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Gender-based violence, such as domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence and abuse do not just happen without causal factors. There is a context - an environment - which allows the attitudes, behaviours and values to take seed and flourish.

Gender-based violence is rooted in firmly entrenched patriarchal values and notions of male superiority, entitlement, domination, use of power and control, seeing women and girls and groups of people (i.e., 2SLGBTQI+, BIPOC folks) as unequal, and in the objectification and exploitation of women and girls. Gender inequalities intersect with factors such as ethnicity, race, age, class, ability, sexual orientation and gender identity creating socially constructed disparities.

Unequal gender norms and expectations which fuel unhealthy masculinities have grown over time, and taken seed in our social landscape, perpetuated through media, attitudes and behaviors of family, friends, co-workers, in our communities' structures. Gender inequality has led to the inequitable access to a host of rights, privileges and freedoms for women, girls and communities impacted by the disparities.

Studies have shown that men who adhere to rigid, traditional masculine gender norms tend to condone and commit higher levels of gender-based violence, while men who are aware of their privilege may be less likely to use control and violence in their relationships.<sup>1</sup> Masculinity also plays a prominent role in violence and hate crimes against gender non-conforming individuals.<sup>2</sup>

A research project, *Male Adolescents' Gender Attitudes and Violence: Implications for Youth Violence Prevention*, surveyed 866 male adolescents (13-19 years), and conducted a literature review, which analyzed the connections among male adolescents' gender attitudes, their experiences of violence/witnessing violence, and the potential predictors of interpersonal violence perpetration, as well as preventive measures. Findings included that sexual harassment, homophobic teasing and bullying behaviours are precursors to partner and sexual violence<sup>3,4</sup> and that men who identify with traditional notions of masculinity (i.e., believe they are entitled to sex and they have a right to control women), are biased towards 2SLGBTQ+ folks and also condone violence/abuse.<sup>5,6,7,8</sup> Further, it found that youth that adhere to attitudes of gender equity reported lower rates of violence perpetration in all aspects of their life, including dating.<sup>9</sup>

Civil society, government and educational partners have an important role to play in advancing healthy masculinities to prevent gender-based violence. At White Ribbon, we have seen increasing demand and interest from a diversity of stakeholders to promote healthy masculinities and redress root causes of gender-based violence, from; youth, educators, parents, and community partners. It is possible to help men and boys see the benefits of fairness, equity, kindness, respect, compassion and emotional intelligence. Key gender-based prevention strategies include:

- Use a gender transformative approach as it has a higher rate of effectiveness.<sup>10</sup>
- Promote healthy relationships to prevent gender-based violence with youth.<sup>11</sup>
- Challenge unhealthy gender and social norms while simultaneously increasing youths' skills in interrupting peers' disrespectful and harmful behaviors.<sup>12</sup>
- Address gender inequity and challenge the social norms that condone violence against women as a key prevention tactic.<sup>13</sup>
- Support the critical analysis of gender norms, challenge homophobia and gender-based harassment, and build skills to question harmful masculine norms and to interrupt disrespectful behaviors.<sup>14</sup>
- Include strength-based messages and campaigns that focus on the positive roles men can play, as they have a significant impact on encouraging men's involvement and help them see they are part of

the solution.<sup>15</sup>

- Utilize a primary prevention approach as it lessens the chances of men and boys using violence, and eliminates the suffering and inequality of women and girls in the first place.<sup>16</sup>
- Encourage men to see their significant role as allies and as engaged fathers to end violence against women and promote gender equality and bystander intervention.<sup>17</sup>
- Employ a spectrum of prevention: strengthen knowledge and skills; promote community education; educate providers; partner with coalitions and networks; change organizational practice and influence policy and legislations.<sup>18</sup>
- Utilize social marketing to create changes in attitudes, behaviours, and social norms in the individual, community and society at large.<sup>19</sup>
- Use long term lifecycle and culturally rooted approaches to deliver primary prevention; to promote healthy masculinities; and to redress the root causes of gender-based violence given the lifelong exposure to stereotypical constructions of masculinities.<sup>20</sup>
- Ensure programming does not perpetuate colonialism and is truly transformative in addressing unequal gendered power relations.

Investing in primary prevention saves lives and stops violence from happening now and in the future. It's the formula for transformative social change. White Ribbon knows how to end gender-based violence. We've been creating new social norms, attitudes and behaviors for 30 years. With great confidence we share these recommendations:

1. Recognize and invest in primary prevention with men and boys, aimed at promoting healthy masculinities and gender equality, and in ending all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination.
2. Invest in ongoing, annualized core funding for organizations like White Ribbon that work to prevent gender-based violence, in addition to the current ongoing support provided to direct service delivery organizations (e.g., hotlines, shelters, counseling services).
3. Use a long-term timeline when developing and funding a National strategy to eradicate the entrenched values, attitudes, behaviors and social norms that perpetuate gender-based violence (similarly to life saving policy measures of: 'if you drink, don't drive'; 'put your cell phones away while driving'; 'buckle up seat belts' and 'install child car seats carefully').
4. Support White Ribbon's efforts to delivery high quality, public education social marketing campaigns and prevention initiatives (e.g., [DayAfterDay](#), [BoysDontCry](#), [Men of Quality](#) and [Uncomposed](#)), as well as our operations and infrastructure to engage men and boys in the primary prevention of violence against women and girls/gender-based violence.
5. Hold male dominated sectors accountable with continued and intensive training and prevention efforts in the Canadian Armed Forces, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and other workplaces that have been harmed by a culture of sexual violence and discrimination.

White Ribbon is world renowned. Our roots grew out of a response to the 1989 Montreal massacre that saw misogyny and hatred rob 14 women of their lives and forever impact our nation. As a Canadian not-for-profit registered charitable organization offering bilingual programming, we engage men and boys in the prevention of gender-based violence by promoting healthy masculinities, gender equity, healthy relationships and transforming social norms, attitudes and behaviors. Our work is based on recognized best practices from around the world. We use a human-rights based, feminist informed, gender-transformative, strength-based approach to engaging men and boys in sustainable change.

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## Endnotes

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