

The incorporation of masculinity in violence prevention initiatives in Scotland

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in collaboration with the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit



Introduction

This is a short summary of research conducted in 2020 in fulfilment of a Masters degree in Transnational Crime, Justice and Security at The University of Glasgow. It was a collaborative project with the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU), an organisation which has significantly reduced violence in Scotland by adopting a public health approach. The research was a synthesis of sociological understandings of masculinity and violence prevention, and set forth to investigate how configurations of masculinity are incorporated into violence prevention initiatives in Scotland. More specifically, it sought to unpack how socially constructed understandings of men (namely, male gender norms) and violence prevention initiatives are interwoven. To achieve this goal, three research questions were constructed:

1. How is masculinity framed by a violence prevention initiative in Scotland?
2. How are localised configurations of masculinity in Glasgow incorporated in the services offered by the initiatives?
3. Why is considering localised understandings of masculinity in Glasgow an effective approach to adopt for violence prevention?

Methodology

The research methodology chosen for this project was discourse analysis, consisting of the dissection and analysis of the language used in text-based sources. There were two forms of sources selected to collate data: session plans for a classroom based violence prevention programme and news articles published publicly online. The analysis of the language used in violence prevention programmes was considered an appropriate research approach to adopt as it was assumed that it would afford an insight into how masculinity is both configured by, and incorporated in, violence prevention initiatives run by the SVRU. Due to the non-intrusive nature of discourse analysis as a research method, there were no ethical considerations for the research. However, it is important to note that the research presented a significant limitation. As the findings were reliant upon only one researcher's interpretations, existing knowledge of sociological constructions of masculinity and personal opinions may have influenced the outcome of the research. Future studies should endeavor to include multiple researchers in order to ensure that the data collection and analysis is as objective and rounded as possible. Nevertheless, while the findings may have been impacted by my subconscious bias, they are theoretically relevant and can inform future research and practice.

Key findings

- The classroom based violence prevention initiative communicates a version of masculinity that coincides with **hegemonic masculinity** - a global concept used to identify attitudes and practices among men that perpetuate male dominance and gender inequality. In particular, behaviours such as standing up for oneself, rejecting stereotypical feminine personality traits (namely emotions or compassion) and exerting power and authority over females are presented in many of the scenarios in the sessions. The purpose behind communicating this model of masculinity within the session plans is to highlight harmful and hurtful male behaviours, with the intention of allowing participants to recognise and discuss the negative implications of such behaviours.
- Localised considerations of masculinity are incorporated into the violence prevention methods used by the SVRU. In line with previous research on masculinity in Glasgow, the SVRU recognises the **inextricable link between manhood and employment**. For example, Karyn McCluskey has suggested that “the best way to stop a knife is a job”. As a result, the SVRU adopts an employment-focussed approach within many of the violence prevention programmes in Glasgow.
- Incorporating localised understandings of masculinity in violence prevention programmes in Glasgow is an effective approach for two reasons. By supporting men to gain employment and hold job titles, they reconsider the kind of person that they are or want to be. Rather than understanding themselves as a man of violence, they are a chef, baker or food server. As a result, acts of violence become less justified; firstly because it is not ‘who they are’ and secondly because in having a job, there is something to lose should they get injured or enter the criminal justice system. Furthermore, the **traditional means of obtaining ‘manhood’** through employment and being the ‘breadwinner’ was afforded, thus reducing the likelihood of violence being used in the pursuit of masculinity.

Conclusion

The findings of this research are relevant to both sociological studies of masculinity and also to the practice of violence prevention. Firstly, the research findings suggest that masculinity can be conceived of both globally and locally; noting that multiple models of masculinity exist and that expectations of how men should behave change depending on the time, culture and place. Moreover, placing this understanding of masculinity within the context of violence prevention can be and (in the case of the SVRU) has been, effective. By recognising and incorporating localised ideas of what it means to be a man, violence prevention programmes can tailor their service delivery to aid in the attainment of masculinity which is both geographically and situationally specific- subsequently diverting individuals away from using violence in pursuit of manhood.

Future research

The research paper concludes by highlighting that many international violence prevention initiatives adopt a **social norms approach**, communicating alternative, healthier models of masculinity that divert away from male stereotypes. Some international violence prevention initiatives encourage 'men who care', in which the role of child rearing is placed on men. In doing so, the common understanding that men are not involved in caregiving roles is destabilized. The research suggests that the SVRU could mirror this approach. Doing so would set the precedent for a more gender equitable, compassionate and non-violent model of masculinity; offering an alternative version of manhood for young males in Scotland to strive towards. With this standpoint in mind, future research concerned with the role of masculinity within violence prevention could undertake a systematic review of international violence prevention programmes. Such research may wish to investigate what, if any, lessons can be taken from the methods used, and suggest how these can be translated into the current initiatives run by the SVRU.