Preventing Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Sri Lanka: Stakeholder Consultations

CARE International Sri Lanka is an international non-governmental organization that is committed to combating poverty and securing the rights of people since the 1950s. In its converted efforts to that end, CARE has come to recognize the strengthened rights and mobilization of women as fundamental elements for sustained change. As such, gender is an integral part of our framework.

In October 2010, CARE embarked on a pioneering initiative, ERU: America to Engage Men to Reduce and Resolve Gender Violence through Education, Advocacy, and Recruitment (EMERGE), which involves men and boys in the conversation about gender in order to effectively reduce and prevent gender-based violence. EMERGE aims to promote a discussion on gender issues that encourages exploration and documentation of dominant gender narratives, gender roles and masculinities, with the intent to bring about cultural as well as structural changes within various influencing institutions including the family unit, community, and society.

In order to better inform this endeavor by bridging knowledge gaps, CARE partnered with Partners for Prevention (P4) UNHCR, UN Women, and UNH Regional joint program for gender-based violence prevention in Asia and the Pacific to conduct a study titled Breaking Gender: why masculinity matters on men's knowledge, attitudes, and practices of masculinities, gender-based violence, and gender equality.

The study findings will contribute towards the Partners for Prevention Regional Study Title: The UN Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence.

The key research objectives of the study were:

- To obtain valid estimates of the prevalence and frequency of men’s perpetration (and women’s experience) of different types of violence against women, as well as men’s violence against other men, with a particular emphasis on intimate partner violence and sexual violence.
- To map men’s own experiences of different types of violence, including violence as children;
- To map men’s gender attitudes and practices and identify which factors males perceive as a risk for perpetrating intimate partner violence and sexual violence; and
- To build evidence-based policy and programme responses to prevent gender-based violence in Sri Lanka.

CARE International Sri Lanka is an international non-governmental organization that is committed to combating poverty and securing the rights of people since the 1950s. In its converted efforts to that end, CARE has come to recognize the strengthened rights and mobilization of women as fundamental elements for sustained change. As such, gender is an integral part of our framework.

In October 2010, CARE embarked on a pioneering initiative, ERU: America to Engage Men to Reduce and Resolve Gender Violence through Education, Advocacy, and Recruitment (EMERGE), which involves men and boys in the conversation about gender in order to effectively reduce and prevent gender-based violence. EMERGE aims to promote a discussion on gender issues that encourages exploration and documentation of dominant gender narratives, gender roles and masculinities, with the intent to bring about cultural as well as structural changes within various influencing institutions including the family unit, community, and society.

In order to better inform this endeavor by bridging knowledge gaps, CARE partnered with Partners for Prevention (P4) UNHCR, UN Women, and UNH Regional joint program for gender-based violence prevention in Asia and the Pacific to conduct a study titled Breaking Gender: why masculinity matters on men’s knowledge, attitudes, and practices of masculinities, gender-based violence, and gender equality.

The study findings will contribute towards the Partners for Prevention Regional Study Title: The UN Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence.

The key research objectives of the study were:

- To obtain valid estimates of the prevalence and frequency of men’s perpetration (and women’s experience) of different types of violence against women, as well as men’s violence against other men, with a particular emphasis on intimate partner violence and sexual violence.
- To map men’s own experiences of different types of violence, including violence as children;
- To map men’s gender attitudes and practices and identify which factors males perceive as a risk for perpetrating intimate partner violence and sexual violence; and
- To build evidence-based policy and programme responses to prevent gender-based violence in Sri Lanka.

CARE International Sri Lanka is an international non-governmental organization that is committed to combating poverty and securing the rights of people since the 1950s. In its converted efforts to that end, CARE has come to recognize the strengthened rights and mobilization of women as fundamental elements for sustained change. As such, gender is an integral part of our framework.

In October 2010, CARE embarked on a pioneering initiative, ERU: America to Engage Men to Reduce and Resolve Gender Violence through Education, Advocacy, and Recruitment (EMERGE), which involves men and boys in the conversation about gender in order to effectively reduce and prevent gender-based violence. EMERGE aims to promote a discussion on gender issues that encourages exploration and documentation of dominant gender narratives, gender roles and masculinities, with the intent to bring about cultural as well as structural changes within various influencing institutions including the family unit, community, and society.

In order to better inform this endeavor by bridging knowledge gaps, CARE partnered with Partners for Prevention (P4) UNHCR, UN Women, and UNH Regional joint program for gender-based violence prevention in Asia and the Pacific to conduct a study titled Breaking Gender: why masculinity matters on men’s knowledge, attitudes, and practices of masculinities, gender-based violence, and gender equality.

The study findings will contribute towards the Partners for Prevention Regional Study Title: The UN Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence.

The key research objectives of the study were:

- To obtain valid estimates of the prevalence and frequency of men’s perpetration (and women’s experience) of different types of violence against women, as well as men’s violence against other men, with a particular emphasis on intimate partner violence and sexual violence.
- To map men’s own experiences of different types of violence, including violence as children;
- To map men’s gender attitudes and practices and identify which factors males perceive as a risk for perpetrating intimate partner violence and sexual violence; and
- To build evidence-based policy and programme responses to prevent gender-based violence in Sri Lanka.

CARE International Sri Lanka is an international non-governmental organization that is committed to combating poverty and securing the rights of people since the 1950s. In its converted efforts to that end, CARE has come to recognize the strengthened rights and mobilization of women as fundamental elements for sustained change. As such, gender is an integral part of our framework. In October 2010, CARE embarked on a pioneering initiative, ERU: America to Engage Men to Reduce and Resolve Gender Violence through Education, Advocacy, and Recruitment (EMERGE), which involves men and boys in the conversation about gender in order to effectively reduce and prevent gender-based violence. EMERGE aims to promote a discussion on gender issues that encourages exploration and documentation of dominant gender narratives, gender roles and masculinities, with the intent to bring about cultural as well as structural changes within various influencing institutions including the family unit, community, and society.

In order to better inform this endeavor by bridging knowledge gaps, CARE partnered with Partners for Prevention (P4) UNHCR, UN Women, and UNH Regional joint program for gender-based violence prevention in Asia and the Pacific to conduct a study titled Breaking Gender: why masculinity matters on men’s knowledge, attitudes, and practices of masculinities, gender-based violence, and gender equality.

The study findings will contribute towards the Partners for Prevention Regional Study Title: The UN Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence.

The key research objectives of the study were:

- To obtain valid estimates of the prevalence and frequency of men’s perpetration (and women’s experience) of different types of violence against women, as well as men’s violence against other men, with a particular emphasis on intimate partner violence and sexual violence.
- To map men’s own experiences of different types of violence, including violence as children;
- To map men’s gender attitudes and practices and identify which factors males perceive as a risk for perpetrating intimate partner violence and sexual violence; and
- To build evidence-based policy and programme responses to prevent gender-based violence in Sri Lanka.

In order to better inform this endeavor by bridging knowledge gaps, CARE partnered with Partners for Prevention (P4) UNHCR, UN Women, and UNH Regional joint program for gender-based violence prevention in Asia and the Pacific to conduct a study titled Breaking Gender: why masculinity matters on men’s knowledge, attitudes, and practices of masculinities, gender-based violence, and gender equality.

The study findings will contribute towards the Partners for Prevention Regional Study Title: The UN Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence.

The key research objectives of the study were:

- To obtain valid estimates of the prevalence and frequency of men’s perpetration (and women’s experience) of different types of violence against women, as well as men’s violence against other men, with a particular emphasis on intimate partner violence and sexual violence.
- To map men’s own experiences of different types of violence, including violence as children;
- To map men’s gender attitudes and practices and identify which factors males perceive as a risk for perpetrating intimate partner violence and sexual violence; and
- To build evidence-based policy and programme responses to prevent gender-based violence in Sri Lanka.

CARE International Sri Lanka is an international non-governmental organization that is committed to combating poverty and securing the rights of people since the 1950s. In its converted efforts to that end, CARE has come to recognize the strengthened rights and mobilization of women as fundamental elements for sustained change. As such, gender is an integral part of our framework. In October 2010, CARE embarked on a pioneering initiative, ERU: America to Engage Men to Reduce and Resolve Gender Violence through Education, Advocacy, and Recruitment (EMERGE), which involves men and boys in the conversation about gender in order to effectively reduce and prevent gender-based violence. EMERGE aims to promote a discussion on gender issues that encourages exploration and documentation of dominant gender narratives, gender roles and masculinities, with the intent to bring about cultural as well as structural changes within various influencing institutions including the family unit, community, and society.

In order to better inform this endeavor by bridging knowledge gaps, CARE partnered with Partners for Prevention (P4) UNHCR, UN Women, and UNH Regional joint program for gender-based violence prevention in Asia and the Pacific to conduct a study titled Breaking Gender: why masculinity matters on men’s knowledge, attitudes, and practices of masculinities, gender-based violence, and gender equality.

The study findings will contribute towards the Partners for Prevention Regional Study Title: The UN Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence.

The key research objectives of the study were:

- To obtain valid estimates of the prevalence and frequency of men’s perpetration (and women’s experience) of different types of violence against women, as well as men’s violence against other men, with a particular emphasis on intimate partner violence and sexual violence.
- To map men’s own experiences of different types of violence, including violence as children;
- To map men’s gender attitudes and practices and identify which factors males perceive as a risk for perpetrating intimate partner violence and sexual violence; and
- To build evidence-based policy and programme responses to prevent gender-based violence in Sri Lanka.
This research revealed significant information that was categorized into five thematic areas that call for attention to be considered in activities of intervention:

2. Youth engagement for reduction of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).
3. Exploring women’s attitudes and the impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on their mental and physical health.
4. Addressing men’s health as a means of primary prevention of GBV.
5. Private sector engagement and the role they may play in GBV reduction.

For each of the thematic areas, various organizations collaborated to produce five corresponding policy briefs that are further elaborated in the sections below.

**Introduction to the five thematic working groups:**

**Child protection** — including childhood experiences and their impact on violence perpetration.

A body of evidence now suggests that men who have experienced childhood trauma are likely to perpetrate violence against their partners. In other words, childhood abuse, characterized by neglect, sexual, physical, and emotional abuse has been identified as one of the possible factors leading to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). An escalating factor for actions of violence could also be current needs and models of masculinity which promote feelings of sexual entitlement and liberties. Furthermore, experiencing child abuse has a negative impact on men’s physical and mental health, which exacerbates the likelihood of perpetrating violence (See figure 1). For example, men who experienced childhood physical sexual or emotional abuse as age 7 to 12 years more likely to perpetrate violence against their partners.

**Youth engagement for the reduction of SGBV:**

One of the most critical areas for effective change is working with the youth. There are many issues affecting young people that are complex and many times hidden from the public eye. In addition to childhood experiences in young adults, we are formative personalities and expressions. Youth is prone to impressionable times, where interests in some things can lead to risky and unhealthy behaviors. Hence, creating a safe space to talk about sex, sexuality, gender, and sexual and reproductive health is critical in ensuring prevention in perpetration of violence.

The study involved the GendSafe-Young Men (GSMY) scale to understand gender perceptions of young people. The results reveal inequitable notions of gender roles. In addition, it also revealed startling statistics about perpetration of violence by youth, starting as young as age 10 (See figure 2). Furthermore, the data set from the study reveal knowledge gaps in youth’s self-awareness as well as an opportunity to begin conversation and break the silence over taboo topics pertaining to growth and sexuality.

**Age when first committed sexual violence, inclusive of rape, among men who reported perpetration of sexual violence**

The prevention and response to child abuse are best addressed in the places of occurrence including homes, communities, schools and juvenile centers.

The brief suggests interventions fitting to the ecological model, whereby strategies are targeted at individual, relational, community, and societal levels. It was facilitated by Prof Subhash, a practitoner in the field and facilitated by Dr. International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) 2011 on Youth Leadership in collaboration with the Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka.

**Addressing men’s health as a means of primary prevention of GBV:**

One of the most significant revelations that came through this study is that those men who do not usually call attention to men’s health, experiences of masculinity through childhood and youth are dictated by dominant notions of gender which can exert pressure on individuals, as well as marginalize those that do not fit the hegemonic masculine image. It is further exacerbated by the idea that men should not display their vulnerabilities or express their emotions. Needless to say, the lack of a healthy value for mental and physical well-being results in unhealthy manifestations of their emotions through anger and violence. For example, men who were emotionally or sexually abused as children are more likely to be used to physical and mental violence against a new partner. Furthermore, there is a significant percentage of men in Sri Lanka that display depressive syndromes (see figure 4).

**Exploring women’s attitudes and the impact of GBV on their mental and physical health:**

Women’s health is undeniably a big component of gender-based violence. Violence and its related terminology, health effects are physical, mentally and culturally. It also leads to internalization of gender roles and notions of womanhood in which the woman is supposed to man. This is evident in the findings of the study whereby women display higher rates of gender inequitable attitudes compared to men. For example, 61.9% of the female sample in contrast to 31% of the male sample, affirmed that ‘In any rape case, one would have to question whether the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation’ (See figure 3). Such attitudes also lead to underestimation of violence against women. Thus, there is a need to not only ensure that the field of physical and mental well-being is addressed, but also to focus on attitudes of women to display more positive self-esteem and identify the agency.

Successful interventions would reduce underestimation of violence against women and help change women’s attitudes about themselves and their roles.

**Men’s and women’s attitudes toward gender relations**

What is the view of respondents? Does men’s and women’s perceptions of the gender relations differ? To what extent do the respondents agree or disagree with the statement: "Women should submit to their husbands?" (See figure 3).

The brief was facilitated by Dr. Indrani Ratanaratne, Country Officer of CARDI, a collaboration with WHO and NUSAD.

**Private sector engagement — and the role it can play in GBV reduction**

Private sector was identified as one of the key players to influence the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the workplace and outside. There is pressing significance of SGBV on the private sector in terms of its effects on company productivity, workforce balance and brand image. This is facilitated by Dr. Indrani Ratanaratne, a collaboration by EIL and CARDI, which can benefit greatly by addressing the issue of sexual and gender-based violence in private sector.