

The majority of men aren't violent, but violence is a men's issue, and we all have a stake in reducing it.

Christopher Kilmartin, Ph.D.



I'm a college professor. My office sits next to a hallway abuzz with students at every class changeover, so I often overhear their conversations, whether I want to or not. Recently, I heard one male student talking to another about the poster they were perusing, the White Ribbon Campaign Men working to end mens violence against women—how insulting!”

Unfortunately, this is not an unusual reaction. When I talk about the gendered nature of violence, lots of men get defensive—“*Hey, I'm not violent*”—and they are unwilling to continue the conversation.

So let me say this loud and clear: the vast majority of men are not violent. I am a man and I haven't had a fight since the sixth grade—and most men I know have similar histories of nonviolence. So why should we talk about violence as a men's issue? After all, some women are violent, too.



While the vast majority of men are not violent, the vast majority of violent people are men. In the United States, men commit nearly 90 percent of all violent crimes, and there are similar imbalances nearly everywhere in the world. Imagine if men were no more violent than women. In the United States, it would mean a 75 percent reduction in violent crimes, which translates into about 22,000 fewer violent crimes and 30 fewer murders per day.

We are tempted to believe that men are so much more violent than women because of some biological factor such as testosterone, but research into the biological correlates of violence doesn't support that hypothesis; besides, the vast majority of men are not violent. Research into psychological factors has been much more successful. Violent men nearly all adhere to toxic definitions of masculinity. In gender-based violence—rape, intimate partner violence, etc., these definitions of manhood include an especially strong dose of dominance and woman-hating. And these definitions are supported by the men they associate with, and the culture at large.

Violence is a men's issue, and all of us have a stake in reducing it. Men are also the most frequent victims of male violence. It is physically and psychologically damaging for victims and their friends and families, it puts perpetrators at risk for harm and incarceration or other legal trouble, it causes non-victims to live in fear, and it costs us a tremendous amount of money in law enforcement, prisons and jails, emergency rooms and health insurance, and social services like batterer education programs and rape crisis centers.



The solutions begin with the awareness that this is largely a men's problem—we need to take responsibility for preventing violence. Every man can get involved by refusing to participate in attitudes and behaviors that support violence and by confronting men who support violence.

A well placed couple of words can be remarkably powerful. Express disapproval when other men say dehumanizing things about others or suggest that violence is an appropriate reaction to conflict. Men talk in these ways to win the approval of other men. If you disapprove, they will not get what they want and they are more likely to stop than if you remain silent or go along with the joke.

We can also support local services such as rape crisis centers and domestic violence agencies with donations and volunteer time. We can get involved with National organizations like *Men Can Stop Rape*. We can participate in or begin a *White Ribbon Campaign* or a *Red Flag Campaign* to prevent interpersonal violence. We can mentor young boys and men and help them to see that there are alternatives to physical aggression.

Make it your personal pledge to never commit, condone, support, or remain silent about mens violence, and we will go a long way toward solving the problem that has affected so many people.