

## **'Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It?'**

**United Nations Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific, conducted by Partners for Prevention, a UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women and UN Volunteers (UNV) regional joint programme**

### **Qualitative Case Studies from the UN Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence**

The following case studies are included in the report, *"Why do some men use violence against women and how can we prevent it? Quantitative findings from the United Nations Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence"*. They have been collated here for ease of access.

#### **Case study 1: A woman's experiences of intimate partner violence in Buka, Bougainville, PNG**

Sarah\* experienced multiple forms of violence across her life, most notably from her father and then her husband. Sarah remembers having a difficult relationship with her father. He was very strict and "didn't whip me properly [for children]. He used to really kill [whip] me...until blood poured out." Her father was an alcoholic, she says. She would lie awake listening for him to return at night. "If he came in and his voice was good [sober], I would go to sleep." If he was drunk, she would run away. These experiences have affected her current relationship. "Even now that I am married, when my husband fights me, I usually run away. I think there is a link, the same fear. I am a woman who runs away."

Describing her husband, she says, "He's a type of colonial ruler, the same as my father." Sarah says he controls what she wears in public and who she sees. "All the time he tells me that I am ugly, so in the mirror I look and just see that I am so ugly." Her relationship with her husband has had an impact on her perception of self-worth. "He changed me really, this man, my husband," she adds. Aside from emotional and economic abuse, Sarah's husband perpetrates severe physical and sexual violence within the relationship. He doesn't have sex "properly" but rather "pushes objects in" (such as a child's toy) and then has sex with her. If she screams, he'll just say "stay quiet, stay quiet". Sarah knows this is marital rape and that "all our children are unplanned because he rapes me and has sex with me." But she stays in the relationship because of her children. She feels sorry for them. "Broken homes only break children," she says. "For me, that's why I think I stick to my marriage. Because my parents broke up and I suffered."

#### **Case study 2: Masculinities in militarized Aceh, Indonesia**

Teguh\* lived in Aceh during the armed conflict period when the *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, or the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), a militarized separatist group fought for independence from Indonesia. He

recalls that “it was cruel in the conflict zone. The law was not imposed.” Before his exposure to the conflict in 2000, he remembers thinking that he would “like to see the war and experience the gun fights. But when the houses burned and I saw people beaten and then when I heard the gun fights, I was afraid.” He remembers seeing incidents of shooting, ambushes, torture and killings” and describes this as “hard”. Teguh’s grandmother was shot and killed in front of him, and many of his childhood friends joined the GAM and were killed in clashes with the military forces. “Sometimes our friends [were tortured] but we could not help them. We did not have power or influence, so we just witnessed [the torture].

Teguh’s ideas of what it means to be a man very much reference this period in his life. Men, he says “should be strong mentally. They should be responsible to themselves, their family and their relatives.” Men also need to be brave in the face of conflict. Teguh remembers his experiences during the conflict when “we often worried about gun clashes”, but when one erupted, “brave men” would run (possibly through a clash) to get to safety).

### **Case study 3: Alternative masculinities and the tension between belief and practice**

This case study looks at the lives of two men – from Aceh, Indonesia and Bangladesh. Their stories illustrate the different ways in which masculinities are performed, and the tension between men’s beliefs and their practices.

Syatir\* works for a women’s empowerment NGO and credits his exposure to messages around equality and non-violence with many of his more equitable beliefs around women’s role in society. Syatir’s wife works and he encouraged her career development, noting that household management (traditionally the woman’s role in Aceh) should be jointly shared and flexible. However, although Syatir is adamant about his wife’s abilities to make decisions, as the male head of the household, he has the ability to push certain agendas within his family, such as decisions around their children’s education. He does not see this as unusual, demonstrating the extent to which norms of masculine entitlement subconsciously influence his expectations around power in the home. In contrast, Syatir speaks differently about his job at a women’s empowerment NGO. Syatir’s supervisor at work is a woman, and he speaks condescendingly of women’s abilities in positions of power. Syatir feels less at ease within his work environment, possibly because gender hierarchies have been dismantled or even reversed.

On the other hand, Hasan\* holds openly rigid beliefs of what it means to be a man or a woman. He thinks “women shall do their job and men shall do theirs ... women cannot do the jobs that men do”. He associates men’s work with the financial responsibilities for the wife and children. “I am her husband. I shall earn to feed them. We shall live properly. We shall live a good life.” He identifies ‘women’s work’ as household management and care taking. “After a long day of work, men return to the home. The wife should cook for her husband, should prepare water for the shower, then take meals and sleep together, show some affection. I always want this.” However, these beliefs around the ideal scenario do not seem

to be practised in Hasan's relationship. Early in his marriage, Hasan travelled to the Middle East as a migrant worker to earn money for his family. After a long series of bad work experiences, he came home to Bangladesh, having lost money. Since his return, he complains, his wife has not followed his orders. "I have taught her how to behave ... [but] she is not able to understand things," he says, although he concedes that "she does the cooking and [child care] is a lot of work." He believes that his in-laws dislike him because "I cannot provide my wife clothes, food and maintenance". His wife frequently takes the children and leaves to stay with her family.

This case study does not intend to compare men in Aceh versus men in Bangladesh. Rather, it illustrates how individual men hold contradictory and complex notions of what it means to be a man, and that these beliefs can be at odds with how men practice masculinity in their daily life, and within their relationships.

#### **Case study 4: Masculinities and alternative professions in China**

Li Ma\* is a male nurse working in Beijing. Li Ma was a mediocre student during his early education. Although he wanted to be class monitor, his low grades prevented him from being elected, despite his efforts to improve his work. When he failed to test into high school, his older sister (a nurse also) urged him to study psychiatric nursing at medical school instead. During those studies, he envisioned his future career as easy, with relatively good pay. He began working as a psychiatric nurse in 2010, and he finds now that he is overworked, stressed and underpaid. He speaks at length about his unhappiness with his current job, but he does not want to change jobs because he does not imagine he is suitable for another profession. He believes he would not be good at other types of work because he was specifically trained as a nurse.

Li Ma seems to have an inferiority complex about his profession. He believes that because there are few male nurses, society looks down on people like him. This contributes to his job dissatisfaction. Li Ma also seems to make up for his perceived disempowerment as a male nurse by emphasizing his superiority over women. Although he says that he supports gender equality and that women are equally capable as men, he believes that men should be the main breadwinners and handle external matters while women should be in charge of the household. He believes that 'real men' should be mature, calm, not afraid and should be able to make their loved ones feel safe, which suggests that he finds affirmation of his masculinity within the relationship space.

#### **Case study 5: Marital violence in Bangladesh**

Noor\* is a 25-year-old man living in Dhaka. As a teenager, he was in love with a girl in his community; however, his family never accepted the relationship. "She was my love. But, there were barriers from all sides." Noor's family arranged his marriage to a girl of their choice, against his wishes. Noor's family

took a dowry from the bride's family. "I consented to marry her because my parents convinced me that I would get quite a good amount of cash as dowry." His new bride's family paid 30,000 taka (approximately \$400). Although now, after being married to his wife, he says "I believe I deserved even more dowry." When speaking of the dowry tradition, Noor de-emphasizes the role of force or coercion in the practice, noting that "most dowry exchanges take place congenially—with one or two exceptional cases of force."

Nevertheless, Noor blames the trajectory into this relationship as responsible for his unsatisfactory marriage. He believes that "a good marriage means a loving, caring, devoted and dedicated wife who can always put the husband's family interest on top of anything else". As for the relationship between he and his wife, Noor says, "Our husband-wife relationship never worked. I am married but not happy at all." He thinks that this is "something that is regular to millions of married men".

This lack of happiness and mutual respect may contribute to Noor's perpetration of violence within the relationship. Noor notes that "if I am angry, I prefer to teach her an instant lesson. Although I sometimes feel bad about my conduct, it's not a big deal. If she disobeys, she must be punished. That is not wrong at all." He thinks domestic violence is normal and natural within relationships, but at the same time, he says, "I know I and others do bad things ... domestic violence is the most common form of violence. We are not angels, just ordinary human beings."

#### **Case study 6: One man's 'modern' perspective in Viet Nam**

Dich\* was born in 1975, the year the American war with Viet Nam ended, when the US-backed South Vietnamese army fell in Saigon. Viet Nam, Dich says, "has changed ... the old family lifestyle has been lost." He recalls that his father "taught me the old Confucian [lessons] about [men's] career and reputation .... He taught me [how to act] even when my family was in difficult conditions."

In particular, Dich believes, the old ways are also lost when it comes to feminine norms. A few generations back, despite his grandmother's husband's widely known and devastating infidelity, Dich recalls that his "grandmother... said nothing. She acted like it was normal. She was a really forgiving person." Back then, "[a woman] would stand down even if she knew [her husband] was wrong. Today, it's not that common."

Today, Dich and his friends—a more modern group of men—think that women are less likely to quietly accept these situations and will argue back. Dich explains that there is more equality between women and men, but he has mixed feelings about this emerging gender order. "Total equality sounds fine... but if there is a difference in thinking, points of view, perceptions or work, that equality may as well turn to problems." He notes that "if a woman is cheeky or says something that makes the husband feel

ashamed, violence is inevitable. A few slaps might do it.” He frames his opinion in terms of long-standing gender norms around women’s role in society. “If a man beats his wife, the wife must have done something she shouldn’t. Disobedient wives should be beaten. That may come from a long-standing perception that women are not meant to do great things.”

Some things, Dich believes, have not changed. “The husband [is] always the authority. The decision-making right is always the man’s, has been, will be, still is.”

\*All names are pseudonyms