

## Men Can Be Allies: Men's Involvement in Ending Domestic Violence in Mumbai

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### Introduction

In 1993 a group of men in Mumbai initiated a movement to promote anti domestic violence. This group called themselves MAVA (Men Against Violence and Abuse). MAVA is the first pro-feminist men's movement in India. (Wagle 2003)

The establishment of MAVA in India is very important in the context of the anti domestic violence movement in Asia. This is an interesting phenomenon because in the Asian context, men have been excluded from initiatives aimed at reducing violent behavior. Romeo B. Lee who studied Filipino men's roles in domestic violence found that none of the 20 domestic violence interventions in the Philippines was intended for men (Lee 2004). Furthermore, men were not regarded as potential partners in the efforts to eradicate domestic violence.

Until recently, major resources for domestic violence elimination programs had been allocated solely for intervention activities toward women victims of violence as well as for preventive actions; they are used either in research programs or direct treatment for women victims of violence. Men were largely left out of these activities because men are seen merely as perpetrators. Researchers do not interview them, donors do not fund programs for them, and activists do not target them (International Research on Women 2002).

Therefore, it is important to carry out a research concerning men, masculinity and the possible involvement of men in ending violence against women. This study wants to enrich previous studies on violence against women and to identify best practices involving men in ending domestic violence.

### Methodological Framework

The study has three objectives:

- To explore men's views on masculinity, domestic violence and their possible role in ending domestic violence
- To explore the views of male activists on the role, challenge and future development of a men's involvement program in ending domestic violence.
- To explore women's views on a men's involvement program in ending domestic violence.

A qualitative inquiry was employed in this study. Data were gathered through participatory observation, in depth interviews, group interviews and focus group discussions. A thematic analysis was used in analyzing the data.

Participatory observation was done between August and February 2005. The researcher was involved in several activities related to domestic violence in Mumbai. The activities were conducted by several women's NGOs and other parties in Mumbai which are concerned with domestic violence and violence against women in general. The activities consist of seminars, workshops, study circles, meetings and rallies/marches.

One focus group discussion with a group of men was conducted in an industrial area located in the sub-district of Palghar, about 100 km from downtown Mumbai. Participants of the FGD were recruited through a referral peer group. Two criteria were used in screening the participants. The first was that they must be married men, and the second was that they must have been married for more than one year. Those criteria were chosen to ensure that the participants have enough experience in dealing with family matters such as their relationship with their wives and children.

A group interview with two men with domestic violence history was also conducted in Daravi, the biggest slum area in Mumbai. They were recruited from the clients of a women's NGO which has a domestic violence intervention program in Daravi.

In depth interviews were conducted with five male activists and twelve women. The women participants consist of ten women activists and two women survivors of domestic violence. The women activist participants were recruited from six women's organizations in Mumbai. The male activist participants were recruited from three men's groups in Mumbai.

The FGDs and interviews (group interviews and in depth interviews) were recorded using a digital recorder and were transcribed verbatim. The FGDs with the group of men, the group interview with the abusive husbands, and in-depth interviews with women survivors of violence were conducted in the local languages (Marathi and Hindi). Trained local people helped the researcher in interviewing the informants. A professional translator was employed to translate the transcriptions from the local languages into English. Transcripts were organized according to the topics that emerged. A thematic analysis was employed in the interpretation of the data.

**Table of Qualitative data collection design**

Method	Men (general)	Abusive Men	Men Activist	Women Activist	Women Survivor of Violence	Total
Focus Group Discussion	10					10
Group Interview		2				2
In-depth Interview			5	10	2	17
Total	10	2	5	10	2	29

## Results

Four themes emerged from the data, namely: masculinity, domestic violence, role of men's groups in ending domestic violence in Mumbai, and women's response to men's involvement in ending domestic violence.

### Masculinity

For the respondents, being a man means having more freedom than a woman because men have wider space to move (inside or outside house). As men, they are free to go anywhere and at any time they want. As men they can make any decision at any time for themselves and others but at the same time men have to shoulder most of the responsibility in the family.

Tradition has given more freedom to men, compared to women. So as a man I can enjoy my freedom. I can go anywhere and do anything. If I were a woman I would not have this freedom. But on the other hand, I would have been spared of carrying all the responsibility for the family.

As husbands and/or fathers, men have the responsibility to fulfill all the family's needs--physical needs such as housing, clothing and food, or financial security such as providing money for the children's education. For some participants, physical and financial security is not enough; they argued that men must also provide emotional support for their wives.

There is a consensus among the discussants that the role of men is to earn money. Men will only handle household tasks which need physical strength such as moving heavy objects while women will be responsible for most of the household tasks such as looking after the children, cleaning the house and preparing the food.

...If there is some nail to be fixed or some heavy object is to be moved, naturally the woman cannot do it and a man should take care of such things....

Another responsibility of men as fathers is to teach their sons social values such as how to respect others and how to be a great man. Men will take over the women's responsibility to look after the children only when she can no longer control them.

Discussants felt that as men, they enjoy a lot of privileges and are respected by society. They would not have enjoyed all those benefits if they were born women.

I would say that I get more respect being a man. If a lady meets someone, the first question asked her is "whose wife are you"? So you see, a man gets more respect. I do not think I have any drawbacks being a man.

One of the topics in the FGD is marriage. For the participants, marriage is the accepted norm in society through which one can enjoy sex. Marriage is a manifestation of being complete

and men who are not married are considered incomplete. Furthermore, part of manliness is the capability to have children. Having children fulfills the responsibility of men to continue civilization.

A man has the responsibility to continue civilization. Reproducing is something which is managed for the society by marriage and family. Seen that way, marriage is also a duty.

There are different opinions among discussants regarding working women. Some discussants thought that the main role or duty of women is to work within the household. If the wife works outside the house to earn money, she cannot fulfill her household duties 100 percent. According to participants, women who work cause tension in the family because their dealings with other men usually result in misunderstandings between them and their husbands. They are also believed to be susceptible to infidelity.

I do not approve of women working outside the house. I believe that a woman who works outside the house is more susceptible to infidelity.

Some discussants posited that the family's material needs have increased so that women also should work outside the house to help support the family. But when they were asked what work is appropriate for women, most of them stressed that women may be allowed to work only in the fields, something which is accepted by society. Working as a doctor, teacher or clerk is also acceptable. Most of them oppose the idea of women working in bars as dancers because this kind of work destroys the dignity of women; according to social norms, it is also unethical work.

### Domestic Violence

The discussants observed that domestic violence is common in the community. The most common form of domestic violence is mental abuse. According to the discussants, domestic violence happens because men or husbands are very short-tempered and society is dominated by men.

Physical abuse is also common in the community. According to the participants, sometime physical abuse such as beating is necessary for the husband to make the wife agree with him. "If your wife does not listen to you, she should be beaten".

Another form of domestic violence cited by the participants is sexual abuse. According to them, sexual violence usually happens because many men think of marriage only in terms of physical pleasure. When a man wants to have sex and his wife is not ready, he will force his wife to have sex.

Many men think of marriage only in terms of physical pleasure. If a man wants to have physical pleasure but the wife is not ready, she is raped and that too is an abuse.

There was a participant who criticized the husband who uses violence to resolve conflicts in the family. He argued that violence is not a solution. Furthermore, according to him, a husband usually resorts to violence when asking money from his wife for alcohol. “I think if the husband demands money for wine, he should be beaten up”.

The participants agreed that domestic violence has a serious effect on the family, either short term or long term. Domestic violence will lead to ill health for the wife, children and even the husband himself. The participants also observed that in most cases husbands are not aware of the consequences of domestic violence.

They agreed that domestic violence can be stopped or resolved. There are at least two important factors that will help stop domestic violence: a couple’s high level of maturity and a spouse’s willingness to give up first. One participant argued that his willingness to stop and say sorry to his wife has significant contribution to peaceful conflict settlement.

Opinion on the involvement of an outside agency varies among participants. Some of them argued that a conflict within the family must be settled in the family. Only close relatives can mediate family conflicts. Other participants argued that a third party such as close friends can be quite helpful in resolving family conflicts.

### **Challenges and Roles of Men’s Group in ending Domestic Violence in Mumbai**

The women’s movement in Mumbai has contributed toward the initiation of men’s movement against domestic violence. All the men activists in this study have strong ties to the women’s movement.

There are various reasons why men have initiated a men’s group or worked with men. According to their reflection on their past experiences, women’s organizations worked only with women victims of violence, and did not include any program for men.

A male activist who worked on the issue of men’s involvement in the reproductive health (RH) program revealed that the program focuses only on women’s RH issues. There is hardly anything on men’s position and their relationship with their wives, which significantly influence women’s reproductive health. This situation convinced him to work with men and focus on examining male power.

For this male activist, it was not easy to work with men. In the beginning, there were a lot of negative responses, especially from the men and their family (parents in particular). Some women’s groups also responded with doubt and skepticism.

...we started eleven years ago. People did not see it as an important issue and often humiliated us, taunted us. What is this bunch of men doing? They are jobless, they don’t work and have nothing better to do. Even now, we get comments from certain sectors of society that are hurtful and humiliating....

Lack of funding sources arose as a crucial issue among the men's groups in Mumbai. Most of the men's groups surveyed in this study use money from personal pockets to run their programs. They felt that funding agencies do not view programs for men as important. In fact, office space has become a big constraint for the men's group. One group finally got their office space after ten years of struggle, and another group runs its programs from a member's house.

One of the main ways of involving men in the anti-domestic violence movement is the creation of a venue where men can open up and express their feelings, fears and anxieties. At the same time, this is where men can question their power, consequently helping them release it and transforming it into responsible behavior.

Creating a "non-threatening" environment for men has become the core principle in building a space for men. Providing a "non-threatening" space means regarding men not only as perpetrators who should be blamed, but also as victims of patriarchy. This space helps men change their mind frame and behavior, thereby making them potential allies in eradicating domestic violence.

Another important issue for the men's groups is taking a political stand on the women's movement. Men's groups must support the women's groups in the latter's endeavor to create an equal relationship between men and women in a society free from violence. Also, they must not take the lead in the women's movement.

There are a lot of strategies pursued by the men's groups in Mumbai to build spaces for men. These include counseling, study circles, various campaigns, group training on gender and masculinity. These strategies are designed to help men open up and to provide a positive image of masculinity as an alternative image to the mainstream image of masculinity which is presented by the media.

### **Women's Response to Men's Involvement in Ending Domestic Violence**

The response of women activists to the men's involvement program in ending violence against women varies from time to time. In the beginning there was doubt among women activists, even skepticism. There is also fear among the women's groups that men will occupy the political space that had been built by them.

Be that as it may, there is consensus among the women who participated in this study that the involvement of men in anti-violence against women is very important.

First, domestic violence is a family dysfunction which leads to a crisis in the family. Involving family members including the husband as perpetrator in domestic violence intervention programs is very important in order to obtain a comprehensive solution.

Second, there is a belief among women activists that everybody, including abusive men, has the capability to change. Thus, a men's program would help men manage their anger, revise their concept of masculinity, and make them understand that violence is a crime that has a negative impact on the family's health.

...as social workers we believe that people can change, have the capacity to change; we want to solve this problem....

Third, domestic violence is a problem between men and women. Without involving men, the effort in eradicating domestic violence is incomplete because it leaves out fifty percent of the population and its success will ultimately be only fifty percent.

Women activists have to involve men in their intervention program. Men's involvement comes in two levels: First, there are those who are involved as professionals, e.g. doctors, male activists, etc. Second, there are those involved in intervention programs. These are the family members (including husbands as perpetrators) and friends who act as a support group for women victims of domestic violence and who are involved in solving domestic violence cases.

There are several strategies by which abusive husbands are included in the intervention programs. Husbands are asked to come to individual and joint meetings. These meetings help a husband handle his temper through psychological exercises such as anger management and make him commit to non-violence through social assurance.

Women activists saw the significant impact of men's involvement programs. They mentioned that by involving male professionals in training programs, violence against women, especially domestic violence, has become the male professional's concern and he can now put a gender perspective into his work.

...after the training, there were a lot of men who have come forward to talk about domestic violence without hesitation. I think that is an impact that the work created. We have male doctors now in two other hospitals who lead the training. And really, there is a different effect when a male doctor stands in front of thirty hospital staff and talks about gender.

However women activists also found a lot of constraints in inviting men, especially abusive husbands, to get involved in solving domestic violence cases. Some of the constraints are: the perception regarding men's superiority, the negative image of women activists or women's organizations among the men, and to some extent the lack of interest among abusive men to attend the intervention programs.

Because of these constraints, women activists have a high expectation of these men's groups in Mumbai. They want to use it to reach the men through the sensitization program on human rights and through a direct service for abusive men such as a counseling program. Furthermore, there is hope that in the future, women's and men's groups will be able to build a referral system that can facilitate handling domestic violence cases in Mumbai.

## Discussion

Early radical feminism stated that a man who is part of the problem should also be part of the solution (Pilcher & Whelehan 2004). The findings in this study are relevant to the previous statement. That men's groups in India can help address the domestic violence issue and promote gender equity in general came from that idea.

Masculinity suggests that being a man, being a father and a husband, make men superior within society and family. In contrast, women have a subordinate position. This view of masculinity also influences the division of labor within the home. The perception of men as the breadwinner in the family allows men to work outside the house. Meanwhile, women are responsible for all household tasks such as preparing food for family members including parents in law, looking after the children and educating them. Men will handle household tasks only when they require physical strength, such as removing heavy things. This seems to prove that men are physically stronger than women.

This study also found that men vary in their opinions regarding women working outside the home. There are men who oppose the idea of women working, but there are also those who accept it. Working outside has given a measure of mobility to women. It seems there is an anxiety among certain groups of men regarding women who work in public areas, because working women will challenge men's dominance in the public sphere as well as in the home (Falludi 2000). Consequently, other studies found that some men tend to use violence to keep their dominance (Dekeseredy & Schwartz 2005). Hence there seems to be a linkage between the anxieties of men about losing their dominance and the occurrence of domestic violence.

Men's opinion that working women are going to be unfaithful to their husbands shows that men also fear losing control over women's sexuality. In the Indian context, one of the men's responsibilities is to control women's sexuality. Controlling women's sexuality is a means to keep the purity of the caste (Cakravarti 2004).

There is a system of socialization in masculinity. Values on masculinity are maintained through socialization within the family in the form of father-son relations. Radhika Chopra, in her study on the formation of masculinity in a Punjabi village, found that masculinity is socialized in the community. Mothers are involved only in the earlier stage of children's development, and once a boy reaches a particular stage, the father takes over and enters as a player, taking the boy out of the home to learn how men work (Chopra, 2004).

As in many others studies on masculinity, no single definition of masculinity might suitably explain the opinions of men, and besides, there is a hierarchy within masculinity itself. Married men--heterosexual married men--are considered as complete men, while unmarried men are considered incomplete. Furthermore, part of manliness is the capability to have children. Men who are unable to have children are considered unmanly. Thus, heterosexual married men, the so-called hegemonic masculinity, are in the topmost position of the gender hierarchy, while unmarried men or gay men, the subordinate masculinity, are in lower position. (Dekeseredy & Schwartz 2005)



The superior position of men at home and in the community triggers an imbalance in the relations between men and women or between husband and wife. This kind of relationship makes the women or wives vulnerable to domestic violence. Asymmetrical relationships between husband and wife have linkage to domestic violence (Dobash & Dobash 2000).

The men in this study recognize that domestic violence has serious impact on all family members, not solely on the wives but also on the men or husbands. There is also the belief that domestic violence can be stopped and that men have an important role in stopping or resolving domestic violence.

### **Importance of the Men's Involvement program**

Feminist theory and the women's movement in their opposition to violence against women have significantly contributed to men's movements opposing violence against women in Mumbai. In the global context, the men's movement or men's consciousness raising efforts also emerged as a response to feminism and women in general (DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2005)

This study reveals that there are three levels of involvement in the programs developed and run by the men's groups in Mumbai. The three levels are the personal, the institutional and the cultural. At the personal level, there is a program for abusive men that helps them change and makes them responsible for their behavior. At the institutional level, an organization is established for men who have committed domestic violence. Here, cultural transformation is addressed through public campaigns and training programs for men on gender and sexuality.

This study recognizes the importance of men's involvement programs. Skepticism to men's involvement has been countered by the fact that it has an obvious positive impact on the community. This recognition is in line with the international concern about men's involvement in women's reproductive health programs. As mentioned in the recommendations of the Cairo Conference (1994) and the Beijing Conference (1995), sexuality, gender relations and human rights significantly affect sexual and reproductive health and that men, because they hold key and powerful positions, are crucial in bringing about changes in women's health status (Lee 1999).

### **Conclusion**

This study reveals that there is a linkage between masculinity and domestic violence. The view that men, as husbands or fathers, are superior to women, as wives or mothers, leads to an asymmetrical relation between the two. An asymmetrical relation between husband and wife makes the wife vulnerable to domestic violence.

This study also reveals that masculinity is a product of socialization either at home or in the wider community. As a product of socialization, masculinity can be changed.

The transformation of masculinity from negative to positive masculinity is possible when three arenas are addressed simultaneously: the personal, institutional and cultural.

Men's groups in Mumbai is an important example of how the transformation of masculinity is being done by building a space for men where they can open up and transform their masculine image into a positive image of masculinity—non-violent, caring, supportive etc. as an alternative reference to being a man in Mumbai.

The final conclusion is that the involvement of men in the effort of ending domestic violence, either at the prevention or intervention level, is very important. However, the impact of men's involvement programs in Asia still needs to be examined. Further research on such topic should be the next agenda for scholars and researchers.

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