The contradictory possibilities of engaging men and boys in the prevention of men's violence against women in the UK

Stephen R Burrell, s.r.burrell@durham.ac.uk, Durham University, UK

Abstract

Contemporary initiatives to engage men and boys in preventing men's violence against women in the UK are modest but growing in prominence, and attracting increasing interest from policymakers. This article discusses findings from qualitative research in which expert-informant interviews were carried out with activists playing an influential role in the development of such efforts. It explores how, despite its potential, there are a number of policy obstacles facing work with men in the UK, including ongoing neoliberal austerity, the influence of 'gender-neutral' conceptions of abuse, and political inertia towards prevention. In addition, the interviews highlighted some of the political contradictions that lie within work which encourages men to question their own power and privilege, and critically evaluate their own practices and those of their peers. These include the need to support rather than supersede the women's movement, simultaneously appealing to and challenging men, bringing about both individual and structural social change, and building pro-feminist engagements without diluting them. The article argues that, if these contradictions are addressed and pro-feminist equilibriums found within them, then work with men has the potential to make an important contribution as part of efforts to prevent men's violence against women in the UK.

Keywords

engaging men and boys; men's violence against women; prevention; men and masculinities; pro-feminism

Key messages

Work with men and boys to prevent men's violence against women currently faces a number of policy obstacles in the UK, as well as internal political contradictions.

If pro-feminist equilibriums can be found to address these tensions then engaging men has the potential to make an important contribution to preventing violence against women in the UK.

Introduction

In the United Kingdom (UK) and across the globe there is increasing attention towards engaging men and boys as part of efforts to prevent gender-based violence (Ricardo, 2015; Flood, 2015). The influence of the '#MeToo' movement has helped to brighten the spotlight on men's harassment and abuse of women - and in turn, the role men can play in tackling such practices amongst one another. This article examines some of the key issues facing policy and practice for this field of work in the UK context, by discussing insights garnered from the perspectives of advocates who have played an influential role in developing these efforts.

Flood (2011) has argued that there is a significant feminist rationale for involving men in the prevention of violence against women: men are responsible for enacting the vast majority of this abuse; it is significantly shaped by norms of masculinity and the structures of male dominance; and men have the potential to play a positive role in helping to eliminate it. This work is closely linked to building gender justice more broadly, based upon the feminist theorisation of men's violence as both a cause and consequence of patriarchal inequalities (Westmarland, 2015). Many feminists have therefore long been calling on men to speak out against gender-based violence, and there is a long history of small numbers of men doing so in the UK. However, to date, most men remain silent on the issue.

Recent policy documents in the UK on tackling violence against women and girls, from successive Labour, Coalition and Conservative governments, have placed an emphasis on prevention, and the Conservative Government's 2016-2010 strategy highlights "*how men can be involved as an integral part of approaches to prevention"* (2016: 17). The Home Office has also initiated its own prevention campaigns, including 'This is Abuse', which was launched by the Labour Government in 2010; and 'Disrespect NoBody', which the Conservative Government instigated in 2016. However, these have been largely media-based campaigns. Despite the strong words, there has been little accompanying investment in prevention work on the ground (Gadd, 2012), and this was a key point raised within many of the interviews.

Methodology

This article discusses the views expressed within fourteen semi-structured, expert-informant interviews (Bogner et al., 2009) carried out with activists, practitioners and researchers playing a key role in efforts to engage men and prevent violence against women in the UK. Work *with* and *by* men in this field are two distinct things (Pease, 2008), and the interviews illustrated that many of those involved in building and delivering this work are women. However, this research has particularly focused upon scrutinising work *by* men to prevent violence against women. As a result, thirteen of the participants were men, and one was a woman.

Interviewees were selected based on the researcher's existing knowledge of the field, together with recommendations from interviewees themselves. Eight were based in

England; two in Scotland; and one in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Three were located in other countries, but had nevertheless been identified as playing a significant role in the British context. The only UK country not represented was Wales, though some of the interviewees were involved in work there.

Eight interviews were conducted in person, and six through a Skype video or voice call, between May 2016 and March 2017. The interviews lasted from 40-85 minutes, and the transcriptions were analysed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A key ethical issue for the study was that of protecting participants' anonymity, with the small size of the field and unique roles of those within it meaning that participants could potentially be identified even from anonymised comments about their work. Interviewees were therefore asked to take into account that only a limited level of anonymity could be guaranteed. Whilst some felt comfortable for their remarks to be public, I did seek to keep the interviews anonymous so that participants felt able to speak as honestly as possible about their experiences.

As a man seeking to support efforts to prevent men's violence against women, I was positioned to some degree as an 'insider' in the field. This may have helped to facilitate participant involvement, and enable them to be more candid with me. However, it may have also inhibited my ability to critically probe the participants at times. This connects to the possibilities for collusion in interviewing other men about their work (McCarry, 2007), which they were likely to want to portray positively. It is also possible that at times, I reproduced what Messner, Greenberg and Peretz (2015) call the 'pedestal effect', of treating pro-feminist men with particular awe, which may have weakened my scrutiny of their practice. I therefore strove to achieve a balance between my support for the work of participants, and the need to examine it through a critical lens. The key points raised within these interviews will now be explored, beginning with the participants' views on the contemporary UK context.

'Just fighting fires' - the UK policy landscape

For all of the interviewees, one of the defining issues facing the prevention of men's violence against women in the UK was a paucity of resources, in relation to broader attacks on the women's movement. Connections were made here to the ongoing neoliberal austerity project since 2010, which has included severe cuts to local government funding (Sanders-McDonagh, Neville and Nolas, 2016). This has had a devastating effect on violence against women services, as articulated by Ben:

> *"Women's services...have been hit particularly hard, in recent years so, I mean it has to be a much higher priority also in terms of, well, government or other funding."*

For example, Towers and Walby (2012) found that 31% of local authority funding for the sector was cut between 2010/11 to 2011/12 alone, and the number of specialist domestic violence refuge services in England declined from 187 to 155 between 2010 and 2014 (Women's Aid, 2014).

Several participants pointed out that this situation has been compounded by the increasing influence of 'gender neutral' constructions of violence and abuse in policy and practice. In this respect, whilst men's practices continue to simultaneously be treated as the default and made invisible within policy discourses, the existence of male victim-survivors is being used to claim that gender should be disregarded in responses to abuse (Hearn and McKie, 2010; Reed et al., 2010). This is despite the fact that research consistently shows gender to be at the heart of interpersonal violence, with men's violence against women by far the most common form of domestic and sexual abuse for instance (Walby and Allen, 2004). In some cases, this 'gender-neutral' framing has also contributed to specialist women's organisations closing and being replaced by generic, cheaper, larger, depoliticised organisations (Ishkanian, 2014). Interviewees such as Kate felt that this approach also has ominous implications for engaging men:

> *"I mean you can't call it men's violence against women if you're not allowed to gender it...if you don't see violence against women as emanating from men having more power in society...I don't know how you start, like from a gender-neutral, starting point."*

Meanwhile, Carl noted that there is a risk that discourses around engaging men could actually be co-opted into justifications for a 'gender-neutral' approach, as is currently being applied in relation to male victim-survivors:

> *"There's now a sense, in the sector and among policymakers, that you always have to engage men and boys, you always have to have men and boys in the room, and that I think is troubling."*

In this way, there is a danger that engaging men could have implications for women to have separate spaces to discuss experiences of or approaches to tackling violence and abuse.

A number of participants emphasised that existing efforts to prevent gender-based violence have been led by the women's movement, so the weakening of women's services in turn constrains the potential for prevention work to grow. Edward described the situation as one of continuously *'fighting fires'*, with frontline services' struggle for survival leaving few resources for prevention. Several of the interviewees felt that this landscape belies the continued under-prioritisation of men's violence against women among policymakers. The approach of the British state could thus be seen as one of managing the problem, rather than seriously trying to stop it.

In spite of this, the participants pointed out that there have still been some steps forward in prevention in the UK in recent years. For example, the government announced in April 2017 that it would become mandatory for relationships and sex education - long campaigned for by feminist activists - to be delivered in all English primary and secondary schools. Participants highlighted that this could provide a vital space for engaging with boys and young men - and all young people - around issues of gender norms, inequalities and violences. For instance, Harry commented that:

> *"I think this stuff really should run through, the curriculum, from start to finish, from primary years upwards. I think it does need to be there, and I think it, teachers need upskilling and supporting to be able do that."*

However, the introduction of compulsory RSE has subsequently been delayed until 2020, and the subject has traditionally been based upon a 'gender-neutral' lens in the UK, so the extent to which this shift will enable the gender dynamics of violence to be substantively discussed with young people remains unclear.

Another important development which several participants highlighted was the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention, a legal framework for tackling violence against women. Having signed the Convention in 2012, ongoing pressure from the women's movement has brought the UK Government close to ratifying it. This was seen as being an important step by interviewees such as Daniel:

> *"It's a sort of rallying cry I suppose, and so that's useful...and I think one of the things that was important for me in terms of this, is the way in which...and I don't think this had happened much before, the importance of, engaging with men and boys...was clearly not an afterthought within this document."*

Though this would still leave few guarantees about how seriously the UK government would take putting the framework of the Convention into practice. Meanwhile, some of the participants pointed out that prevention efforts have been spreading into new spheres in the UK, such as university campuses. This often takes the form of 'consent workshops', first instigated by student activists themselves, or bystander intervention programmes such as the Intervention Initiative (Fenton and Jones, 2017). However, thus far 'gender-neutral' discourses again appear to be shaping the responses of universities, despite considerable public attention towards harmful constructions of masculinity on campus in recent years through notions of 'lad culture' (Phipps, 2016). In addition, their focus has typically been limited only to sexual violence (rather than all forms of violence against women) and the student body (rather than the institution as a whole).

One interviewee pointed out that the ebbs of flows of policymaking itself provide a significant challenge to the sustainability of violence prevention, as it is so dependent on the priorities of particular ministers at any particular time, and the shifting of different issues into and out of the public eye. For example, in 2009 the Labour Government committed to a far-reaching strategy to prevent violence against women, including through work with men and boys (HM Government, 2009; Gadd, 2012). However, they were unable to implement these plans after losing power in the 2010 general election. Similarly, several interviewees discussed the initiation of the Coalition on Men and Boys (COMAB) in 2007 as a particularly significant development for the engaging men field. This was supported by the Labour Government, and included several different pro-feminist oriented men's organisations and academics. It published a wide-ranging report in 2009 about the relationships between public policy and men and masculinities (Ruxton, 2009; Wright and Cowburn, 2011; Hearn, 2015). However, COMAB also experienced internal divisions, and dissipated in the wake of the financial crisis. This

provides an example of what interviewees such as Harry saw as the obstacles provided by the transience of policymaking:

> *"The civil servants move on, or the political agenda moves on, and that's that, you know. And you think, oh god, why have I been engaged in this for so long, and there's now nothing, really, to show, for all of that."*

It is also important to recognise that the policy context does vary significantly in the different constituent countries of the UK, and caution must be taken in considering them as a whole. Several of the participants talked about how the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have some freedom to devise their own policies around violence against women, and often take different approaches to that of the UK Government, shaped by the unique political histories of each of these countries (Charles and Mackay, 2013). Many interviewees felt that the Scottish Government in particular was ahead of the rest of the UK in supporting violence prevention and adopting a gendered approach. It was suggested that this was linked to the strength of the women's movement in Scotland (Hearn and McKie, 2010) which, through the Zero Tolerance campaign for example, has developed highly influential prevention work.

The UK practice landscape of engaging men

The interviewees discussed how there has been a long history of men supporting struggles for women's rights in the UK, such as through the anti-sexist magazine Achilles Heel from 1978-1999 (Owen, 2013), and there are now a range of organisations involved in work of this kind in the UK. The most well-known of these are the UK adaptations of the global movement of White Ribbon campaigns for men to speak out against violence towards women (Seymour, 2018). The UK's first 'White Ribbon Day' took place in 1996, organised by the charity Womankind, and White Ribbon UK (which operates principally in England and Wales) was set up in 2004. Subsequently, White Ribbon Scotland was launched in 2006, and in 2010, an all-Ireland White Ribbon campaign was founded, which is now run by the Men's Development Network. A White Ribbon All Party Parliamentary Group was also established in 2016, with the support of several UK Members of Parliament.

The work of these White Ribbons include ambassadorship programmes with volunteers who commit to spreading the campaign's message; accreditation and partnership schemes to encourage organisations to take steps towards engaging men in violence prevention; education and training; and public-facing actions such as community mobilising. A key focus of activity is the annual 'White Ribbon Day' on the 25th November. Whilst the different UK-based White Ribbon campaigns have all received some degree of government funding, participants pointed out that the resources of all organisations involved in this work in the UK remain meagre. Such efforts were therefore described as being in a piecemeal, fragmented state; typically being small scale, localised, and delivered by voluntary organisations.

The interviewees also discussed several other organisations carrying out work with men to prevent violence against women in different parts of the UK. For instance, two organisations in this area, Great Men and the Good Lad Initiative, have recently amalgamated. Great Men delivers workshops by trained volunteers with young men at secondary schools around challenging gender stereotypes. The Good Lad Initiative was founded by university students, originally running workshops primarily for young men in higher education around promoting 'positive masculinity' and tackling gender-based violence on campus, and has now branched out to schools and workplaces too. They have also recently been involved in IMAGINE (Inspiring Male Action on Gender Equality in Europe), a cross-European project on preventing sexual violence and harassment with young people. Meanwhile, A Call to Men UK, which was inspired by the US organisation of the same name, trains those who already work with young men (such as teachers or youth workers) to become coaches for their 'FreeUP: Living Respectfully' programme.

Some interviewees discussed how there has also been *"a lot more cross-fertilisation going on"* (Edward) in work with men in recent years, including interactions and collaborations through international networks (Hearn, 2015). The MenEngage Alliance, which was founded in 2004, was seen as being particularly influential in this respect:

> *"MenEngage is now a kind of, significant player internationally, representing, what seven or eight hundred NGO's I'm not sure, and are having a presence at international events like the UN Commission on the Status of Women and other significant international events."* (Carl)

Several interviewees referred to the significance of online communications in this regard, by enabling greater connectivity between activists across the world. One participant emphasised how valuable it can be for sometimes isolated pro-feminist men to know they are part of a bigger national and international movement. However, it was noted that the internet has also opened up new spaces for misogyny, harassment and abuse towards women, and Edward pointed out that it has similarly helped to develop anti-feminist 'men's rights' activism:

> *"There has been, I think, quite a significant development of, what I would regard as men's rights activity, in the UK as well. Which is, you know, a counterweight, a countervailing force if you like..."*

In this respect, one interviewee argued that it could be valuable for the engaging men field to do more to take up and apply a pro-feminist analysis to some of the issues that 'men's rights' activists focus on, in order to reduce their influence.

Contradictions in engaging men and boys

The interviews demonstrated that there are also a number of tensions involved within work with men itself. These may be difficult to entirely resolve, because they are based upon a fundamental political contradiction described by Carl: *"the overarching problem, is around the challenge of engaging members of a privileged group, in undermining that same privilege"*. This article will now explore some of the issues raised by the interviewees in this respect, where the implication appeared to be that for engaging men to create change, it should seek to find pro-feminist equilibriums by taking into account the different factors at play within its contradictions, as described by Kate:

> *"You've got to tread such a line, you've got to be able to engage with people who are probably, possibly hostile to your message, and not going to understand it...you've got to also have, that depth of gender analysis yourself, like, understanding...but equally be able to, put it across in such a way which isn't going to alienate people, but also isn't going to condone, like sexist behaviours..."*

Supporting and collaborating with the women's movement

Perhaps the most fundamental principle echoed throughout the interviews was that efforts to engage men should be carried out in collaboration with the women's movement. This means that it should consult with and be accountable to feminist women, with critical commentary taken on board and addressed (Pease, 2008). Interviewees pointed out that failing to do this can lead to ineffective, counterproductive, or even harmful practice. There were a range of approaches to pro-feminism being adopted by the participants, and some were more explicit about their feminist commitments than others. There was also sometimes vagueness about how this accountability was being put into practice. However, they commonly described their work as being shaped by feminist women's voices and experiences:

> *"Listening to the range of thought within feminism. Specifically, about their views of male intervention in this sphere…if you don't spend time on that then I think you're on sticky wicket, and can come a cropper because you're just marching on in perhaps an unguided, and unreflective instinct to do something."* (Ian)

Several participants suggested that it is important for men in the field to model egalitarian relations with women and women's organisations - and to play a supportive rather than superseding role to them. Indeed, some questioned how necessary it is for work with men, to be delivered by men. Whilst they appeared to see the answer as resting partly on the context and aims of the activities being carried out, a number of participants felt it is important to recognise that a lot of this work is already being done by women, both formally and informally. They pointed out, for example, that it is often women in men's lives that push them to think most profoundly about gender norms and inequalities. Similarly, whilst many organisations in the field seek to recruit men as public

representatives for campaigns, a lot of the behind-the-scenes work that keeps organisations running but receives less public recognition is being done by women, which in turn could help to reinforce dynamics of male authority. These imbalances were summed up by Kate:

> *"The second men do anything, like a little bit, it's like, oh amazing, oh brilliant, oh look what you're doing, oh great, and then you realise all these like, women that have been working away at the same thing, saying the same thing for like, 40 years."*

A key task may therefore be encouraging men to play a more active, supportive role in the behind-the-scenes work, and not only the symbolic, public-facing activities. Edward also pointed out that some oft-repeated ideas about men only listening to other men, and male role models being crucial to preventing violence, may be overly simplistic: *"I think we're in danger of, missing the influence that women and girls have, which I think is absolutely huge to be honest."*

A number of interviewees also underlined how involving men in the struggle to end men's violence against women carries with it a number of risks, such as constraining or diminishing women's voices and leadership (Pease, 2008; Flood, 2015). For example, it was noted that 'White Ribbon Day' has been perceived as taking over what was originally a day of feminist activism; the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which is marked on the same date. Some participants alluded to the potential for men's presence, no matter how well intentioned, to have a deradicalising, depoliticising or colonising impact upon feminist activism. Indeed, there is the potential for men to replicate patriarchal inequalities within violence prevention. This underscores the importance of pro-feminist men practicing critical self-reflection in their work, and I discuss further some of the personal and political issues which can arise with men's involvement in preventing violence against women elsewhere (Burrell, Forthcoming). Edward summed up these tensions as follows:

> *"There are all kinds of elephant traps, to fall into, and I think there's quite a lot of guys who just, topple right into them, and they don't even know they've, done it, you know. And so they, they can act insensitively, they can take over women's spaces, you know, not be sufficiently informed about some of the issues, some of the impacts..."*

Many of the participants recognised that they were just as likely to fall into these traps, and that this possibility always remains for pro-feminist men, no matter how much experience they may have. However, this was not always the case, and on other occasions, some of the interviewees did appear to be less reflexive about the potential for mistakes in their own work. It is crucial then that in seeking to change the practices of other men, pro-feminists also apply a critical lens towards their own practices and complicities. This reflects one of the foremost contradictions of engaging men; that it is simultaneously both necessary, and potentially perilous, for men to play an active role in preventing violence against women, as surmised by Kate:

> *"I think working with men and boys is vital, I think it's absolutely important, I think it should be well resourced. However...you want it to be the right work with men and boys, and I think that's always the, hesitation, that women, the women's sector, tend to have."*

Some participants spoke of the significance of this tension in relation to resources, with a common principle for pro-feminist men's organisations being to avoid taking funding away from women (Pease, 2008). This becomes even more important given the aforementioned cuts to women's services. However, some interviewees felt that there had not always been enough care taken in this regard in the UK. This also creates a dilemma for prevention work more broadly:

> *"You have to provide services to survivors of violence against women. Those services can't be allowed to diminish, in order to provide funding for a prevention campaign. But if you don't have a well-funded prevention campaign, you won't diminish the need for the services."* (Lee)

Edward described the situation as one of attempting to 'square the circle', but did propose some solutions:

> *"Apply for different funds, so that we're not in direct competition. But that can be difficult…in an ideal world, what would happen I think is that we would raise the profile of gender equality across the board, and therefore in a sense you'd end up with a bigger cake. If you can end up with a bigger cake then we're all at least going to win, more."*

These tensions demonstrate the limitations of working to end men's violence against women within the confines of a patriarchal, neoliberal state. It was thus suggested by some of the participants that pro-feminism must not become detached from its roots in social movement-building and activism, and the creation of radical social change.

Both appealing to and challenging men to create change

Within their experiences of the practice of engaging men, one of the biggest challenges that participants described was that of getting men and boys 'in the room' in the first place (Casey et al., 2017a). José stated that: *"I mean men don't flock to this campaign, they're not knocking our door down."* Some pointed out that participation in prevention programmes should therefore sometimes be mandatory, such as in schools. However, it was also recognised that this can impact on participants' willingness to engage. For this reason, interviewees such as Marcus described the importance of a dialogic, participatory approach:

> "*You don't want them to be walking into your workshop thinking, I'm here because of a punishment. You want people to be open minded, and most of the time, we can, like change that round, but it involves, getting them to talk about it, rather than talking at them."*

This touches upon another core contradiction in engaging men, between the need to communicate a message which participants will take on board and not feel alienated by, whilst at the same time honestly confronting the realities of men's practices within patriarchy:

> *"They need to know, and think about, some of the, the very negative stuff that goes on, but at the same time, we need to give them some, possibilities, some opportunities for, being involved actively themselves, and being part of the solution."* (Edward)

If men are not listening, then they are unlikely to change. However, the same is also true if they at no point feel challenged or uncomfortable by work which seeks to deconstruct their power and privilege. Several interviewees talked about how they seek to articulate a positive vision to men and boys, which offers optimism and opportunities for action, whilst at the same time encouraging them to question how they might be implicated in patriarchal inequalities.

It was deduced from the interviews that an impactful way of balancing these issues might be found through a triadic approach to engaging men (see Figure 1). This should include focusing on the construction of masculine norms (which may often serve as a useful starting point), and illuminating the connections between that and men's varied practices and experiences, and the structures of patriarchy and their reproduction. This means helping men to make sense of the micro, meso and macro dynamics through which violence against women is perpetuated, and how they relate to their own lives, personally and politically.

Figure 1 here

Some participants felt that this should include articulating empathy for the conditions in which men and boys live - especially when they too are experiencing forms of structural oppression - and for the difficulties of overcoming the constraints of rigidly-policed masculinity. It was suggested that whilst seeking to challenge men, it is necessary not to lose sight of the humanity in them - not least as a catalyst for change. Edward discussed a comment he had heard within the field which had a lasting impact on him in this respect: *"if you don't like young men, you're going to find it difficult to convince them to change."* Work with men must therefore find a balance between the need to embrace and encourage men's humanity, and illuminate and confront the inhumane ways in which they often behave towards others:

> *"It's one of the steps towards getting men and boys back to our true selves, back to where we're humane, and connected, and loving, and caring, and so that's why I think it's really, really important."* (José)

Several of the interviewees also raised concerns about appealing to men's investments in masculinity in attempting to reach out to them, by deploying notions such as heroism, strength or 'real men' to convince men to change (Salter, 2016). Some participants felt

that this risks reinforcing the norms of gender that are so entwined in the roots of men's violence itself:

> *"It's tempting, to go down a route that, is comfortable for a certain sort of guy, that doesn't actually challenge his basic concept of his own masculinity, and sees him almost as a sort of protector, of women. And you can sort of, you know...who's not going to be against, which sort of mainstream guy like that is not going to be against violence against women?"* (Daniel)

It was suggested that the more challenging, yet more sustainable goal for prevention work, may be to persuade men to disinvest from hierarchical codes of masculinity altogether, rather than simply proposing alternative formulations of them (Flood, 2015).

Within some interviews there was also consideration of the value of attempting to recruit men on the basis of how they can 'benefit' from the dismantlement of patriarchy. Some participants did argue that there are ways in which promoting gender justice can be seen as in men's interests, such as by enabling healthier, more fulfilling relationships with others. However, it was also argued that self-interest is unlikely to present a sustainable path towards individual or social change (Pease, 2002; Flood, 2015):

> *"I think it's really important to take that to young people, but not by saying, as a man or as a boy, you benefit from this as well, or...you need to learn this because it helps you. I think, a lot of the time that does, it resonates with young people, but I would, I don't think an approach of sort of gender equality, of the idea that, of something in it for men, you know, is helpful in the longer term."* (Fred)

Men report a range of motivations for becoming involved in the prevention of violence against women (Casey et al., 2017b; Peretz, 2017). However, the advocates interviewed here fundamentally appeared to share a drive founded in an ethical commitment to gender justice. Cultivating such an ethos among men based upon a sense of solidarity with women may offer the most sustainable path towards individual and collective change (Edwards, 2006). This question can also obscure the complicities of men in maintaining patriarchy because it structurally benefits them to do so - and risks centring a discussion about male domination on men's needs. Meanwhile, illuminating the complicities of both practitioners and participants in prevention work alike, may help to encourage men to understand their role in both perpetuating and potentially preventing violence against women (Pease, 2015).

The need for both individual and structural transformations

Another common view within the interviews was that efforts to engage men and boys are needed *everywhere*; not only in certain settings, or carried out only by certain individuals:

> *"There's so many opportunities to try and do something about it...it's about trying to get people to realise that actually, you can raise these issues, you can talk about these issues, in almost any kind of context."*(Andrew)

Some participants pointed out that this means that prevention work cannot only focus on young people - not least because of the contradictory messages they will continue to receive from the world around them:

> *"They...tell their parents what they've been doing today, and quite enthusiastically say that, and it's so easy for that to be dismissed out of hand with a single comment. And if that's what happens, then you've killed that enthusiasm."* (Lee)

It was a shared view that formal and informal efforts to prevent violence against women need to be undertaken within every sphere, at every level of society, as part of a holistic approach to social change. This scale provides a major challenge for organisations working in this area - Gareth described them as being relatively 'diffuse' as a result, and Edward summed up this tension by asking: *"you've got this huge canvas of things you could do, how do you decide, what's the best thing to do, you know?"*

Perhaps as a result of this, several of the participants felt that the focus of work with men is too often on changing individual attitudes, leaving the patriarchal structures that provide the foundations for men's violence largely untouched (Pease and Flood, 2008; Salter, 2016). Carl argued that:

> *"The ways we address men and boys, and the things that we try to shift, are kind of limited, and we don't necessarily address the material or the structural dimensions of domestic...violence...in particular the kind of structural inequalities that are at the heart of those forms of violence."*

This raises another key contradiction within this field - that on its own, engaging men is not actually enough. Work with individual men and boys therefore needs to be accompanied by efforts to bring about broader structural change. These tasks are not mutually exclusive, given that social structures are themselves created, maintained and changed through the patterns of practice of multitudes of social actors. However, it was suggested by some interviewees that this work is sometimes currently taking relatively superficial forms, which have limited potential to create deep-rooted individual *or* structural change:

> *"I guess I'm saying I've been really disappointed by, you know, sometimes when you get, things which seem very tokenistic…does it make any difference to people? Um, I'm not sure that it does."* (Gareth)

Participants therefore emphasised the need for preventative interventions to be coordinated both vertically and horizontally throughout an organisation or institution, in order to address the patriarchal inequalities embedded within it, as described by Kate in relation to schools:

> *"If we want to prevent violence against women in a school, it's the same as society, you can't just do one thing, you've got to be looking at the teachers, the policies, the curriculum, the, you know, everything."*

Similarly, Harry argued that whilst media-based campaigns are important in initiating conversations, they need to be joined up with other, more in-depth forms of prevention work: *"it's not enough on its own, you know, there's no escaping the need to talk to people"*.

Several interviewees also discussed the importance of helping men to understand not only how different forms of violence are interconnected with one another and with the structures of patriarchy, but how these inequalities also intersect with and mutually reinforce other systems of oppression based around class, 'race', sexuality, and disability for example (Peretz, 2017). Carl remarked that:

> *"There's growing recognition now, in the engaging men and boys field, of the fact of...men and boys' diverse lives, and a kind of taking up, at least in some simple sense, of the, kind of fundamental feminist recognition of intersectionality."*

It was noted that this can complicate discussions within this work, because whilst all men receive some degree of power and privilege from patriarchy, there are also significant differences between men in relation to their positions within other systems of power (Casey et al., 2013) Men can therefore simultaneously dominate and be marginalised through these different systems, and it is important for this to be addressed when engaging with them, to recognise for example that structural privileges may make it easier for some men to speak out about violence against women than others. For instance, one participant pointed out that, as a white middle class man, going into a diverse room of young men and encouraging them to take action against gender-based violence without taking into account the different ways in which this message might be received and acted upon might receive a dismissive response. Interviewees therefore underlined the importance of prevention work being relevant and relatable to its audience - and for practitioners to be reflexive about their social positioning in relation to different systems of power.

Making engaging men 'mainstream'?

An urgent question facing the participants was how prevention efforts can be broadened to engage many more men and boys in the UK. The following were commonly seen as being crucial first steps in this respect: entrenching learning about gender norms, inequalities and violences at all stages of education and beyond, such as workplace training; developing large-scale, impactful campaigns to start conversations across communities; and policy shifts which recognise the pervasive and gendered nature of men's violences against women.

However, this question also illustrates another core contradiction in engaging men, between the need to make it more 'mainstream', and the risk of it becoming politically diluted in the process. Some of the interviewees spoke about tensions associated with the increased professionalisation of work with men, as it seeks governmental and institutional funding and support (Messner, Greenberg and Peretz, 2015):

> *"There's a danger of it being depoliticised, of it being psychologised, of it increasingly having a...kind of soft focus on individual men's attitudes, rather than I think a more radical social justice orientated focus."* (Carl)

Similarly, many participants acknowledged the importance of ongoing evaluation, to understand and demonstrate how preventative change is being achieved. However, they also discussed how challenging it can be to show the extent to which prevention 'works' according to narrow neoliberal definitions. In the words of Ian, *"preventative work is hard to quantify, in terms of its impact"*. This was also described by Kate:

> *"Primary prevention is always really under-prioritised…it's one of those things that's like, really important, but incredibly difficult to measure, like incredibly difficult, almost impossible to measure and evaluate, and that's not the funding context that we live in. We don't live in a world where people are happy to give you money, for something you can't prove at the end."*

Some interviewees suggested that the lack of resources or political support for prevention also constrains opportunities for instigating innovative and creative approaches, which were seen as vital for its development. It was stressed that effective prevention is long term, multifaceted, in-depth work which needs to be carefully strategised and sustained, yet this rarely fits with the prioritisations of the institutions and organisations in which it needs to be implemented. An additional bearing mentioned here was the impact of shifts in the political landscape, such as Britain leaving the European Union, an institution which Edward felt *"has always been a significant player in terms of gender equality."*

Turbulences in the political climate accentuated another point made by several interviewees, about the importance of engaging men becoming more sustainable. It was discussed that violence prevention organisations and projects often come and go within a short space of time; in the words of Harry, *"the good work doesn't always last very long"*. With many organisations being significantly reliant on volunteers or precarious staff, it was described as difficult to plan ahead or retain commitment over time:

> *"To keep people on board as volunteers in any charity, is difficult, and people's ability to be part of that change is…just through circumstance, not necessarily through lack of interest or whatever. But then there is also the element of keeping the interest, so that's a massive thing, as to how, how do we manage our volunteers effectively, and keep them all on board."*(Lee)

A crucial next step for building work with men for some participants therefore meant consolidating a more resilient base from which to grow.

Conclusion

This research has found that there is mounting momentum for engaging men and boys as part of efforts to prevent men's violence against women in the UK. However, whilst political interest and initiatives in this area are both growing, such work remains localised

and fragmented. The ongoing neoliberal austerity agenda, 'gender-neutral' framings of abuse, and a lack of ambition for prevention among policymakers, all appear to be seriously inhibiting efforts to prevent gender-based violence in the UK. Engaging men also contains a number of political contradictions, and if these go unaddressed, then there are dangers that it could be counterproductive. For example, in terms of its potential to deradicalise, delegitimise or colonise feminist activism - or for some of the same patriarchal inequities it seeks to end to be reproduced within it. It is therefore imperative not to lose sight of the fundamental goal of engaging men: to support the cultivation of feminist transformations across society. The interviews suggested that rather than seeking to 'solve' its contradictions, an effective approach may be one based around dialectically developing pro-feminist equilibriums within them. If such balances can be found, then work with men has the potential to make an important contribution towards preventing men's violence against women in the UK and beyond.

References

Bogner, A., Littig, B., and Menz, W. (2009) *Interviewing Experts*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol 3(2), pp. 77-101.

Burrell, SR. (Forthcoming) Changing men/changing ourselves: Men as agents of change and resisting disassociation in the prevention of men's violence against women, in: Luyt, R. and Starck, K. (eds.) *Political Masculinities as Agents of Change: Theory, Practice and Intervention*. London: Springer.

Casey, EA., Carlson, J., Fraguela-Rios, C., et al. (2013) Context, challenges, and tensions in global efforts to engage men in the prevention of violence against women: An ecological analysis. *Men and Masculinities*, vol 16(2), pp. 228-251.

Casey, EA., Leek, C., Tolman, RM. et al. (2017a) Getting men in the room: Perceptions of effective strategies to initiate men's involvement in gender-based violence prevention in a global sample. *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, vol 19(9), pp. 979-995.

Casey, EA., Tolman, RM., Carlson, J., et al. (2017b) What motivates men's involvement in gender-based violence prevention? Latent class profiles and correlates in an international sample of men. *Men and Masculinities*, vol 20(3), pp. 294-316.

Charles, N., and Mackay, F. (2013) Feminist politics and framing contests: Domestic violence policy in Scotland and Wales. *Critical Social Policy*, vol 33(4), pp. 593-615.

Edwards, KE. (2006) Aspiring social justice ally identity development: A conceptual model. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, vol 43(4), pp. 39-60.

Fenton R., and Jones, C. (2017) An exploratory study on the beliefs about gender-based violence held by incoming undergraduates in England. *Journal of Gender Based Violence*, vol 1(2), pp. 147-167.

Flood, M. (2011) Involving men in efforts to end violence against women. *Men and Masculinities*, vol 14(3), pp. 358-377.

Flood, M. (2015) Work with men to end violence against women: A critical stocktake. *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, vol 17(2), pp. 159-176.

Gadd, D. (2012) Domestic abuse prevention after Raoul Moat. *Critical Social Policy*, vol 32(4), pp. 495-516.

Hearn, J. (2015) The uses and abuses of the political category of 'men': Activism, policy and theorising, in: Flood, M. & Howson, R. (eds.) *Engaging Men in Building Gender Equality*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, pp. 34-54.

Hearn, J., and McKie L. (2010) Gendered and social hierarchies in problem representation and policy processes: "Domestic violence" in Finland and Scotland. *Violence Against Women*, vol 16(2), pp. 136-158.

HM Government (2009) Together we can end violence against women and girls: A strategy. London: HM Government.

HM Government (2016) Ending violence against women and girls strategy: 2016 to 2020. London: HM Government.

Ishkanian, A. (2014) Neoliberalism and violence: The Big Society and the changing politics of domestic violence in England. *Critical Social Policy*, vol 43(3), pp. 333-353.

McCarry, M. (2007) Masculinity studies and male violence: Critique or collusion? *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol 30(5), pp. 404-415.

Messner, MA., Greenberg, MA., and Peretz, T. (2015) *Some Men: Feminist Allies in the Movement to End Violence Against Women*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Owen, N. (2013) Men and the 1970s British Women's Liberation Movement. *The Historical Journal*, vol 56(3), pp. 801-826.

Pease, B. (2002) (Re)constructing men's interests. *Men and Masculinities*, vol 5(2), pp. 165-177.

Pease, B. (2008) Engaging men in men's violence prevention: Exploring the tensions, dilemmas and possibilities. Issues Paper 17. Sydney: Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse.

Pease, B. (2015) Disengaging men from patriarchy: Rethinking the man question in masculinity studies, in: Flood, M. & Howson, R. (eds.) *Engaging Men in Building Gender Equality*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, pp. 55-70.

Pease, B., and Flood, M. (2008) Rethinking the significance of 'attitudes' in challenging men's violence against women. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol 43(4), pp. 547-561.

Peretz, T. (2017) Engaging diverse men: An intersectional analysis of men's pathways to antiviolence activism. *Gender and Society*, vol 31(4), pp. 526-548.

Phipps, A. (2016) (Re)theorising laddish masculinities in higher education. *Gender and Education*, vol 29(7), pp. 815-830.

Reed, E., Raj, A., Miller, E., et al. (2010) Losing the "gender" in gender-based violence: The missteps of research on dating and intimate partner violence. *Violence Against Women*, vol 16(3), pp. 348-354.

Ricardo, C. (2015) Men, masculinities, and changing power: A discussion paper on engaging men in gender equality from Beijing 1995 to 2015. Washington, DC: MenEngage Alliance and UN Women.

Ruxton, S. (2009) Man made: Men, masculinities and equality in public policy. London: Coalition on Men and Boys.

Salter, M. (2016) 'Real men don't hit women': Constructing masculinity in the prevention of violence against women. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, vol 49(4), pp. 463-479.

Sanders-McDonagh, E., Neville, L. and Nolas, SM. (2016) From pillar to post: Understanding the victimisation of women and children who experience domestic violence in an age of austerity. *Feminist Review*, vol 112(1), pp. 60-76.

Seymour, K. (2018) "Stand up, speak out and act": A critical reading of Australia's White Ribbon campaign. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, vol 51(2), pp. 293-310.

Towers, J., and Walby, S. (2012) Measuring the impact of cuts in public expenditure on the provision of services to prevent violence against women. Lancaster University: Northern Rock Foundation and Trust for London.

Walby, S., and Allen, J. (2004) Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey. Research Survey 276. London: Home Office.

Westmarland, N. (2015) *Violence Against Women: Criminological Perspectives on Men's Violences*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Women's Aid (2014) Why we need to save our services: Women's Aid data report on specialist domestic violence services in England. Bristol: Women's Aid Federation of England.

Wright, C., and Cowburn, M. (2011) What's happening in men's work in the UK? Reflections on policies and processes, in: Ruspini E., Hearn, J., Pease, B. et al. (eds.) *Men and Masculinities Around the World: Transforming Men's Practices*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 109-121.

Funding details

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council under Grant number 1448235.

The Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all of the interviewees who took part in the study; Professor Nicole Westmarland for her supervision throughout the research project; and the reviewers for their helpful comments on this article.