Shama Ethnic Women's Trust

Let's Talk, Men - Project Report

November 2023

Abstract

Critical engagement with healthy masculinity can play a key role in preventing violence in communities, especially against women. A series of conversations and one-on-one interviews were carried out with ethnic men from different backgrounds in Aotearoa New Zealand, to explore and highlight positive attitudes, values and examples of healthy masculinity from their cultures.

The exercise found differences in the concept of healthy masculinity across cultures, religions and ethnic backgrounds. Participants also reported a palpable change in masculinity norms. They attributed this to environmental change or generational change due to education and social media.

Respect for women and the elderly and the importance of supporting the family were identified by the participants as some of the common examples of positive masculinity. Most of the participants noted the changes in parenting values around what is important for boys and girls, and the importance of educating boys about healthy masculinity, and inculcating values such as empathy, kindness and respect for others.

Introduction

In her book "The Second Sex,"[1] Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote "one is not born a woman but becomes one" to underscore the socially constructed nature of female gender identities. The same could be said of men. This understanding of the socially constructed nature of masculinities is critical in tackling family violence and sexual harm, and building safer and

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[1] Beauvoir, S. (2015). The Second Sex (Vintage Feminism Short Edition). Random House.

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inclusive communities. Feminist scholars and sociologists have contributed to a deeper appreciation of how gender relations and hierarchies are mediated through cultural context-specific notions of masculinity/femininity and defined by patriarchal power relations.[2]

For the purposes of this paper, masculinity refers to the "pattern or configuration of social practices linked to the position of men in the gender order" – a position that "may not correspond exactly with what men actually are, or desire to be, or what they actually do."[3] The discourse on masculinity has evolved over the last few decades, with increasing attention paid to the concepts of "toxic masculinity" [4] and "healthy masculinity" or "masculinities".[5] These terms encapsulate essential discussions about the societal expectations and behaviours associated with men and their impact on both individuals and communities. Rather than being biologically driven, masculinity – as a social construct – is defined by historical and political constructs, and reinforced everyday by individuals, institutions and organised systems such as the law, religion and education.

Values such as toughness, aggression and dominance that are seen to be central to patriarchal masculinity[6] legitimise men's dominance in society and justify the subordination of women.[7] Such harmful norms and stereotypes linking gender and power – normalised through phrases like "boys will be boys" -- can reinforce the idea that men should be in control, express aggression to assert authority, and even justify violent behaviour.

Addressing the societal and individual problems arising from unequal gender relations is not merely a matter of acknowledging and tackling toxic masculinity. It would be folly to present masculinity in such singular terms as an "assemblage of toxic traits" [8] or to construct men as

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[2] Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). Polity.

[3] Connell, R.W. (2002). Studying men and masculinity. *Resources for Feminist Research*, 29(1/2), 43-.

[4] First use of the term "toxic masculinity" is attributed to psychiatrist Shepherd Bliss. A scholarly definition describes toxic masculinity as "the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence." See Kupers, T. A. (2005). Toxic masculinity as a barrier to mental health treatment in prison. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *61*(6), 713–724. https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20105

[5] For a critical discussion on healthy and toxic masculinity(ies), see Waling, A. (2019). Problematising 'Toxic' and 'Healthy' Masculinity for Addressing Gender Inequalities. *Australian Feminist Studies*, *34*(101), 362–375. https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.1080/08164649.2019.1679021

[6] Messner, M. A. (1992). *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity*. Beacon Press.

[7] Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). University of California Press.

[8] Lomas, T. (2013). Critical Positive Masculinity. *Masculinidades y Cambio Social*, *2*(2), 167–193. https://doi.org/10.4471/mcs.2013.28

"damaged and damage doing."[9] A view that over-emphasises "toxic masculinities" can be counterproductive to the project of creating safe and inclusive families and communities, especially in light of empirical evidence that show how many men resist and redefine traditional hegemonic norms of masculinity in ways that are more conducive to individual and community health and well-being. Exercises that affirm positive masculinity traits as perceived by men in different cultures can provide a foot in the door for developing interventions aimed at confronting patriarchy.

A caveat, though. Working within the framework of hegemonic patriarchy, even masculinity traits identified as positive can entrench patriarchy, sustain male dominance and frustrate the quest for more equal gender relations. Best practices in repairing disrespectful gender relations acknowledge the need for a nuanced approach to addressing masculinities, and a careful balance between focusing critically on toxic masculinities and healthy, positive masculinities.[10] Lomas (2013) offers "critical positive masculinity" as a "fresh perspective that is neither fatalistically negative nor naively optimistic about the possibility for positive change in men."

Various resources, including videos, are available to discuss and promote healthy masculinity[11]. These resources explore the societal norms that pressure men to conform to specific behaviours and attitudes and highlight opportunities to break free from the constraints of toxic masculinity, encouraging open conversations and a re-evaluation of societal expectations. Helping boys and men resist unhealthy traditional masculine stereotypes and redefine masculinity to foreground healthy attitudes and behaviour will not only reduce violence but also foster happier, better-connected, and less-restricted existences for men.

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[9] Mac an Ghaill, M., and Haywood, C. (201 2). Understanding Boys: Thinking through boys, masculinity and suicide. *Social Science and Medicine*. 74(4), 482-89.

[10] Englar-Carlson, M., & Kiselica, M. S. (2013). Affirming the strengths in men: A positive masculinity approach to assisting male clients. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *91*(4), 399-409.

[11] See, for instance, Decoding the Man Box - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZLeNfeLQdg or Tough Guise - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqiX9Al-LZ8. The ANZ "We do how" ad video features an ethnic Indian father who nurtures his son's dream to be on the Kiwi cricket team. https://www.campaignasia.com/article/young-cricketer-makes-dad-proud-in-new-anz-campaign/469221

Manifestations of healthy masculinity are evident in all ethnic groups and cultures. One study of men's attitudes and practices related to gender equality in eight low- and middle-income countries -- Brazil, Chile, Mexico, India, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda – found that men report positive attitudes toward gender equality, and that in most countries, men's equitable attitudes translated to more equitable practices, including increased participation in domestic responsibilities and reduced use of violence.[12] Another study of perceived masculinity attributes by men from China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia and Taiwan reported "being a family man" as a newly emerging masculinity trait that was ranked fourth most important masculinity attribute. Only having a good job, being seen as a man of honour and being in control of one's life were rated higher.[13]

In some Asian belief systems such as Confucianism, the concept of a virtuous gentleman (*Junzi*) highlighted qualities such as benevolence, righteousness, trustworthiness and wisdom, and humility through reflexivity. Such embodiment traits of healthy masculinity can promote ethical conduct and harmonious relationships within society[14]. As per these ideals, one's strength was to be used for the betterment of society rather than personal gain.

A four-nation study covering Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine found ample evidence of men's caregiving in the home, of men who empowered their daughters and those who viewed their wives' and their sisters' work as fully equal to theirs.[15] Providing for and protecting their families are seen as a noble and honourable duties among Pakistani men[16].

Even as the concept of masculinity evolves with education, changing environments and transgenerational change, embracing diverse expressions of healthy masculinity can help

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[12] Levtov, R. G., Barker, G., Contreras-Urbina, M., Heilman, B., & Verma, R. (2014). Pathways to Gender-equitable Men: Findings from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey in Eight Countries. *Men and Masculinities*, 17(5), 467-501. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14558234

[13] Ng, C. J., Tan, H. M., & Low, W. Y. (2008). What do Asian men consider as important masculinity attributes? Findings from the Asian Men's Attitudes to Life Events and Sexuality (MALES) Study. *Journal of Men's Health (Amsterdam)*, 5(4), 350–355. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jomh.2008.10.005

[14] Li, M. (2022). Ancient Chinese roots. In *The Global Foundations of Public Relations* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 24–47). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351245340-3

[15] UNWomen & Promundo (2017). Understanding masculinities, results from the International Men and Gender Equality Study in the Middle East and North Africa. United Nations. (https://dspace.ceid.org.tr/xmlui/handle/1/810)

[16] Haroon, M A. (2021). Construction of Masculinity as "Provider" and "Protector" in Pakistani Men. PhD Thesis, Habib University.

individuals and communities break free from harmful stereotypes and foster more inclusive and equitable societies.

To build a climate of healthy masculinity in Aotearoa New Zealand, Shama Ethnic Women's Trust launched its "Let's Talk, Men" project. The aim of this project is to create a network of ethnic men interested in preventing family violence and sexual harm, and to link into existing healthy masculinity efforts, providing positive examples and actions of ethnic groups in New Zealand.

**The "Let's Talk, Men" Project**

Set up to engage ethnic men in conversations about healthy masculinity and initiatives focused on preventing sexual harm within ethnic communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, the "Let's Talk, Men" project involved a series of group discussions and one-on-one interviews with ethnic men on a range of topics including attitudes towards women, raising children, and experiences of living in Aotearoa New Zealand. The project's objective was to collate positive cultural perspectives on the concept of healthy masculinity within diverse ethnic groups in the country.

Participant sample, data collection, and analytical approaches

The corpus of data for the study covered transcripts of seven group conversations and 15 interviews with ethnic men. The total of 71 participants in ages ranging from 20 to 63 years are from Chilean, Chinese, Chinese-Filipino, Chinese-Malaysian, Chinese-Pakeha, Colombian, Congolese, Costa Rican, Spanish, Egyptian, Korean, Pakistani, Filipino, Indian, Korean, Middle Eastern, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Uruguayan and Zimbabwean communities based in different parts of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Image 1 shows the ethnicities and locations of participants.
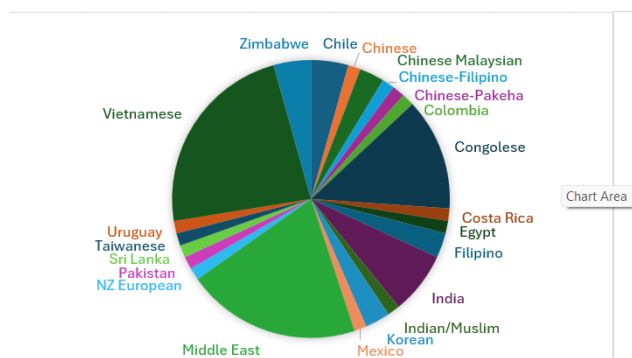
Ethnicities   **Location**
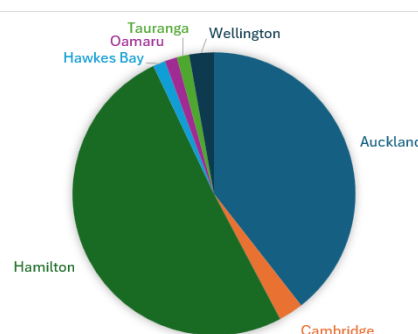
Six of the seven community conversations took place in person, and one was conducted over Zoom. The size of the groups varied between five and 14 participants. Five of the conversations were among men who shared some cultural trait in terms of nationality, religion or language (for e.g. multi-ethnic Muslim, Congolese, Vietnamese, and Spanish-speaking participants). The remaining two conversations involved people with a mix of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. The conversation among Muslim men of varying ethnicities was conducted in a mosque, and it was not possible to record individual ethnicities. This is to highlight that "muslim" is a religious identity, and that wide variations can be expected between muslim men from different cultural backgrounds.

The conversations were prompted with the following questions:

- What do you understand by healthy masculinity?
- How does this look in your community/culture/family?
- What positive examples of healthy masculinity can you see in your culture?
- How does this affect others around you (wife, children, parents, friends, etc.)?
- What are people's experiences on healthy masculinity?

For the one-on-one interviews, Shama staff introduced themselves and the interview's objectives, and collected interviewee details. They explained "healthy masculinity" as traits that allow men to express themselves emotionally without feeling emasculated, and to avoid social norms that involve using their size, strength or power to get what they want from others. Healthy masculinity confronts and exposes harmful stereotypical ideas propagated by

phrases such as *"Boys need to be brave"*, "Boys can't be afraid", "Boys can't be gentle", "Boys can't be hurt", or "Boys can't look soft"[17].

Each of the interviewees selected two topics from the list below and discussed questions related to how healthy masculinity appears in their community/culture/family, highlighted positive examples of masculinity, and suggested actions ethnic men can take to promote healthy masculinity. The topics were:

- Let's talk about healthy masculinity
- Let's talk about sex
- Let's talk about attitudes to women
- Let's talk about what it's like for us in New Zealand
- Let's talk about how to raise our children

Further details on the workshop and the interview template are presented in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

The data (voice records of interviews and conversations and interview notes) were then analysed to extract and summarise the patterns and positive attitudes as well as extant examples of healthy masculinity mentioned by participants from their respective cultures.

Findings

Participants in conversations and interviews agreed that there is no unique definition of healthy masculinity, as it may change from one culture to another.

"It can be very hard to give a universal definition of healthy masculinity because of demographic and cultural differences. What healthy masculinity is, in some societies in many

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[17] Definition used by Shama, informed by https://theconversation.com/toxic-masculinity-what-does-it-mean-where-did-it-come-from-and-is-the-term-useful-or-harmful-189298 , https://greenhillrecovery.com/toxic-masculinity-vs-healthy-masculinity/ & file:///C:/Users/manag/OneDrive/Documents/Programmesmesmes%20and%20events/SEXUAL%20VIOLENCE/Let's%20Talk%20Men/VicHealth%20Masculinities%20and%20health%20framework%20JUNE%202020.pdf

parts of the world, especially Muslim nations, is different from here in New Zealand." (Participant of Egyptian origin) Ethnic men across cultures shared many values and ideas associated with healthy masculinity. Most participants noted that generational change and education have brought a significant shift in the concept of masculinity. Generational change emerged as a consistent theme in all conversations. Traditional notions of masculinity that required men to be strong, dominant and emotionally stoic are being reevaluated and challenged by younger generations. More access to education, especially for women, has also had a big impact on gender roles and social norms.

> *"With the advancement of women's education, there has been a significant shift. Both women and men now work and contribute equally to the household. The notion of positive masculinity has also evolved. Previously, it was associated with financial success, the number of children, and overall wealth. However, the current perspective emphasises the importance of contribution, supporting a partner's pursuit of education and employment, and overall satisfaction. Consequently, significant changes have taken place."* (Participant of Indian ethnicity)

Another Indian participant (Participant 2) stated that in male-dominated societies, the man is the main person who generates income, and the woman is the person taking care of children. Therefore, man has the upper hand and dictates the rules. He believes in India, for example, this is the case for rural areas, where people are less educated. But in cities where both genders are well educated, men and women take equal responsibility. Acting to empower women is seen as a trait of healthy masculinity.

> *"In urban areas where the male and female both are educated, they take masculinity as empowering to women. So, it's a different thing, and it's all based on the education."* (Participant 2 of Indian ethnicity).

<u>Gender roles are changing</u>

In many cultures, as shared in community conversations and interviews, men are expected to be the main providers and protectors. They are also expected to be strong, responsible, and

discouraged from expressing their emotions. Crying, for instance, is seen as a sign of weakness. However, gender roles are beginning to change:

> *For centuries the "man has to be the family provider, has to bring the bread and butter for the table, and the woman has to handle the house and kids. But for several generations, like three or four generations back now, things are changing, especially when women are coming forward and doing the roles that were only dedicated to men, for example, construction work or things which are very physical. Now, women are even doing sports that are labelled as male sports, like boxing or martial arts stuff. So, things are slowly changing, especially with education and internet."* (Participant from Muslim group discussion)

Masculinity norms that project men as protectors are also changing as women's expectations change and are willing to take risks especially when it allows for enjoyment of increased freedom. A South Korean participant explains with an example of his society's changing norms. In his family, only the father drove to shield the mother from the increased risk of accidents associated with driving. However, as women aspire to be independent, many more are driving as they find the risks worth the freedom and mobility driving offers.

In Vietnamese culture, men are often expected to take on physically demanding duties such as mowing the lawn, fixing cars or gardening; women are expected to do lighter duties like washing dishes, cooking, and taking care of children. However, a Vietnamese participant observed that such a gendered division of labour can exclude women from participating fully in society and pursuing careers in fields like law or medicine.

> *"It is important for fathers to communicate effectively with their wives and consider switching roles as parents, allowing women to contribute to society and promoting gender equality."* (Participant of Vietnamese ethnicity)

Participants in the Muslim group discussion commented that it is important to get more women (from the Muslim community) into the work environment, as this helps change mindsets and advance the cause of women.

In the Spanish speakers' conversation, participants acknowledged that women are now capable of providing for themselves. They questioned the need for traditional male roles of protection and provision considering evolving dynamics of gender relations and increasingly self-sufficient women. One of the participants pointed out that although women now have equal participation in various fields, traditional gender roles and expectations persist here in Aotearoa. As an example, he said his child's school still calls his wife every time there was a need, even though he is the main contact (as his wife is not fluent in English). This points to a societal assumption that mothers are responsible for nurturing and taking care of children.

Citing global examples of advancement of gender equality, such as the election of female heads of state and equal pay in sports, Spanish-speaking participants noted that much progress has been made in terms of gender equality. However, all remained uncomfortable with the idea of men staying at home to care for children. They said it went against their cultural norms. Participants acknowledged the need to redefine masculinity and move away from traditional ideas of machismo. They questioned what it means to be a man in a changing world where traditional gender roles are being rendered irrelevant. But they pointed out that many professions remain gendered -- nursing as a woman's domain, or construction work that remains a male bastion.

Another participant compared gender roles in different countries, highlighting the progress made in Colombia where men and women share household responsibilities. Assuming a protective role towards women and children, safeguarding the values of their families and wanting the best for their children were highlighted with pride by participants as positive masculinity traits. They said men need to redefine masculinity and see themselves as providers of not just material needs but also of family experiences and as protectors of values central to their families.

> *"There is a need to redefine masculinity as providers and protectors of values and experiences, rather than just physical needs".* (Participant of Spanish ethnicity)

Changes because of the local environment

While assimilation into the New Zealand culture happens across generations of migrants, it is quicker and more pronounced among the younger generations and comes with some positive implications. Congolese participants, for instance, said that younger people can absorb healthy masculinity traits from the new culture.

In Congolese culture, parents usually have a decisive role over their children's futures. But this has changed in the new environment. Here, decisions are taken through a participative process where children discuss their interests and preferences with their parents and reach an agreement.

However, serious cultural conflicts remain where deeply ingrained traits and norms from ethnic cultures clash with practices and norms in New Zealand. In Congolese culture, parenting values and practices are heavily influenced by religion and the "word of God". For instance, corporal punishment may be an accepted parenting norm as per Congolese's religious upbringing. However, corporal punishment is an offence under Aotearoa's law. Participants said they struggle with such conflicts where what they see as the "word of god" is contradicted by laws prescribed by humans. Participants highlighted the need for flexibility and time in adapting cultural values in a changing environment.

"Back home, you can slap because even in the Bible, it says you can slap your children to correct them. Because we are now in a new country, we will respect the government's laws. Yeah, they choose not to slap them; just leave them because they told us not to beat anyone in this country. That is New Zealand law. But we will show our children [other positive aspects of] our culture as well." (Participant of Congolese origin)

The participant said they negotiate such intercultural conflicts by respecting the host society and its laws, and focusing on their priorities of educating their children, finding employment and supporting their families.

Similar conflicts were shared by Spanish-speaking participants who insisted on the need for flexible approaches to cultural adaptation:

"Masculinity's impact on migrants stems from the clash between their heritage, traditions, and belief systems, and the need to adapt to the new culture. Integrating into the host society

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often requires letting go of certain practices, especially when they conflict with opportunities for personal and educational growth." (Participant of Central American heritage)

<u>Respect</u>

Participants from diverse ethnicities highlighted the importance of respecting the elderly and women as a healthy masculinity trait, and as integral to fostering a healthy and inclusive society. By valuing and upholding respect for these groups, individuals contribute to the promotion of equality, empathy, and understanding among different generations and genders:

> *"My dad always said that you couldn't touch a woman even with a petal from a rose. So, if I pulled my sister's hair I would get in big trouble and if they pulled my hair, that doesn't matter... I left Costa Rica quite young, but over there you respected women above all."* (Participant of Costa Rican ancestry)

> *"In our culture the person who beat the wife or any woman is actually not a man. That's what we brought up. You can't raise your hand on a woman because you are not physically equal, then you should not be actually going on or anything like that. So that's the thing, they need to look up to, for men, he's made to protect her, not to beat her."* (Participant of Indian ethnicity)

<u>Educating parents to teach children about healthy masculinity</u>

Several participants expressed a need for parental education on raising children and a toolbox of parenting skills to help them raise their children in their newly adopted country. They felt that what they had learned from their parents may not always be appropriate for their new setting in Aotearoa.

Participants emphasised the idea of parenting by example, as children tend to imitate what they see -- "monkey see, monkey do"!

"Children would see and learn from their parents how they act, behave, or implement their responsibilities in the family role". (Participant of Congolese ethnicity)

Fathers can encourage their sons to follow good aspects of masculinity by being good role models. A Korean participant pointed out that among the younger generations, caring for children and the elderly are no longer seen as women's work; men too are shouldering these responsibilities.

Besides seeing themselves as role models, people also pointed out that their friends too should be seen as role models. So it is not enough for the father to serve as a healthy role model; he should choose his friends with care as children will see and learn from them too.

Participants said they needed to be actively involved in their children's lives, and that children need to be nurtured with love, care, and support rather than through strict discipline – for instance, by using "timeouts instead of physical punishment for kids". They prioritized creating a safe and nurturing environment, where children can freely express themselves, develop their identities, and explore their interests, and underscored the importance of boys learning values such as empathy, kindness, and respect for others.

A participant of Taiwanese origin related positive upbringing of children to an emphasis on respecting women and practicing kindness, and said that these values positively impact community and culture. He also said it was important to raise sons with a healthy understanding of masculinity:

> *"I think . . .you learn [masculinity] from your parents, the environment of your family. Now, if you [had a] dominating father, that comes back to you, but if there is love and there is cooperation, then is a different situation again. . . again, what we learn in our environment, our culture, I think that's how you, you mould yourself. So, I think that if you're in a good environment, you're a good person"*

Managing emotions

Shedding stoicism and embracing emotional expression were seen by participants as essential traits of healthy masculinity. By way of example, a man of Indian ethnicity shared how men greet each other has changed over time. Younger generation men are comfortable hugging each other, as opposed to older generation males' more formal and less physical greetings such as shaking hands or bowing to each other. Though such changes happen slowly, these physical expressions have the potential to undo stoic masculinity and promote emotional expression among younger generations:

> *"I remember a young father was moving to Australia. And I saw him off at the airport. And we had to say goodbye to him. And I was like, see you later mate. And he said, Hey, what about a cuddle? And that was, that was the big eye opener for me"*
> *(Participant of Indian ethnicity)*

Physical expressions of affection, even by and among males, is common in some cultures. A participant of Mexican heritage said that his 21-year-old son greets them with a kiss every morning. Such displays of affection are common and accepted in many Spanish-speaking cultures, he said. The speaker compared this to his experience in New Zealand, where physical affection among people is less common:

> *"I have a very clear example, my son, he is 21 years old, and works with us in the company. Every morning it doesn't matter who is there, he will come and say hi to me with a kiss, and he is almost 22. He has always done, because we are used to that, and he will not be any less for that. We, in the Spanish speaking world, we are very physically expressive; we hug; in Argentina and Uruguay men kiss each other. We are expressive with our family members; we all hug and kiss; you kiss your tata's hand and hug him; we are much more physically expressive than here. In my family, it was like that. But here I have friends whose kids don't even let them drop them at school."*
> *(Participant of Mexican ancestry)*

However, participants from other cultures acknowledged that as per traditional masculinity norms men in many cultures are expected to be stoic, strong and not cry or get emotional.

This emphasis on toughness and emotional restraint in men need not always be negative; it can be good for the family by shielding family members from being exposed to anxiety, and help men become more resilient and persevering in the face of hardships, they observed. For example, they said, in times of bereavement, men can help their wives overcome grief by showing strength and support. Similarly, in situations where a mother is hospitalised and unable to work, the father can choose not to react to her job loss and focus instead on supporting the family, thereby saving the child and the woman from additional stress. Indeed, emotional restraint is a desirable trait for certain professions – such as ambulance operators, doctors and lawyers -- that can be emotionally demanding. However, participants also acknowledged the risks of anxiety and depression associated with suppressing their emotions. In such cases, it is important for men to find healthy ways to express themselves, including by changing their methods of communication or seeking help from men's support groups. As important as it is for men to look out for the family's well-being, it is also critical to fulfil this responsibility without endangering their own mental health.

One participant spoke of the pressures on Asian men to remain stoic and argued for measures that would help them become more expressive. He shared statistics of high suicide rates, anxiety, and depression among Asian men, and attributed these to Asian men's tendency to suffer in silence rather than express themselves about traumatic experiences -- such as bullying or domestic and sexual violence – suffered by them.

> *"Asian culture is like … we don't really show emotion. Asian men are not supposed to show emotions, like to the family, you never, like even my dad, never showed whether he was sad or angry. It just always seemed [like] he carried the burden of the family. But I don't think it's actually a good thing. We should actually show our emotion more because I think it's, all of a sudden, like a lot of … No, I mean, back in Asia, the suicide rate there is massive, they just never show their emotions or stress and then all of a sudden, they just disappear".*
> *(Participant of South Korean heritage)*

Helping men let go of excessive emotional restraint and express themselves can help reduce risk of mental illnesses and suicidal tendencies, the participant suggested.

A participant of Vietnamese descent linked the lack of emotional expression among men from his culture with events such as the Vietnam wars, where men put themselves in harm's way and protected women and children. Women's sheltered lives during the war also meant they were not as active in the public sphere. That changed after the war as more and more women began to get involved in Vietnam's socio-economic development.

> *"You know, in Vietnam, we had a lot of wars, between China and Vietnam, then France and Vietnam, then US and Vietnam. So a lot of men go to a battlefield... So, from childhood, we are taught to be strong, because we are supposed to go to the battlefield, and we need to win the war. So that's part of the reason. Yeah and the women in South Vietnam women never go to war, and men go to war, and that was the fight. We need to be strong and we do not necessarily show emotion"*
> *(Participant of Vietnamese heritage)*

Overall, cutting across ethnicity, participants acknowledged the healthy outcomes resulting from free emotional expression within close circles of family and friends. When individuals feel safe and encouraged to express a wide range of emotions, that fosters deeper connections and understanding among them. Emotional expression allows individuals to share their joys, sorrows, fears, and vulnerabilities, creating an environment of empathy and support. Healthy masculinity plays a crucial role in this dynamic by encouraging emotional openness and validating the experiences of others. Men who embrace such traits and express their emotions tend to empower those around them also to do the same. This leads to stronger bonds, increased trust, and a sense of belonging within the circle of trust, and ultimately promotes overall well-being and mental health.

A participant from South Korea highlighted the difference between his generation and his father's in terms of emotional expression. He said in his relationship with his children, emotional detachment is discouraged and it is normal to express anger and sadness. In contrast, his father, influenced by his own experiences of parental bereavement, was emotionally restrained -- he had allowed himself to cry only three times in his life.

Communicating and sharing

Participants identified effective communication between men and women as a crucial factor in striking a balance between expressing emotions and maintaining traditional gender roles. A 30-year-old Asian man observed that marital relations in his generation tended to be more collaborative, egalitarian, and equitable. Encouraging each other to be emotionally vulnerable and open with each other was seen as important.

Muslim men from multiple ethnicities who participated in a group discussion noted that communities can provide various kinds of emotional support and encourage people to express their emotions in a controlled manner. They also underscored the influence of stress, including time constraints (highlighted by an Asian participant) and financial (in)security on emotional regulation and the ability to avoid violent behaviour. As coping mechanisms and stress busters, participants spoke of healthy habits such as reading, spending time with friends, physical exercise, engaging in voluntary work, and confiding in friends and family. Many men highlighted the importance of having a supportive network of friends to share life's challenges, and identified as valuable male friendships where emotional matters could be discussed openly in an atmosphere of empathy.

Participants also consistently called for natural and informal support groups or spaces such as gatherings after a sports game or over a coffee or a drink – rather than through formal support group meetings.

> *"The first step in promoting healthy masculinity is recognising that everyone is unique and that no two people are the same, so there is not just one way to be a man. The second step is making men aware that it is okay to talk about mental health. How masculinity can be improved in a positive way in the family and community, especially in a male-dominated field like engineering? Encouraging people to be themselves and having open conversations. Support groups can be helpful for individuals who experience emotional challenges intermittently, providing them with the necessary assistance."*
> *(Participant with European and Singaporean Chinese ancestry)*

When individuals within a community are comfortable expressing their emotions, it creates a ripple effect that permeates various aspects of community and nurtures a culture of compassion, understanding, and inclusivity. Emotionally expressive individuals are more likely to engage in open and honest conversations, leading to better conflict resolution, improved cooperation, and the development of healthier relationships. This, in turn, helps reshape societal norms and expectations, fostering a culture that values emotional well-being, respects individual differences, and supports mental health on a broader scale.

<u>Emotional capacity building</u>

A pressing need identified at several sessions was for educational programmes and workshops, and material such as videos, to help boys and young men express themselves emotionally and become emotionally intelligent as a means of developing healthy masculinity traits. Such outreach and exposure could be facilitated through community initiatives and churches, a Zimbabwean participant suggested. Many participants proposed that such interventions should also promote healthy relationships and lifestyles, highlight the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse, help young males recognise and prevent sexual abuse and harm through sex education. Rather than a one-size-fits-all strategy, educational interventions must be developed in culturally appropriate ways and in languages accessible to the target communities.

Conclusions and recommendations

The discussions with ethnic men in Aotearoa New Zealand highlighted the importance of interventions that would help men identify and discard toxic masculinity traits and redefine masculinity to incorporate traits that are healthy for society and for men themselves. Such traits – which include effective communication, emotional expression, and respect for women and the elderly -- could be inculcated through educational interventions for parents and young males and the creation of safe and nurturing environments for boys and men.

The emerging understanding of healthy masculinity emphasises emotional intelligence, empathy, and the rejection of toxic behaviours. Masculinity norms that prescribe behaviour that is unattainable, unhealthy, unpleasant or disagreeable to individuals will be a source of

conflict and harm the individuals' emotional response. Investing in emotional intelligence can help boys and men adopt a critical approach to masculinity and pave the way for a more inclusive and egalitarian society, where men are encouraged to express their emotions, cultivate meaningful relationships, and actively participate in nurturing and caregiving roles. "Emotional intelligence," according to Daniel Goleman who popularised the term, "reconciled what had been seen as two opposites: our feelings and our reasoning."[18]

The younger generation is paving the way for a more balanced and compassionate society, where individuals of all genders can thrive and contribute to a healthier and more harmonious world:

> *"Things are changing, but maybe not fast enough, maybe we have to do something more quickly to actually change …".* (Participant of Indian ethnicity)

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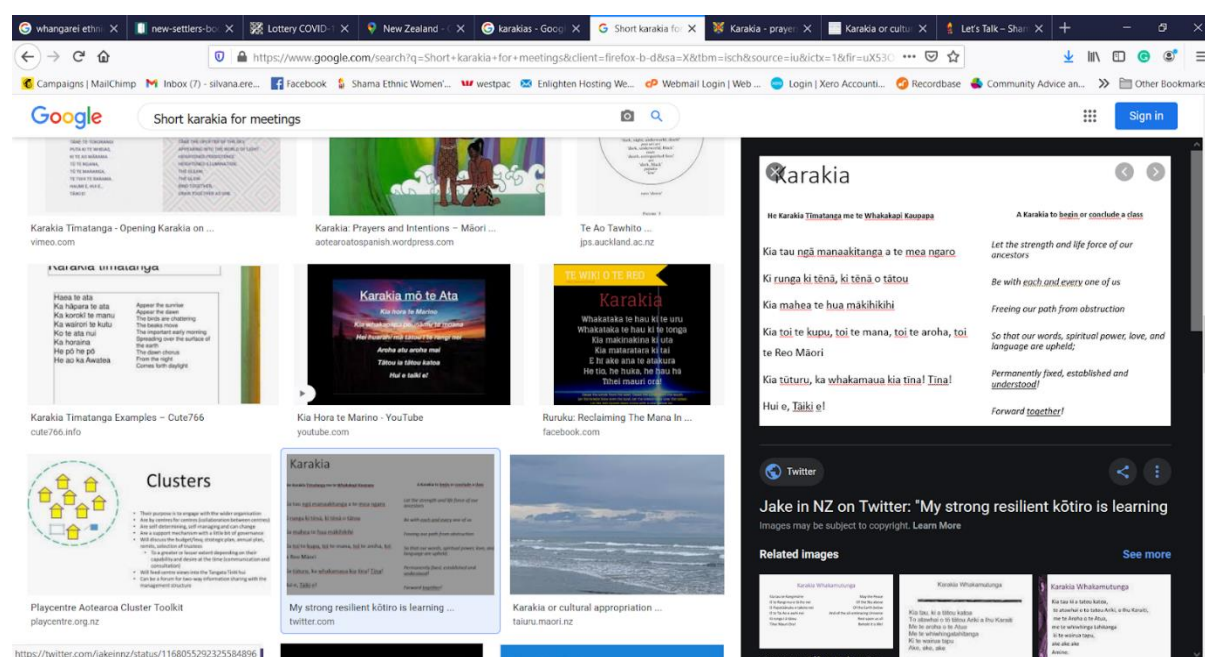
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Appendix 1

Community conversations run sheet

<u>Let's Talk Men, Community Conversations</u>

3pm   Welcome and karakia

3.05pm   Whakawhanaungatanga (introductions)

　　　　Ask each person to introduce themselves. Optional questions that you can use: who is in the room, name, where are you from, a bit about yourself and your family maybe, how you got here to this meeting.

　　　　This should take around 30 minutes. If the group is small (for example, 5 people), they can talk around 5 minutes each; but if it is a group of around 10 people, then ask to introduce themselves in no more than 2 or 3 minutes.

3.30pm   Briefly explain what the purpose of the meeting is:

"You may now know, but Shama is running a project to start community conversations with ethnic men about what healthy masculinity means for us. We want to focus on the positive aspects of our cultures. We get enough negativity from the wider society, here is about highligtinh those aspects in our cultures and values that enable healthy masculinity.

But first, please lets respect each other, honour what everyone says and keep this space safe for everyone to open and share what they think about these new concepts".

1. What is healthy masculinity or masculinities for you? Ask them to say what this concept means for each of them

After everyone shares, read what you have in the facilitators guide about healthy masculinity

Show one or two of the following videos:

Decoding the Man Box - Kevin Powell, Tony Porter. This video talks about the social norms which pressure and reward men to behave in specific ways **(up to the 1minute 46 seconds is relevant for all men)**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZLeNfeLQdg

Video 2 (6 mins): **Tough Guise** - Jackson Katz examines the role of American mass media in forming ideas about masculinity, considering bullying and school shootings or gay bashing, sexual assault, and violence against women, Katz makes a powerful case that male violence, misogyny, and homophobia are inextricably linked to how we define manhood as a culture.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqiX9Al-LZ8 **(up to the 1minute 56 seconds is relevant for all men)**

Here is an example of great healthy masculinity: You can use the video of ANZ cricketer as an example of the cricketer's father as a great role model (respectful, supportive, loving, etc.)

What positive examples can you think of your cultures in your countries or families ? What do men in your community or culture do that shows healthy masculinity? Why or where do you see this?

Let participants share their ideas and experiences. Ask them to write them on a post note or record their answers (audio should be enough) so we can capture their ideas

4.05pm   5 minutes break (refill drinks, stand up and a quick walk, or just mingle)

4.10pm   In this second part, let's go a bit more specific. Let participants choose a topic or 2 to reflect on:

- let's talk about healthy masculinity,
- let's talk about sex,
- let's talk about attitudes to women,
- let's talk about what it's like for us in New Zealand,
- let's talk about how to raise our children

    Questions to prompt the conversation:

- How does this look in your community/culture/family?
- In our cultures, what positive example we see of this?
- How does this affect others around me (wife, children, parents, friends, etc.)?
- What are people's experiences on this?

    You have 30 minutes for this, so if they want to cover 2 topics you should manage time to allocate 15 minutes for each topic.

    Let participants share their ideas and experiences. Ask them to write them on a post note too so we can capture their ideas

4.40pm   "Before we finish today. I want to share some videos that Shama made as part of another project to prevent sexual violence".

In this page: https://shama.org.nz/cd/projects/lets-talk/   Show the video in the language of the group

Questions to prompt the conversation:

- What do you think about this video? Do you think this type of videos are useful for your community?
- Where do you think we can share them? (Any social media platform or meeting for example)

Please write the ideas, comments and suggestions about where to share them.

4.55pm   Closing: Thanks so much for coming. And sharing your ideas with us, we will be sharing the report with the findingns

Does anyone want to do a closing karakia? (if no one wants, you can read one)

4.58pm   Meeting close

What you need:

Stationary: Post notes (colour papers) so they can write their ideas (maybe 3 different colours for the 3 different parts for easy recognition after) or a voice recording app on your phone

Watch out for: People who start talking and never stop. Just stop them kindly saying something like: "I'm sorry to interrupt, what you are saying is really relevant, but let's see what others think as we have very limited time."

After the meeting: Make sure you collect and keep all post notes (if the meeting is on zoom, there is an app to have online stick notes, or they can use the chat in the zoom)

Appendix 2

Shama Interview Template

This is a 30-minute interviewing session. The main objective from this interview is the following:

- Obtaining demographic information about the ethnic man
- Obtaining information from the ethnic man about healthy masculinity in their cultures
- Discussion of two topics that can be associated with healthy masculinity

Warm introduction (Approximately 2 – 3 minutes)

- Shama member should start with their name, background, and interest in the interview, then pass it over to the interviewee
- Give them time to write their name down/obtain their demographic information (e.g., First and Last name, ethnicity, email addresses, phone number, age)
- Mention that Koha will be given at the end of the interview.

Explanation of Healthy Masculinity (Approximately 5 – 7 minutes)

- Explain what healthy masculinity is:
  - Healthy masculinity is defined as men being able to express themselves emotionally, express their emotions without feeling emasculated, and avoiding social norms that involves using your size, strength or power to get what you want from others.
  - Healthy masculinity involves decreasing the stereotypical ideas, such as "Boys need to be brave", "Boys can't be afraid", "Boys can't be gentle", "Boys can't be hurt", or "Boys can't look soft".
  - Healthy comes in diverse cultures, geographical locations, and time

    = influence of laws and social norms

Practising healthy masculinity should start within an individual, which can be spread to whanau/peers, then community, and finally the entire society (use ecological model in appendix A)

Questioning the interviewee about their culture (Approximately 5 – 7 minutes)

- Question 1: What positive examples can you think of in your cultures?
- Question 2: What do men in your culture do that shows healthy masculinity?
- Question 3: Why are these examples practiced?
- Or Question 4: How can you improve healthy masculinity in your family and community?

Questioning the interviewee about specific topics (Approximately 5 – 7 minutes per topic)

Shama member or the interviewee can select two topics from the following:

- Let's talk about friendship
- Let's talk about marriage or partnership
- Let's talk about attitudes towards women
- Let's talk about migrants' experiences in New Zealand
- Let's talk about how to raise our children
- Let's talk about ways to control our emotions in stressful scenarios
- Let's talk about using media to promote healthy masculinity (e.g., Movies that do this are Wedding Season, (other movies)
- Let's talk about social norms that promote healthy masculinity (i.e., modifying social norms "Boys need to be brave", "Boys can't be afraid", "Boys can't be gentle", "Boys can't be hurt", or "Boys can't look soft"). Discuss how these social norms can be displayed in social media (e.g., FaceBook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.)
- Let's talk about how to have a life that involves healthy masculinity (living a life with healthy masculinity)

The following questions can be used with regards to the two chosen topics from above:

- How does healthy masculinity in (enter topic) in your community/culture/family?

- In our cultures, what positive example we see of (enter topic)?

- How does (enter topic) affect others around me (wife, children, parents, friends, etc)?

- What other people you know experiences (enter topic)?

Note: If running out of time, important questions to ask are questions 1, 3, or 4.

Acknowledgement to the interviewee:

- Acknowledge about providing their information

- Discussion about retaining information as confidential and for reporting purposes

- Double check name, and interviewee's contact details (e.g., email address), and use of the contact details for distributing gift vouchers

Content