

Men Against Sexual Assault, Brisbane, Australia

BACKGROUND

Men Against Sexual Assault (MASA) is an Australian organisation, based in Brisbane, which describes itself as 'pro-feminist, gay affirmative, male positive.' It attempts to engage men on the social forces that give them a propensity for violence, particularly against women and children. MASA believes that the preponderance of men as perpetrators in statistics documenting violence against women arises from the roles and stereotypes men believe they must play in society.

Recently, MASA implemented a programme at the Gwandalan Community Corrections Centre in Brisbane, a correctional centre servicing a largely Aboriginal and Straits Torres Islander population. The Centre believes in the concept of positive self-development as a means to ensure low recurrence of offences. Aboriginal people staff the Centre, and its main aim is successful reintegration of offenders. The Centre is run by the Brisbane Tribal Council, and accepts offenders who have committed violent crimes.

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

MASA ran an 8 week programme at the Gwandalan Centre. Course content included:

Week 1 The Nature of Violence: Why is society so violent? What is the relationship between masculinity and men? Are men more violent than women? Are there alternatives to violence?

Week 2 Why Feminism?: What does feminism say about men? To men? What is it about the feminist model that is useful for us? How can a man be pro-feminist? What is patriarchy? What does it mean to live in a patriarchal, sexist society? How do issues of class, race and gender interact?

Week 3 Learning to Be a Man Part 1: What have our families taught us about relationships, power and masculinity? What do our role models tell us about what it means to be a man? How is power used and expressed in families? How do families interact?

Week 4: Learning to Be a Man Part 2: What happens to children when there is abuse of power in a family? How do those children protect themselves? What do these understandings imply to developing masculinities? Understanding Pro-feminist Education Programmes – theoretical framework on how men develop. Experiences of boys, adolescents and young adults. Masculinity as a template.

Week 5 Self-violence: The use of 'self-violence' in repressing 'feminine' traits. Objectification and emotional truncation in the creation of masculinity and personalisation of these social imperatives.

Week 6 Relationships with Men: Homophobia, Competition, Fear of intimacy, the threat of rape and how sexuality develops.

Week 7 Relationships with Women: Sexuality continued. Physical and sexual abuse. Pornography. Misogyny.

Week 8 Feedback and Course Synthesis: Synthesis of the issues discussed to emphasise the ways in which they are interconnected. Feedback.

Many of the men in the programme had internalised and externalised violence experienced or witnessed in their childhood. The process of learning attempted to assist the men in understanding the basic tenets of feminism as well as connecting their early childhood experiences with their behaviour patterns in their adult lives.

The programme tried to measure the success of introducing pro-feminist work into an essentially hostile environment. Denial and antagonism about culpability and responsibility within a patriarchal society was rife – when confronted with examples of violence against women, many men excused it as extreme forms of violence with no connection to an engendered identity. Change was not possible, because either men were ‘born that way’ or victims of extreme ‘bad luck’.

ORGANISATIONAL REFLECTION

Where the programme was not successful, a number of interesting lessons were learned:

- Aboriginal presenters were more successful in reaching and engaging participants than white presenters. Language and culture issues were more accessible, and participants were more open and trusting of people from their own backgrounds;
- Initial organisation with prison officials and the Tribal Council was critical;
- It was felt that occasionally, a female co-presenter might be useful. Many times, men discussed what women felt or would think, without a woman’s voice present;
- Video, audio and stories, were utilised to enable men to tell ‘parallel stories’ – making connections between the stories and their own personal histories;
- Confrontation works – men were consistently confronted and their own attitudes were used to show up the patterns of patriarchy.

EVALUATION

While MASA is a feminist organisation, its hierarchy is male-dominated. Its effectiveness can be measured by the apparent lack of integration with women’s voices and evaluation. While it is a vocal and useful advocacy organisation, its interventions are dominated by a male vision of feminism, relatively uninformed by a female voice.

MASA’s work with Gwandalan was impacted by the fact that most of the facilitators were white men, and most of the participants were Aboriginal or Straits Torres Islanders. Trust, understanding and congruency were not achievable within this dynamic. Issues of power and control could not be dealt with in an open and honest manner because the facilitators were representative of a group that held power and control over the participants. This is not to condemn white men to positions where they are unable to engage with or facilitate groups such as this – but it is to make an undeniable point. Culture, religion, ethnicity and race are critical components in understanding power, control and VAW. If the nature of the intervention is group workshops, it is critical that facilitators and participants meet on a relatively equal footing.

Conclusion

The case studies described in this report illustrate the various options available to those individuals and organisations that seek to work against gender abuse and domestic violence. They offer a multi-faceted set of tools with which to build a potentially holistic set of interventions or programmes. The key message that can be highlighted from the set of case studies is that a co-ordinated, integrated approach to tackling the problem of gender-based abuse and violence is essential if any meaningful, lasting impact is to be made. Holistic approaches are able to address the many faces and foundations of this scourge.

Given the small size of most NGOs in South Africa who run programmes in this field, holistic interventions of this nature are difficult to achieve. That this is true can be borne out by the very small number of organisations currently working with men (or women for that matter) on any large scale in South Africa. This requires either much closer co-operation between organisations, or significant growth of capacity within organisations, so that efforts to work with men can be implemented alongside current efforts to work with women, without undermining the existing women's programmes. Fruitful synergies may even result from the interaction of the two programmes within organisations or between organisations.

A further problem in implementing larger scale programmes that work with men as partners, or via public education, or masculinity initiatives or via perpetrator programmes themselves, is that wide disagreement exists on the processes, merits, and even effectiveness of such interventions, especially with regard to perpetrator programmes. A solution to this is linked to the third option for building a holistic intervention, namely, a process of national discussion and debate, in the shape of a National Forum or Commission on the formulation and construction of a Gender Abuse Intervention System (GAIS – see Main Report). This system would essentially encompass the four main areas of intervention noted in this report (and the Main Report), as well as the richness of detail and experience found across the theoretical literature and the case studies described in this report and the Main Report. The possible components of such a system would be agreed upon by consensus within the proposed National Forum, and from this agreement a pilot model for implementing the GAIS would be constructed. This pilot would then be tested and thoroughly evaluated, with a view to developing a workable, indigenous system that could possibly be rolled out nationally, in collaboration with and via civil society, the private sector and the state.

¹ The alienated identity of SA's men. http://www.tiscali.co.za/tiscali/news/news_story.jsp?content=126357.

² Draft Working Document of the Inter-Departmental Men's Forum of the Government, prepared by Gift Buthelezi, March 2000, p. 2.

³ Interview with Hector Madima and Gift Buthelezi, Pretoria, July 2002.

⁴ Interview with Hector Madima and Gift Buthelezi, Pretoria, July 2002.

⁵ Interview with Hector Madima and Gift Buthelezi, Pretoria, July 2002.

⁶ Lesetedi, B. Telephonic Interview, 2004.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Regarded as sissies or girls.

⁹ Sardien, Tony, Gender training must get its rightful place in development, Network News, February 2001.

¹⁰ A recent (2004) evaluation of GETNET's Men's Programme was apparently completed for a UCT "Women and Gender Studies" post-graduate mini-thesis by Glynis Levendal. Report not obtained at time of writing.

¹¹ Interview: Peter Jordaan, GETNET, August 2004.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Rashid, M. Giving Men Choices: A Rozan Project with the Police Force in Pakistan, INSTRAW GAINS, 2001, p. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁵ Asian Development Bank, Law and Policy Reform at the Asian Development Bank, 2001, Part Two, Legal Empowerment Advancing Good Governance and Poverty Reduction, p. 75.

¹⁶ <http://www.menstoppingviolence.org/services.html>, September 30, 2002.

¹⁷ Telephone interview with Red Crowley, Men Stopping Violence, October 28, 2002.

¹⁸ From Gokova, J, Challenging men to reject gender stereotypes, http://www.kit.nl/information_services/exchange_content/html/1998_2_editorial.asp.

¹⁹ This is an a point which should be investigated further, to establish whether this info has been written up since the initial interviews for this report were concluded.

²⁰ From email correspondence (2003).

²¹ Interview: Cindy Celliers, Masimanyane: August 2004

²² Interview with Venessa Padayachee, NICRO: August 2004.

²³ Shepard, Melanie, Evaluating Coordinated Community responses to Domestic Violence, April 1999, p. 5.

²⁴ Pence, E., and Paymar, M. Education Groups For Men Who Batter: The Duluth Model. Springer Publishing, New York: 1993.

²⁵ *Op cit.*, Shepard, p. 2.