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**NEEDED: A NEW MODEL OF MASCULINITY  
TO STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST  
GIRLS AND WOMEN**

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## 1. SOME FACTS ABOUT THE PROBLEM

For too many women, the family and the home are **not** safe. More and more studies from countries all over the world show this to be true. For example,

- A study of crimes against women in Delhi, 1984-1994, concludes that all categories of crimes, except “eve-teasing”<sup>1</sup>, were committed more within the confines of a home and not out on the streets.
- In France, 95% of the victims of violence are women, 51% of them at the hands of a husband.
- A survey in Kissi districts of Kenya, reported that 42% of the women were beaten regularly by their spouse.
- In Peru, a study conducted in the Maternity Hospital of Lima revealed that 90% of the young mothers age 12-16 had been raped -- the vast majority by their father, then stepfather, or another close relative.
- In South Asia there are “missing millions of women -- from selective foeticide, infanticide, discriminatory child care, poor maternal care, domestic violence and suicide, not only from seclusion, under-reporting or migration.
- In Sri Lanka, 60% of women interviewed in a sample survey responded that they had been subject to domestic violence during their period of cohabitation.
- A survey of 150 married women in Karachi showed that even during pregnancy, about 45% of the women concerned said they had been physically abused. A third of these reported a subsequent miscarriage.
- A study of all the murders in New York City from 1990-1994, showed that 50% of the women victims were killed at home, 10% in another home, and 49% were killed by their intimate partner, husband or boyfriend; with another 14% killed by a relative other than the husband.
- A Bangladesh NGO estimated that more women die from bride burning than from pregnancy and child birth.

### WHY?

Many men believe that women, especially wives and daughters, can and should be beaten. These men also believe that they can even kill women with relative impunity because women are men’s property. For them, culture prescribes that women should be killed under certain conditions. And what a

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<sup>1</sup> Harassment of women on the streets.

man does in his family, they say, is a domestic matter: the State is unlikely to and should not interfere. For example, recently I was told that an immigrant to Sweden killed his wife and children. When brought for trial, he refused to co-operate on the grounds that the State had no right to question his culture. He had killed his wife because he suspected her of relations with another man. For him, his “culture” justified, even demanded, that he kill her for the sake of his honour. As for why he killed the children, he said it was because he couldn’t imagine children without their mother.

His own potential role as a loving father day-to-day didn’t seem to come to mind.

## **2. TOWARDS A NEW MODEL OF MASCULINITY**

At the same time, there are men trying to stop various forms of violence against women and girls, men who challenge the definition of women as men’s property, men who challenge the patriarchy - and the kind of masculinity that supports it. These are the men we need to learn more about, to recognize and work with. These are the men we need to raise our sons to be like. If violence against women and girls is to stop, men as well as women must work against it.

To look for men as well as women who are active against such violence, to find out what they do and why, to be able to bring them together, and with women, to re-vitalize the movements against violence, UNICEF/ROSA has supported some 160 interviews with “activists” doing something to stop some form of violence against girls and women in South Asia. Over one third (57) are men, from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Their examples can help guide us towards a new model of masculinity, and stimulate us to think about what is needed for more boys and men to say “NO” to beating and killing women as part of what a supposedly “real man” does. First, let us look at some of their actions, then at what inspired them.

## **3. MEN’S ACTIONS TO STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Take the case of Bharat Joshi\*, a young lawyer in Nepal. He works against girl trafficking, particularly from an area where it is known that parents often sell their daughters into prostitution, for the sake of a tin roof, TV, or less. He is encouraging the men not to regard a daughter as a commodity that will go to another family, at a cost to the parents. Seen in that light, selling a daughter into prostitution would let the parents gain, not lose economically. But Mr. Joshi wants to address the root cause of girl trafficking, not poverty, but greed and a lack of affection for girls in the family.

He asked men in the village, “Who treats little females better, animals or people? Which are better parents?” He points to a mother dog nursing both male and female pups, he notes that father and uncle dogs don’t kill female pups. The men get the point and start to discuss their attitudes and behavior.

On one visit to the village, he saw a man beating his wife. He asked the man to stop. The man said that he could beat his wife as he liked, because she was his property. "Are you stronger?" The lawyer asked. "Yes", was the answer. "Then what kind of man are you if you beat someone weaker?" Asked Bharat. The man said, "Oh, I see what you mean", and stopped beating his wife.

Mr. Joshi was questioning the model of masculinity in the village, getting the men to think about it in a new light.

Also in Nepal, Ram Thapa\* committed himself to work against domestic violence in the community. He did this because he had vowed to be a good father and husband. He decided that for a good family life, community values should support harmony at home. Once he tied up a drunk man who was beating his wife. The husband said, "She's my property, I can beat her if I want", But Ram countered, "But she is like my sister, so you can't do whatever you want".

Another time he took a pregnant woman facing a difficult delivery to the hospital even though the village was against him, as it should be up to the husband, everyone said. When she didn't die after all, they agreed with his action. Then he started a community group of men and women working together to stop various forms of violence against women.

In Maharashtra, India, Chowdhury\*, a farmer, formed a men's organization to work for improved village life. He wanted to help widows and other women. The group said to him, "You begin by not taking dowry." He agreed. When it came time for his own daughter to marry, he arranged it without giving dowry, which is difficult. "We consider our wives, sisters and mothers equal to us and as capable as us", he said.

Another Indian man, Lalu Prasad\*, said in his interview, "Taking dowry is a form of violence against women. I arranged for my son to marry this woman without dowry". At first, others saw his act as a source of shame for the families. But later, the young bride was accepted as was her father-in-law's position.

In a Bombay slum, Sanjay\*, a self-identified Harijan<sup>2</sup>, started telling other men not to harass women. He threatened them if they did. One day he saw a policeman harassing a neighbor woman. The policeman hit her when she didn't respond to his advances. Sanjay\* and his friends beat up the policeman, - a risky thing to do! Then he and the men insisted that the woman go to the police station to register the case. They would accompany her. She went. Eventually, it is said, she won the case.

In Pakistan, Salim Khan\* is one of many men who have joined War against Rape and similar organizations to help women victims of rape through counseling and legal assistance. Their activism is a testimony to the need for

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The lowest strata of traditional Hindu society, said to be "untouchable".

a new law that will recognize and punish rape without the four presently required male Muslim witnesses to penetration. Without this unlikely condition being met, a girl or woman who registers a case of rape, is at risk of being sentenced for fornication or adultery. She becomes the perpetrator in the eye of the present law.

From Afghanistan, one man interviewee is doing research and writing about women's contributions to the history of Afghanistan. He said that he wants to promote the status of women as human beings to help prevent violence against them.

In Sri Lanka, Mr. Fernandes\*, a pediatrician, decided that he would be what he called a "passive perpetrator of child abuse" if he didn't publicly recognize that child abuse was the actual cause of some injuries of children brought to him as patients. He saw that he needed to try to build a support system for child abuse victims to bring the issue into the open, and work to prevent it. His subsequent research suggests that, in fact, there may be five times as much sexual abuse of boys as girls in the family in Sri Lanka. This could in part be because of the value on girls' virginity. Still, it is not unusual to read in the Sri Lanka newspapers accounts of men who sexually abuse young girls in the family, particularly when the mother is away.

#### **4. MEN'S INSPIRATION TO STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS AND WOMEN**

What inspired these men and others like them to question cultural values and norms that are patriarchal, to intervene publicly, to stop violence against girls and women? Why do they try to change their own lives? What inspired them to become the kind of husband, father, or man who would deny rather than stand for a man's supposed right to abuse women? Why do they stand so courageously for women's human rights? Why do they want others to follow their examples?

Most who talked about their own early life refer to being inspired by their mother's or sister's, words and examples, or by the injustices women faced compared to the men in the family.

For instance, Naseer M.\* from India said, "I am greatly influenced by my mother. My mother taught me to share with people and to reach out to others and help. She taught me that I am a human being first and a man second. And that as a man, I should help the women publicly and privately to build their lives."

Bharat Joshi\* from Nepal described his family as one in which his mother was strong and respected. Thus, when he later saw violence against women, it disturbed him.

Another Nepali, Suman\*, said that he was from a scholarly family, yet his sisters didn't go to school. He was angry that the women in his family were

left out. He considered his mother's and sisters' illiteracy as an injustice to them. He later helped start a "Send Your Girls to School Programme."

An Indian man, Manoj Patel\*, farmer and social worker, said he didn't like the way his mother had been treated. She was not allowed to socialize, and couldn't even talk to him in public. He said, "I realized that the most important issue in the family was the husband and wife moving slowly [forward], like a bullock cart with two wheels. I realized that just as both wheels are important for the bullock cart, so they are for the family, but one wheel is stuck. Both men and women are important in the family".

Jamil\*, A man from Pakistan, said his mother had faced many kinds of violence, and because of this he wanted to change things for other women.

Another man from Pakistan said his mother had been emotionally neglected although his grandmother had been assertive, vocal, resourceful. "I invariably liked being the gallant 'hero' joining hands with the 'losing side", he said. Later he met both men and women who also inspired him to work with women as partners.

From Nepal, Bhim Karki's\* sister had been married off when she was 15½, without his even knowing it. This sad incident encouraged him to bring issues about women's rights into the open, to work for prevention of violence against them.

Some men cited positive examples of their fathers, older brothers, or a famous man that inspired them to help women. A few had been arrested and had learned more about human rights, and violence against women, when in prison.

"Since childhood", Selim\*, a Pakistani man said, "I hated any form of cruelty. Father helped women in the family and other women with problems. I worked against injustice since childhood with the support of parents. In jail as a political activist I came to know about violence against women in prisons."

Shankar,\* an Indian counterpart, said, "I was detained many times as a political prisoner, because of torture, harassment by police, security forces and because of my conscience involved. In prison, I read a lot about human rights, women's rights in particular."

Anil\* another Indian said that his father had received better medical treatment than his mother did. "As children we resented this" he explained. "Also, I felt badly for my younger sister when she was removed from college because she was a girl."

What do these men have in common in their background that cuts across caste, class, and national boundaries? They saw injustice and recognized it, whether it was in their own families or outside, or in the contrast between the two. Many had models of women or men which contradicted stereotypic norms about relations between men and women based on dominance and

submission. They saw justice as more important than domination, and worked for this consciously as men who wanted to be better individuals and partners with women. For them women outside the family were like sisters, mothers, daughters, friends, and colleagues, and they were like brothers, sons, fathers, friends and colleagues. In short, they opened themselves to the feminine in their lives, and selves, as a valued aspect that did not need to be suppressed, overcome, denied. For too long, the stereotypic “masculine” has been idealized, and the stereotypic “feminine” denigrated except with reference to the woman in a home controlled by a man.

## **5. ACTIONS BY WOMEN INSPIRED BY FATHERS**

What about the women activists in the study, and the role of their fathers? This is another source of information about models of masculinity that can support action to stop violence against girls and women.

Although a detailed analysis of this part of the regional study on activists against violence still remains to be done, I have a strong impression of women who were their fathers’ favorites<sup>3</sup>, for whom the fathers often broke “rules” about what girls should get and be. The girls’ strong identifications with the father’s perceived strength sometimes prompted them to take bold measures, even if the mother’s and father’s support failed.

For example, Savitri\*, a woman lawyer from Nepal, said she was brought up like a boy with her brothers in a well-to-do family. She didn’t understand that she was different until she had her first menstruation. When her father and mother wanted her to stop her education and marry, she was shocked, and went on a hunger strike. Her mother was willing to sell her jewelry so she could go on in school. A family friend, a man, intervened and paid some costs. Later Savitri got a scholarship. Her father admitted he had been wrong.

And an Indian woman activist, Sarala\*, doted on and indulged by her father when she was young, was convinced that he would not force her to marry a man she didn’t choose. When her father instead lamented, “Will you be a liability for me all your life”, she vowed to leave home quietly. She did so to work as a volunteer in an ashram. Her father found her, later supported a marriage she planned herself, and a plan for her to go to Europe to study on a scholarship, - while others in her family and community strongly disapproved.

Another Indian woman, Renu\*, simply stopped talking to her mother when she was two years old. She only communicated with her mother through her father, who supported and encouraged her in every way until she became a medical doctor.

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<sup>3</sup> Studies that focus on victims who may become activists later will, however, likely reveal backgrounds that include incest.

An Afghani woman activist remembers her inspirational grandfather like this: “My grandfather was a big Mullah. He had a good mind. He was the one who wanted us to go to school, to go to the faculty and to go walking outside the house. He was an old man when the mujaheddin came. They announced that a woman couldn’t be a governor, couldn’t be a judge, couldn’t be a Mullah. And when I went to see him he was sad. I asked him, ‘What is the matter?’ And that man laughed and said, ‘It is not good, it is not right. These things are from another time. Now it is different. Women must have education and must work.’ ”

## 6. COMMONALITIES AND PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN ACTIVISTS

The injustice of violence against women seems to have struck those, - both men and women, - who are not locked into gender role stereotypes from childhood. They likely have a close relationship with and concern about the opposite sex parent, they go beyond stereotypic identities of male and female in their own character and action. They lay the groundwork for an active **partnership** between men and women to stop violence against to girls and women.

To date, there has been more emphasis on women’s action to stop violence against women, than on women’s co-operation with men, or on the need for a complementary men’s movement. For example, a resource guide on violence against women from India has less than a dozen reference to positive actions by men in the annotations in its 288 pages. Meetings regarding violence against women scarcely address the issue of men’s roles. But just as the women’s movement appeals for a new model for women, - empowered, actors not victims, - a new model of masculinity is needed, one that doesn’t include or depend on dominance over women but features partnership with them.

Let me return to the voices of some of the men activists, on partnership:

Narendra\*, from Musoori, India: “All gender related training must have both male and female trainers and participants. The trainers and trainees need to be convinced that the training is about empowerment of both male and female. It is not empowerment of women at the cost of disempowering men... true empowerment lies in interdependence. This must be the foundation for any further training on gender issues.”

Dr. Mohan Shah\*, also from India: “Its important to discuss the topic of existing violence against women in all village groups, women’s groups, men’s groups, youth groups. It is important to bring out that women and men are equal, that they have equal rights. I believe that with the help of such groups, it is possible to change society.”

Javed Khan\*, from Pakistan: “There cannot be two opinions about the importance of this issue. Crimes like rape, sexual exploitation, acid throwing

and stove-burning are all important [to take up] in their own place, but as a whole, society cannot develop where women - nearly half the population - are oppressed. Women are not only half of the population, but we must remember they are the major influence on the future generation of the nation. A mother who is subjected to domestic violence can only give to this society children who are timid and shy or are dangerously violent.”

Umer Sheikh, also from Pakistan: “Oppression has a series of faces. It can only be eliminated if we change the values of our society..... We are going to the people telling them they are responsible. And we are talking to men, that it is their isolation [from which], they will suffer..... He [a man who doesn't believe in equality] will not be able to have a relationship with his wife. He can't make his children human beings. We are interdependent. Both, man and woman, have to liberate each other. We should at least be able to love each other.”

Ramesh Bastola\*, from Nepal: “In preventing violence, crime, rape and so on, we need to involve the men and say let us do this together and this is our project. This will be more successful and there will be little opposition. It is much better than doing things by women, to women, for women ....., because if men don't know what's happening, there are going to be problems.”

Mahesh Mehara\*. from India: “Just as the bullock cart will move when both wheels are in balance, the family too will develop when both men and women have equality.”

The men activists are questioning the value of the stereotypic masculine model. In the past, when the economic base for society was different, and communities were less inter-dependent, control, power, domination, physical strength were more useful for human survival than they seem to be today. Now we face the possible destruction of the planet by unchecked growth of the military, and by exploitation of the environment. The growth of poverty, exploitation, violence threatens human security. Now, caring, sharing, conservation, co-operation are the attributes that can save the earth and its people from self-destruction. These are the more stereotypic feminine than masculine characteristics. The greater role of technology and communication in the economy today also does not favour physical strength and the stereotypic “masculine” traits. The “feminine” is being re-assessed for its strategic contribution for the human future.

For all these reasons, it can be both exhilarating and upsetting to look at new definitions of “masculinity” and “femininity”. Still, we need to re-examine and even re-define what our cultures may have set as standards for masculine and feminine behavior. But those who derive power from the past, naturally resist change. Those who care about the human future look to new ways to ensure it. They understand culture as a tool for human adaptation to new situations, not something stuck in the past.

I join the voices of the men and women activists from South Asia, to call for a concerted effort to involve more men in the movement to stop violence

against women and girls. The women's movement by definition, has not been good at appealing to male solidarity whereas fundamentalists have been. This has to change. We need to help define a new model of masculinity, as well as a new model for women. We need to work for change within the family - change that supports non-discrimination, CEDAW/CRC, and human rights - for children and women as well as men. We need to help ensure the human future. One of the best ways to do this is to bring up boys and girls to honour both the "masculine" and the "feminine" that are within themselves and society.

In the future the immigrant mentioned earlier would not kill his wife and children because he would respect and value them as human beings with equal rights. He would understand and honour his own role to nurture and love. This should be the prerogative and basis of honour for both men and women. That is the goal of our collective effort to stop violence against girls and women, which otherwise dehumanizes all of us.

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\* note: all names are pseudonyms.