dynamics that prevent them from acknowledging that others may not share their views. **Group reinforcement**¹⁹⁰ refers to the phenomenon by which people publicly agree to the majority's opinion, even when they privately think it is wrong. This may lead women or ally-minded men to refrain from voicing their views on issues related to VAWG. On the other hand, the **illusion of similarity**¹⁹¹ may lead men in power to overestimate the proportion of the population that shares their opinion or the extent to which they care about the same policy issues. One of the best ways to counteract these tendencies is to create routes so that a diverse set of views can feed into the policy and decision-making process.

Finally, **optimism bias**¹⁹² refers to people's tendency to overestimate their abilities and the likelihood that their initiative will succeed. This also applies to men with the power to address structural inequalities as well as to organizations. They may perceive that the actions they are implementing will be successful at preventing VAWG and promoting gender equality more broadly. This may exacerbate one of the barriers described in section 4.2. for men to take action to prevent VAWG - that perception equality has already been achieved.

Organizations working to prevent VAWG should introduce processes to mitigate optimism bias, particularly during planning phases. One such mechanism is pre-mortems. In a pre-mortem, people imagine that a project fails and then think about what could have gone wrong. For example, if an organization introduces a new system for reporting sexual harassment, a useful exercise for decision-makers might be to put themselves in the situation that a few months later no one has reported harassment and ask themselves why.

Practitioner tip #17

VAWG prevention practitioners should advocate establishing mechanisms that mitigate the impact of decision-maker's biases, particularly of men in positions of power. This may entail creating new processes and tools. For example, organizations may introduce incentives to develop VAWG prevention solutions, even when it is not a priority in the public agenda; or mandate public consultations around VAWG policies. Other tools that may help mitigate decision-makers' gender biases include surveys to gather input from different stakeholders or discussion guides to conduct pre-mortems of VAWG prevention projects.

6. Conclusion

Over the past two decades, numerous organizations working to prevent VAWG in Latin America have incorporated the involvement of men and boys as a core component of their philosophy and programming.^{193 194} Yet, there is still much unknown about how to engage men effectively and in a way that aligns with the broader agenda of promoting gender equality. In particular, a preoccupation that permeates this report is how men can be prompted to not just talk the talk but walk the walk. Behavioral science can help reach that goal.

Throughout this report, there are 22 recommendations to apply behavioral science to engage men in VAWG prevention in LAC. The recommendations address barriers and enablers along four levels of the socio-ecological model: Individual, relationships, community, and structural.

Among the proposed recommendations, there are interventions specific to an individual man's life experience or and his inter/personal relationships - for example, leveraging milestones such as moving cities or becoming a father to form new habits or re-framing housework as doing one's fair share rather than helping out. Of particular importance, considering the extent to which gender inequities are shaped by the communities and structures we live in, recommendations to change community norms are included- for example, by using influential messengers. Finally, there are recommendations aimed to mitigate structural drives of VAWG, such as an unequal distribution of power along gender lines in organizations - for instance, through the use of quotas for leadership positions.

As in any nascent field, there is much work to be done to turn these ideas into practice. The ideas in this report should be rigorously evaluated to understand their impact and contribute to the scarce evidence on the effectiveness of VAWG prevention programming involving men.

This report aims to inspire and support practitioners working with men in the region to increase the impact of their efforts. This includes organizations that may not identify as "VAWG practitioners" (from schools to workplaces or civic associations) but may find these strategies helpful to promote behavioral change, transform gender stereotypes and contribute to more equal and peaceful societies.

6.1. Appendix

6.1.1. Masculinity definitions

The term “**masculinity**” refers to the socially constructed notion of what it means to be a man.¹⁹⁵ Masculinities are the range of roles, behaviors, and attributes that are associated with maleness and considered appropriate for boys and men in a given society. Masculinities are expressed personally (in behavior), culturally (in images and stories), and institutionally (in policies and practices). Masculinities are defined socially, historically, and politically rather than being biologically driven. Although usually associated with boys and men, masculinity can also be expressed by and linked to women, girls, and people with other gender identities.

The **theory of hegemonic masculinity** posits that there are multiple notions of masculinity within a society and that male control over women is often a component of the most widespread and socially-acceptable version of manhood.^{196 197 198}

Patriarchal masculinities are those ideas about and practices of masculinity that emphasize the superiority of masculinity over femininity and the authority of men over women. Ideas and practices of patriarchal masculinities sustain gender inequalities. Violence against girls and women is maintained by ideas and practices of patriarchal masculinities. Stereotypical traits of patriarchal masculinity include aggressiveness, individualism, assertiveness, and dominance^{199 200 201 202}, while traits of femininity are more community-oriented including warmth, nurturance, affection, and compassion.^{203 204 205}

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