

Inspiring accountability and solidarity

Men's power in preventing gender-based violence

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Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most urgent human rights challenges of our time. It cuts across borders, cultures, and social divides. Although anyone can experience GBV, women and girls bear the greatest burden, rooted in deep inequalities and power imbalances.

Men have a critical role to play in ending GBV. Many acts of violence are committed by men following harmful gender norms, but men can also lead change. By speaking out, acting responsibly, and challenging abuse, men can co-create societies where respect, safety and dignity are the norm. This is not about blame, but about inspiring accountability and solidarity.

UNDERSTANDING GBV

GBV includes physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological harm rooted in power and control. It is systemic, reinforced by patriarchal values, cultural norms, and institutional inaction. At its core are rigid gender roles: men expected to be dominant and detached, women expected to be submissive and self-sacrificing. Such norms normalise violence and silence survivors.

Breaking this cycle requires choice. Men can remain passive, or they can challenge sexism, speak out against abuse, and model respectful relationships. Change begins with listening to survivors, questioning societal norms, and holding peers and institutions accountable. When men embrace responsibility, they help dismantle the systems that enable GBV and foster safer, more equal communities.

MEN: POWERFUL ALLIES IN PREVENTING GBV

Men's involvement is essential to shifting harmful norms, promoting equality, and

building safer environments by:

1. Challenging harmful masculinities

Rigid notions of masculinity equating strength with aggression and dominance normalise violence. Men can disrupt these patterns by embracing vulnerability, empathy, and mutual respect.

2. Supporting survivors

Men can support survivors by listening without judgement, validating their experiences, and respecting their agency. Allies help create a culture of care and accountability where survivors feel safe.

3. Promoting healthy relationships

Men can model respectful, consensual, and equitable relationships in families, friendships, workplaces, and communities. Through open communication and shared responsibility, they demonstrate that positive masculinity is possible.

4. Engaging in activism

Men can contribute to prevention through awareness campaigns, community dialogues, and advocacy for policy reform. Whether through grassroots efforts or professional influence, men can challenge the systems that sustain violence and inequality.

5. Educating themselves and others

Men must learn about GBV's root causes, such as power, inequality, and privilege, and how their own actions or silence may perpetuate harm. Intersectionality deepens this understanding, showing how race, class, sexuality, and disability intersect with gender to shape experiences of violence.

Equipped with knowledge, men have a duty to share it by speaking up against sexist jokes, challenging toxic behaviours, and advocating for inclusive policies. This is not about being "saviours", but about being allies and co-creators of just and safe communities.

A CALL TO MEN

Ending GBV is not a women issue, it is a human issue. Men's involvement is vital because they are often in positions of influence. Whether as fathers, teachers, leaders, or friends, men shape attitudes in homes, workplaces, and communities.

When men speak out against abuse, model consent, and challenge harmful norms, they give others permission to do the same. Men's voices are especially powerful in spaces where women's concerns are dismissed. By using their platforms to advocate for justice, men can shift policies, conversations, and futures.

Men also have unique access to peer spaces, such as locker rooms, WhatsApp groups, or workplaces, where harmful ideas often circulate unchallenged. By interrupting sexist jokes, controlling behaviour and victim-blaming, men model a masculinity rooted in empathy, courage, and accountability.

This is not about perfection, but presence. Silence and indifference perpetuate harm, while willingness to learn, listen, and act can create change.

Preventing GBV is a shared responsibility requiring collective action and inclusive leadership. Men must move from the periphery to the centre of this work as advocates, allies, and change-makers. Men can:

Listen to and believe survivors, offering compassion and support.

Speak out against GBV in all spaces, ensuring silence is never mistaken for neutrality.

Support organisations dedicated to prevention and advocacy through time, resources or amplification.

Engage in ongoing dialogue, unlearning harmful beliefs, and fostering equity. □