



THE RELEVANCE OF INTERNATIONAL MEN'S DAY

Jerome Teelucksingh



ABSTRACT

Since the 1960s there have been appeals and efforts to establish a special day for men. International Men's Day has moved from the fringe to the mainstream of the men's rights movement, and it must continue its meaningful and powerful message which has positively impacted the lives of millions of boys and men. In the past, IMD has largely projected a serious, no-nonsense approach as serious problems plaguing our society were addressed. In the future, IMD will continue being serious and uncompromising but this movement must also be seen as exciting and interesting to reach the younger generation and those young at heart.

Keywords: boys, international men's day, males, men

Since the 1960s there have been appeals and efforts to establish a special day for men (“History and Background,” 2019 & Thompson, 2016). On 19 November 2019, the revamped version of International Men’s Day (IMD) observed its twentieth anniversary. Since its inception in 1999, IMD had an uncertain and shaky beginning which was largely due to my shortcomings—immaturity, lack of experience and training in this sphere of gender activism. Today, IMD stands tall because it rests on the shoulders of outstanding boys and men, in the past and present, who have built a solid foundation by their speeches, writings and activism. Supporters salute those who have breathed life into IMD and made it very much alive.

For the past two decades the momentum of IMD has not been stagnant; it has evolved and expanded. One of the main achievements is that IMD has intervened and rescued the world’s boys and men who were in need of assistance. This is neither an empty boast nor self-praise. There is no statistical evidence but countless lives have been saved. IMD has inspired men to become better fathers, nephews, husbands, step-fathers, partners, employers, brothers, employees, grandfathers and neighbours. Yes, IMD has inspired persons and made them optimistic. There has been overwhelming support from a wide cross-section of society.

Despite the overwhelming support, there has been opposition. Undoubtedly, the critics and cynics have also helped shape IMD. The anti-male opinions and caustic comments should have derailed the direction of coordinators and supporters, but this did not occur. Interestingly, the negative voices ensured greater solidarity for a fledgling vision and some sympathy for this arm of the men’s movement that did not have the benefit of financial resources and high-profile support. Those in the opposition were a minority and proved to be a challenge that ensured a healthy growth of IMD. It is unfortunate that in 2019, some are still fearful and ignorant of this segment of the men’s movement. There will always be individuals and governments who will resist the culture of peace and harmony of IMD. This is a feature of a democratic society; thus, they are free to vent their grievances.

There is no ulterior motive and certainly no hidden agenda. The questions for the discontented are what is wrong with attempting to create better relations within the human family? What is wrong with trying to prevent suicides and depression? Is it wrong to protect the vulnerable and empower the weak and underachievers? IMD encourages solutions to boys’ and men’s problems. Supporters of IMD have not been distracted by the discontented and have

never forcefully imposed the six objectives of IMD on anyone.¹ Instead, there have been healthy discussions, and the options of reform or behavioural change have been presented.

The strength of International Men's Day is also one of its apparent weaknesses. In accepting men and boys from all walks of life, IMD appears to embrace males who are violent or aggressive. This is an obvious dilemma as we empower and uplift whilst embracing others. Supporters of IMD cannot claim to be all-inclusive and yet ostracize some men or criticize a few boys who are different. Indeed, it would be hypocritical if within the IMD movement, men who are challenged by addictions are condemned and ridiculed. Coordinators and supporters of IMD have welcomed boys and men who are underachievers, deviants, or anti-social but also provided guidance, advice and a model of a better lifestyle.

IMD's main goal is its all-inclusiveness. An illustration of this is the existence of IMD supporters who are conservative, moderate and extreme in their outlook. For instance, the Men's Rights Activists (MRA) who remained unwavering in their criticisms of women or men who sympathise with feminists are not excluded from supporting IMD. However, the ideology of IMD is different as adherents believe that masculinity cannot be defined as anti-female or opposed to feminism. The hate and animosity must be curtailed and left in the past. Highlighting crimes committed by women or shortcomings of females will neither empower men nor bolster masculinity. This will only perpetuate the polarized gender gap and a culture of antagonistic gender relations. Masculinity should be defined within a positive framework. IMD focuses on certain attributes, morals and values such as industriousness, empathy, honesty, bravery, compassion, humility and leadership. These are ingredients for a larger blueprint for defining masculinity and rewriting the gender narrative.

¹ The six objectives of IMD are "To promote positive male role models (not just movie stars and sports men but every day, working class men who are living decent, honest lives); To celebrate men's positive contributions to society, community, family, marriage, child care, and to the environment; To focus on men's health and wellbeing; social, emotional, physical and spiritual; To highlight discrimination against men; in areas of social services, social attitudes and expectations, and law; To improve gender relations and promote gender equality; To create a safer, better world; where people can be safe and grow to reach their full potential" (Objectives of International Men's Day, 2019).

The different masculinities cannot be seen as static. The broad spectrum of expanding notions of masculinity means that we need to be appreciative of the different conversations continuously occurring at different levels. For instance, masculinity will have different connotations for men residing in rural areas and who are poor, wealthy, or of Chinese, Syrian, European and African descent. Likewise, Hindu, Muslim and Jewish males would view manhood through different lenses. There is neither a theory nor a framework that can neatly encompass these masculinities. These multiple masculinities cannot be marginalized and need to be respected and recognized. We cannot believe that one form of masculinity is the ideal masculinity or that one version is superior or inferior.

Across the globe, IMD provides an elusive, safe space for men and boys. Furthermore, this movement reinforces existing safe spaces. It is a flexible and protective space where men and boys can openly discuss, debate and seek answers. Indeed, it is a space created to deal with the troubling and taboo topics. Those familiar with IMD would know it is promoting a way of life and a mindset that will not compromise one's culture or religion.

International Men's Day has moved from the fringe to the mainstream of the men's rights movement, and it must continue its meaningful and powerful message which has positively impacted the lives of millions of boys and men. In the past, IMD has largely projected a serious, no-nonsense approach as serious problems plaguing our society were addressed. In the future, IMD will continue being serious and uncompromising but this movement must also be seen as exciting and interesting to reach the younger generation and those young at heart. The innovative, fun and creative observances will certainly appeal to families, teenagers and children as they ponder on solutions and strategies for repairing a damaged and misguided world.

Unfortunately, IMD is not yet on the annual calendar of United Nations events. I have done my share of constantly requesting previous and present governments in Trinidad and Tobago for the motion to be included in the United Nations agenda. However, politicians and ambassadors have ignored my requests. Another country will have to take the mantle and carry the motion of 19 November to be officially recognised by the UN. One of the visions for the future of masculinity and IMD should be to permanently eliminate the gender gap to ensure equality and equity prevails in every country. IMD must never lose its momentum as the world embarks on a quest of deconstructing stereotypes, removing barriers, crossing boundaries and

destroying those walls which have created sadness, stigmatization, pessimism, loneliness and pain.

Supporters will continue collaborating with progressive organizations, other movements, individuals and governments to create a brighter, stable future and ensure the survival of humanity. The baton of IMD has been passed to this generation and they must continue this journey into the 21st century and beyond.

REFERENCES

- History and background. (2019). Retrieved from <https://internationalmensday.com/founders-statement/>
- Objective of International Men's Day. (2019). Retrieved from <https://internationalmensday.com/objectives-of-imd/>
- Thompson, J. (November 15, 2016). Resistance to International Men's Day. Retrieved from <https://www.avoicemen.com/mens-rights/resistance-to-international-mens-day/>

Author Profile:



Jerome Teelucksingh is a Lecturer in the History Department at the University of the West Indies. He revived International Men's Day (19 November) and also initiated the inaugural observance of World Day of the Boy Child (16 May). Dr. Teelucksingh has been promoting IMD since 1999, and it has spread to approximately 80 countries.

Contact details: j_teelucksingh@yahoo.com

NEW MALE STUDIES: AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL (NMS) IS AN OPEN ACCESS ONLINE INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION OF ISSUES FACING BOYS AND MEN WORLDWIDE.

THIS JOURNAL USES OPEN JOURNAL SYSTEMS 2.3.4.0, WHICH IS OPEN SOURCE JOURNAL MANAGEMENT AND PUBLISHING SOFTWARE DEVELOPED, SUPPORTED, AND FREELY DISTRIBUTED BY THE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE PROJECT UNDER THE GNU GENERAL PUBLIC LICENSE.

THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN DOWNLOADED FROM [HTTP://NEWMALESTUDIES.COM](http://newmalestudies.com)