

Changing traditional views of masculinity could reduce urban violence

In Brazil and Mozambique, traditional models of masculinity often legitimize violence, outside and inside the home. Poverty, social inequality, and aggression by the state or police bolster this violence, which spills over generations: children exposed to violence are more likely to become violent themselves.

The issue: How masculinities interact with violence

Poverty and inequality are facts of life in the rapidly-growing cities of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Maputo, Mozambique. And the disparities are growing.

Generally, with social inequality comes public insecurity and violence, particularly in low-income urban neighbourhoods. Men are the main perpetrators of violence. They are also the most frequent victims. Public violence, whether on the streets or by the state or police, spills over into the home and into intimate relationships: as many as 60% of women in Mozambique are victims of domestic violence.

While spikes in violence correlate with unemployment and overall economic stress, its persistence is due to how men and women perceive their roles. The cultural notion that men and boys should be dominant, aggressive, and sexual fuels violence. How this attitude interacts with urban violence, poverty, and inequalities is little understood, however.

Findings: Violence breeds violence across generations

Research carried out by Brazil's Instituto Promundo shed light on the connections between views of masculinity, violence, poverty,

Recommendations

The consistent “transfer” of violence from public spaces to the family suggests that measures to increase security should include psychological support — such as trauma therapy and community-based prevention efforts — to reduce gender-based and other forms of family violence. These should be accompanied by approaches that promote non-violence and seek to change social norms about what it means to be “a real man.”

Researchers recommend:

- Improve income supports, social and income equality, and increase employment opportunities.
- Invest in integrated social projects in low-income communities rather than in repressive policing.
- Prioritize programs and policies aimed at preventing violence and transforming gender norms, such as educational and support programs for men who have engaged in violence and for youth to challenge traditional models of manhood.
- Provide therapy and support services for witnesses and victims of violence.
- Offer programs to prevent youth from joining gangs or the drug trade, and support those who are involved or who have left such groups.

Drivers of violence:

- Inequitable and pro-violence male identities
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Childhood exposure to violence
- Drug trafficking and gun ownership
- Ineffective policing and police violence

and inequalities in a post-conflict setting (Maputo, Mozambique), and a setting of high urban violence (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). It showed how public violence is linked to violence in the home.

Violence can be a multi-generational problem. In both cities, having witnessed or experienced trauma was the strongest predictor of resorting to violence at all levels of society: violence during childhood correlates to using violence in adulthood, as did witnessing violence, particularly against mothers.

Fear of aggression on the part of police, gangs, or drug dealers also contributed to violent behaviour in Rio.

In Maputo, more than half the men had witnessed their siblings being beaten and 30% saw violence between their parents. In Rio, individuals in neighbourhoods with higher rates of homicides were consistently more violent, both inside and outside the home.

A variety of factors contribute to decisions to engage in violence or not.

High unemployment and poverty are associated with young men's use of violence and involvement in crime, partly to try to prove their masculinity and gain access to women. In Maputo, for example, most think that a man should be the family boss and provider. Fewer than 35% of men are in formal employment, however. Because failure to achieve the manly ideal leads to social exclusion, they resort to violence to affirm their male identities, impress women, and compete with other men.

In Rio, unemployment is also a factor in decisions to participate in drug trafficking – a high-risk occupation associated with violence.

In both Brazil and Mozambique, public violence fosters less equitable gender norms, which in turn promote domestic violence. In Maputo, cultural traditions also continue to influence gender relations. For example, spirit belief can justify violence against women, provoked by evil spirits from her ancestors or witchcraft.

There is another side to the picture, however: some men and family members abandon violence or never engage in it. In Rio, higher education and social support systems influence the move away from violent versions of manhood and from drug trafficking. Strategies to step away from conflict, and better access to resources and opportunities, also contribute to non-violence. Becoming fathers and being involved in their children's lives play a large role in shifting men toward non-violence.

The research

The research carried out by Instituto Promundo was part of a comprehensive, multi-country study on men's practices and attitudes toward gender norms, household dynamics, intimate partner violence, and economic stress, among other topics. Promundo's offices in Brazil and the United States coordinated the study in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Maputo, Mozambique. It included household surveys of men and women in both high- and low-violence urban areas, as well as informant and in-depth life history interviews to capture factors that promote men's trajectories away from the use of violence. Focus groups were also held, in addition to a policy review.

Research findings are being widely disseminated in Brazil and Mozambique.

Resources:

IDRC. Understanding non-violent male identities for safe and inclusive cities. Ottawa www.idrc.ca/en/project/understanding-non-violent-male-identities-safe-and-inclusive-cities

Taylor, A.Y. et al. 2016. This isn't the life for you: Masculinities and nonviolence in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Promundo. Washington and Rio de Janeiro.

Safe and Inclusive Cities is a global research effort jointly funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Launched in 2012, it supports 15 multidisciplinary teams working in 40 cities across sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America to build evidence on the connections between urban violence, poverty, and inequalities.



Safe and Inclusive Cities

International Development Research Centre
PO Box 8500, Ottawa, ON
Canada K1G 3H9
Phone: +1 613-236-6163
Fax: +1 613-238-7230
Email: cities@idrc.ca | www.idrc.ca/cities

idrc.ca