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Engaging men in the prevention of gender-based violence: Opportunities within the business sector

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Tackling GBV Conference

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Introduction

- Increasingly recognised that businesses can play a vital role in preventing gender-based violence, at all 3 levels:
- **Primary (stopping abuse from happening in first place)**
- Secondary (stopping abuse while it's happening)
- Tertiary (stopping abuse from happening again)
- Research method: 15 semi-structured key-informant interviews.



The screenshot shows the BBC News website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the BBC logo, a 'BBC Account' link, a notification bell icon, and menu items for 'Home', 'News', 'Sport', 'Weather', 'iPlayer', and 'Sc'. Below this is a prominent red banner with the word 'NEWS' in white. Underneath the banner is a secondary navigation bar with links for 'Home', 'Brexit', 'Coronavirus', 'UK', 'World', 'Business', 'Politics', 'Tech', 'Science', 'Health', and 'Family & Education'. The 'Business' link is highlighted with a red underline. Below this is another row of links: 'Business', 'Your Money', 'Market Data', 'Companies', 'Economy', 'Global Car Industry', and 'Business of Sport'. The main headline reads 'Firms told to look out for domestic abuse signs' in a large, bold, dark font. Below the headline, it says '3 days ago' with a clock icon.

Why engage with men?

- Most violence and abuse in society is perpetrated by men, and this is closely connected to harmful ideas and norms of masculinity and to male dominance.
- This also means that men can play a vital positive role in its prevention (Flood, 2019).
- Helps us to address the roots of the problem – and move beyond victim-blaming narratives.
- Men hold majority of positions of power.
- Raise issues relating to men's experience of violence.

Why engage with businesses?

- Prevention efforts needed across society – and businesses have a substantial influence.
- Preventative focus tends to be on young people, yet they have less power to create change.
- Workplace = crucial space in which to engage men.
- Gender-based violence takes place within (e.g. sexual harassment) and impacts significantly on the workplace (e.g. may be only safe space for victim-survivors of domestic abuse). Key health and safety issue.

What can businesses do internally?

- Support victim-survivors and address the behaviour of perpetrators within their organisation.
- Raise awareness among staff, and help to change attitudes, behaviours and norms (e.g. through training, campaigns, workplace champions / allyship / bystander intervention schemes). Gender-transformative approach most effective (Casey et al., 2018).
- Ensure that organisational structures and workplace culture embrace violence prevention and gender equality (Powell, Sandy and Findling, 2015).

What examples are there?



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What can businesses do externally?

- Lead the way in speaking out about violence against women in wider society – e.g. among clients/customers, in their communities, in public conversations.
- Set an example to others with their own conduct, by actively promoting gender equality and helping to shift harmful gender norms (e.g. in their products and advertising) – starting by avoiding reproducing unhealthy stereotypes.
- Collaborate with specialist services and NGOs.

'The Best Men Can Be'

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koPmuEyP3a0>



What works to engage businesses?

- One person often plays a key role – shows the change that individuals can make.
- Importance of senior level buy-in and leadership.
- Creating holistic change across the organisation – including at individual, cultural and structural levels, and engaging with range of key players, e.g. trade unions.
- Need for an incremental approach, engaging with businesses and staff ‘where they are at’.
- Recognise heterogeneity of businesses (size, industry).

What works to engage men?

- Range of ‘entry points’ to conversations about shifting masculine norms – from domestic abuse, to mental health, to being gender equality allies.
- Value of both mixed and gender-specific conversations, in both organised and informal settings.
- Highlight positive role men can play – and how a more inclusive workplace benefits everyone – whilst also challenging them to reflect on their own practices.
- Make it ‘real’ and ‘personal’ to men’s lives, and give them the tools and confidence to speak out.

What challenges are there?

- Lack of understanding of the issues, or why they affect businesses.
- Organisational denial, defensive responses from staff and managers, or backlash from wider community.
- Prioritisation of financial concerns, lack of funding for violence prevention organisations.
- Limitations of one-off/single-level interventions (e.g. introducing policies alone).
- Embedding violence prevention work sustainably.

What are some of the tensions?

- Well-intentioned but counter-productive messages.
- Risk of men being put on a 'pedestal' (Messner et al., 2015), 'taking over' conversations, or seeing themselves as 'white knights'.
- Dangers of a superficial or tokenistic approach - or of being co-opted into corporate agendas.
- Potential for message to be depoliticised/degendered.
- Challenging highly masculinised organisations and power structures.

What impact is Covid-19 having?

- Tackling these issues is more urgent than ever.
- Both challenges and opportunities associated with moving violence prevention work online.
- Some businesses less willing/able to invest in 'non-essential' activities, and many NGOs are struggling (Burrell and Ruxton, 2020).
- Increased awareness of domestic abuse, reflections about relationship between the personal and professional, desire to embrace more ethical practice?

What next?

- Need to make the most of increased awareness and reflection during Covid-19, to engage more men in speaking out and promoting gender equality.
- Vital to ensure that violence *prevention* and gender inequalities don't fall 'off the agenda' during times of crisis.
- Need for more government action, e.g. investment, placing requirements on employers.

Thank you for listening!

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“I think the other challenge is that people in businesses want to be focused on the business and they don’t want to get side-tracked by personal stuff. But the best businesses are the ones that allow themselves to be side-tracked, because the best businesses are the ones where people feel supported no matter what’s happening in their lives. You see that, you see these amazing organisations where they are so supportive and caring, and the productivity goes up, you can see it. You can see the difference it makes.”

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