

MEN ROLES IN A GENDER EQUALITY PERSPECTIVE: NATIONAL AND CROSS-NATIONAL SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

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Men and gender equality in a changing world

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The Gender Equality Revolution

Let's look first at where we are in terms of this thing we might call the Global Gender Equality Revolution. There have been dramatic changes in the world in the past 30 years. In terms of education we have effectively achieved equality at the primary level. With a few exceptions, at the primary level, girls are studying in equal proportions as boys.

We have seen major declines in maternal mortality. Some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America have achieved in 20 years the same declines in fertility and maternal mortality that it took Europe and North America 100 to 150 years to achieve. These changes mean that more of the world's children are wanted children and that even in places where fertility has historically been high, there is a gradual but real shift to the quality of children's lives rather than the quantity of children.

Women are now 40% of the global paid workforce and half of the world's food producers. Women's income has increased relative to men although it still lags behind men in unacceptable levels; globally women earn 22% less than men. At the same time, some groups of women in middle and upper income countries are now earning more on average than men.

Equally important is what is happening in the social imagination: there is now a generation of boys and girls in many countries who have gone to school together,

who see each other as equals and who have increasingly seen their mothers and other women carry out activities – in particular, working outside the home and contributing more to household income, and in positions of leadership – that used to be considered the purview of men.

Our multi-country household surveys with men – the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – found that younger men, men with some years of secondary education, and urban-based men are more likely to “buy into” and believe in gender equality and to live it or practice it in some aspects of their daily lives. Given that the world is becoming more urban, and that young people in much of the world are staying in school longer, men are being pushed and dragged, sometimes kicking and screaming, toward accepting gender equality.

On the issue of men’s violence against women, we have far less evidence of progress. Global rates of men’s reports of lifetime use of physical violence against female partners range from about 20% to nearly 50%. While we lack comparable data over time to measure men’s use of violence against women, the data we have suggests that such rates remain persistently high. Most countries have passed or laws or policies aimed at reducing this violence and seeking to hold men responsible for such violence, but changes in women’s daily, lived experiences of violence from their intimate male partners are far too slow in coming.

In terms of caregiving, it is still women and girls who carry out the majority of unpaid domestic and care work (this includes care of children, the elderly and ill family members) -- two to 10 times more than men.

Why Men’s Caregiving Matters

So why does all this matter? With so many pressing issues, why does it matter if men care? For one, **80% of the world’s men will be fathers at some point in their lives.** Even those who don’t have biological or adoptive children have parents who will require care, partners who need care, family members who become ill and

need care. Care is what all of us alive on the planet today needed to survive our first years of life and continue to need.

We can fill up volumes on what happens when men care. In study after study from Burundi to Belgium, men's caregiving matters for women, it matters for children, it matters for societies and it matters for men themselves.

It's obvious to the women why it matters. One of the major reasons is the pay gap: There is a Europe-wide gender pay-gap of 16% and worldwide gap of more than 22%. In the case of divorce, the gap widens even more.

In study after study we see that when care work is equally divided, women's income and household income goes up. Women are happier with their partners, and happy sexually with their partners.

Men's caregiving also matters for societies. We can look at Norway – with its 20-year investment in gender equality policies – which found that family violence decreased by a third when gender equality was achieved. In other words, caring men lead to less violence against children and against women and in society in general.

Men's caregiving matters for children in other ways too. Children in households with more equitable participation of men show better health and development. Men who report stronger connections to their children tend to contribute more of their income to their households, so their children are less likely to grow up poor.

The Deeply Held Secret: What's in it for men?

So we've seen the benefits for women and children and societies. And here's a deeply held secret. Getting men involved in caregiving is good for men.

First, let's look at what's happening with men's health globally. Of the 10 leading causes of death and chronic health problems, men lead in 8 of them.

So what does that have to do with men's caregiving? Numerous studies find that men who report close connections to their children live longer, have fewer mental health problems, are less likely to use drugs, are more productive at work and report being happier than fathers who do not report this connection to their children. Clearly causality is multiple in all of these associations but there are consistent benefits found in studies from around the world when men participate more and in non-violent ways in the lives of their children.

Some Directions for a Care Work Revolution

We know, of course, what societies value in men (and increasingly in some settings, in women): performance; the accumulation of capital; manhood based on conquest; and the individual (man) who invents or creates, and who is autonomous and self-sufficient. We value the heroic inventor of a computer application, the winner of a grants competition or the successful businessperson. We too seldom inquire how care work fits into this view of man as provider man, or when we do, the caregiving is considered secondary. Our perpetuation of masculinity based primarily on production is associated to an economic model that is materialistic and short-term and shows limited concern for sustaining families, individuals or the environment.

With the gender division of caregiving so deeply engrained in the institutions that shape our lives, how do we achieve change? We know that media or community campaigns, however important those can be, are not enough. Social norms must shift. But the heart of the revolution is around the meanings and markers of manhood – particularly as those are shaped in the policies, workplaces, institutional and community structures. Our work on the MenCare+ initiative seeks to change these policies in schools, in the health sector and by promoting family leave.

Our work with men and boys must evolve beyond our laudable but short-term program goals of increasing condom use, or reducing violence, or increasing hours devoted to care work. It must involve changing how we organize the workplace, changes in policies and laws and changes in how we raise our sons and daughters.

Some of the things we need to achieve this change are:

- Equal, non-transferable and paid parental leave;
- State- or workplace-supported child care and family care;
- National policies to increase men's participation in reproductive and sexual health so that 50% of contraceptive use happens in men's bodies;
- Making caregiving part of the school curriculum for boys and girls;
- Equality of supports, governmental benefits and societal respect for all caregiving arrangements, including same-sex parents;
- Incentives to encourage workplaces to offer flexible work time and adequate family leave;
- Presumed joint custody in cases of divorce;
- Income support policies that encourage men's participation in family life and as caregivers (breaking assumptions that men do not care or will not contribute income to households).

Engaging men in caregiving cannot be reduced to measuring men's time use or to making men feel good around Father's Day for things they should already be doing.

It is nothing less than a fundamental reworking of our work-life balance and our beliefs in the purpose of our lives and relationships. As we look to the next round of development goals (post-2015), the achievement of those is conditional on questioning our societal model that is too often based on production at any cost. It is conditional on achieving equity including and especially equity in caregiving. I think the question before us at the moment is: Will we evolve toward a more caring society or a "care-less" society? Are we promoting the intergenerational transmission of violence or the intergenerational transmission of care and non-violence?

Thank you.

