

PositivMasc conference

**“ Young men´s and young women´s
understanding of masculinities and violence
against women”**

October 19-20, 2022

Aims

1. to explore how these discourses influence young people's attitudes, behaviors and responses to violence against women (VAW).
2. to explore individual and societal factors supporting and promoting anti-VAW masculinities discourses.

Methods

- Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with 16 young men, 12 young women, and 12 local stakeholders. In addition, we collected 2 focus group discussions (15 participants each)
- October 2019–March 2020
- A semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions
- Transcribed interviews were analyzed using content analysis
- Informed and voluntary consent, confidentiality guaranteed

Findings from young women's interviews

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- **Theme 1:** Young women prefer caring masculinities more than traditional ones while struggling to reconcile with societal conflicting femininity demands
- **Theme 2:** Types of gender-based violence are fully recognized and rejected yet sexual violence is perceived as hopeless to report and difficult to prove

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- Masculinities: the caring man versus the macho man

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- Norms for women and girls are changing more rapidly than the masculine norms
- Men and masculinity are a narrow concept where men are pressured to act according to the traditional norms
- The ideal man is caring and empowering toward others, as well as being present, vulnerable and reflective

Theme 2. Types of gender-based violence are fully recognized and rejected yet sexual violence is perceived as hopeless to report and difficult to prove

- Gender-based violence is more than physical violence
- Controlling behavior is normalized
- Sexual violence, a game with unwritten rules
- Sexual consent within relationships is a complex undertaking
- Revenge porn is common and difficult to report

Controlling behavior is normalized

- Controlling behavior common among youth
- Controlling behavior in romantic relationships is perpetrated both by women and men, especially controlling your partner's choice of friends both in real life and on social media
- Admitting to being victimized would reveal you as stupid and incapable of choosing the right partner

“Didn’t you understand that this behavior is not ok?”

“How could you have stayed in this relationship for so long, you should have gotten out.”

Sexual violence, a game with unwritten rules

- Norm of men always taking the first step in sexual relationship could explain unwanted touching.

“Of course it has happened to me as well (inappropriate touching) and I feel that people who do it thinks that they are doing something that girls like, that they are showing appreciation – so it is about lack of respect but also misunderstanding.”

Sexual consent within relationships is a complex undertaking

- Sex without lust and sex to keep the house peace perceived as normal events.

“One must compromise in relationships as long as it is not only one of the parties compromising.”

Revenge porn is common and difficult to report

- All participants strongly rejected revenge porn saying it was related to gender power and revenge with the aim to shame the victim, by showing her dirtiness and promiscuous behavior
- Revenge porn was also used as a threat to get the partner to stay in the relationship
- Revenge porn was difficult to report
- Damage is already done (shame)
- Online violence means one will never be free of the perpetrator

Findings from young men's interviews

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- **Theme 1:** Recognition and rejection of emotional, physical, sexual violence against women but ambiguous stance on controlling behavior
- **Theme 2:** Consent during sex – an issue of gray zones and blurred lines
- **Theme 3:** Being an active bystander – *“Hard to act, but still want to do the right thing”*

“What is complicated about relationships, but as I see it, if you are with a partner and you, for example, have a relationship that is bad for you, that affects you incredibly negatively, it could be alcoholism or a drug culture or something like that, then it is not completely unreasonable that the partner tries to build a wall to build something else away from it and in that way be more controlling, but it is always in the form of an alternative.”

Theme 2: Consent during sex – an issue of gray zones and blurred lines

- Need for consent and situations where consent cannot be obtained recognized (drunk, unconscious, asleep)
- Consent is a communication problem; consent is often not explicit (verbal) leading to gray zones where sexual violence can happen
- Consent open to interpretation – sexual violence is difficult to prove
- No gray zone exist in the law – ask if unsure

Theme 3: Being an active bystander – *“Hard to act, but still want to do the right thing”*

- Hard to be an active bystander
- Type matters: Easier if physical/ less if emotional/sexual
- Severity matters: React if reaching a certain perceived severity
- Person matters: friend/stranger (both for victims and perpetrators)
- Background matters: private vs. public issue
- Perceived consequences matter: wanting to act but concern about own safety, fear sarcasm, rejection friends

Talking about witnessing violence against women:

“... but then we know who it is you have to deal with in a different way, if you have a connection, you know what the other is thinking, you know how to present messages in a good way so that it becomes, if you are friends for some reason too. It's a much more difficult situation if it's a stranger doing it nearby or something like that, it's a hell of a lot more complicated. At least I think so.”

Conclusions (part 1)

- Most common forms of violence against women (emotional, physical, and sexual) recognized/rejected but ambiguous stance on controlling behavior
- Own bystander intervention to tackle violence against women perceived as difficult and vary depending and constraints on individual action were discussed
- Sexual violence and consent recognized as important but perceived as challenging due to “gray zones and blurred lines”
- Young women described sexual violence as “hopeless to report and difficult to prove”, which highlights a key area for future preventive interventions

Conclusions (part 2)

- In general, participants rejected any justification for violence against women. However, some young people's discourses shifted part of the responsibility for sexual violence to women, since “a woman is partly responsible for her own safety”



Thank you for your attention!

mariano.salazar@ki.se
signe.svallfors@ki.se
