



**CONFRONTING THE DINOSAUR IN THE ROOM:  
THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF  
VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN AND BOYS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Violence against men and boys is under-reported, ridiculed and often ignored. The phrase the elephant in the room effectively describes what's obvious but difficult to acknowledge. Violence against males is, however, a crisis that is much larger and older than the proverbial elephant: one might rightly call violence against males the dinosaur in the room. In response to this obvious-but-often-ignored problem, the inaugural observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Men and Boys was commemorated on 31 January, 2020. This observance will continue annually because men and boys need a special day that draws our attention to their experience of violence.*

**Keywords:** boys, violence, males, masculinity men

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...physical violence in particular is predominantly more socially acceptable as a practice for men or boys rather than for women or girls while, conversely, men or boys are often acutely embarrassed if they become victims of violence and particularly if that violence comes from girls or women.... (Cultures of Masculinity, Tim Edwards, p. 45).

It seems unusual to write that violent acts are perpetrated against boys and men. Boys and men are overwhelmingly portrayed in the media as violent and aggressive perpetrators, not victims. Males are frequently depicted as offenders who are capable of causing pain and suffering. Undoubtedly, some would want to trivialize or ridicule the fact that men and boys are on the receiving end as victims of violence. This is not fiction but it is an unfortunate reality. Violence against men and boys is under-reported, ridiculed and often ignored. Furthermore, there are few or no resources such as safe houses and hotlines to call, for men and boys who are victims of domestic violence.

The phrase *the elephant in the room* effectively describes what's obvious but difficult to acknowledge. Violence against males is, however, a crisis that is much larger and older than the proverbial elephant: one might rightly call violence against males the dinosaur in the room. It is the dangerous dinosaur that we are afraid to discuss; it is the dinosaur that we presently cannot move; it is the dinosaur that is not extinct but still survives in today's society. Men and boys have historically been forced (or expected) to protect tribes, villages and empires. Many were injured and died in this role. Popular culture perpetuates our acceptance of this violence against males. For example, in the 2016 movie *The Lost City of Z*, the husband, a British explorer, is arguing with his wife and pleads with her to stay safely at home: "Men and women have performed their roles since the beginning of time! It is the cornerstone of our civilization" he insists. Men are the ones who should be exposed to danger and violence.

The spread of civilization, colonialism and imperialism all have an inseparable link to violence against males. Indeed, the associated labour schemes as slavery and indentureship, were inherently violent, so was the medium for controlling the minds and bodies of innocent souls. Consider the patriotic and nationalistic men and boys who lost their lives in wars and conflicts in the 20th century. Many men lost their lives believing they were rightly defending their country, an ideology, land boundaries or fighting for justice and peace. Men are traditionally side-lined and considered disposable (*as Warren Farrell convincingly argues in The Boy Crisis and The Myth of Male Power*). Was the patriotism and nationalism worth the

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cost? Many men and boys had to suffer, to be injured and to die due to conflicts and wars. These dead boys and men could not proudly wear their medals; they could not proudly see their names on memorials, statues or tombstones honouring them. We comfort ourselves and calm our conscience by labelling these men and boys as patriots, heroes and martyrs. Brave soldiers have certainly liberated countries from tyrants and dictators, too often at the cost of many male lives. Males are taught that peacekeepers or mediators are not as heroic as soldiers. Indeed, the dinosaur of violence remains.

Obviously, the owners of companies who manufacture military weapons and guns for civilians would not want total peace. Our governments with budgets for military spending or military aid are also not primarily promoting peace. It's unfortunate that violence against males is linked to militarism and money, big money. The owners of these companies and many governments do not care enough about the mainly male child soldiers who should be in school or at home. Any industry, government or company whose violent agenda is being threatened would become defensive to avoid a loss of profits, reduced public support and bad publicity. Many of us have become accustomed to living with the male-disposable military industrial dinosaur in the room.

Research by Miedzian and Messner and Sabo contribute to the ongoing debate about the origins of masculine violence: is it instinct or aggression? Some have questioned the genetic links to violence. Undoubtedly, to blame the Y chromosome or testosterone is to make a dangerous generalization. The supporters of the sex-role theory contend that sex role learning or socialization helps explain violence among men. This would mean that factors such as the role of the media in promoting violence, glorifying violence, use of toy guns, participation in competitive sports (as boxing or wrestling) influence violence among boys. The media willingly depict males as violent, masculinity as toxic. Some persons believe that effeminate men are less violent or non-violent, that heterosexual men are more violent than gay men. The abovementioned research demonstrates that these observations and conclusions are inaccurate.

Concerning males' experience of violence, it is often difficult to distinguish among violence, punishment and discipline. Many boys experience parental alienation and are physically and emotionally abused at homes and schools. Parents and teachers often use

violence to enforce laws and demand obedience. Many parents are ignorant or unaware of their role in perpetuating anti-male violence, hence the need for the intervention of family-court judges and social workers to protect the child or children. Violence only creates temporary obedience and stability; it does not instil respect. Violence is regularly used to intimidate, to control and to destroy males.

The cycles of violence can be broken. It is foolish to believe that violence can be used to permanently end violence. The boy who is whipped, beaten or bullied to be studious, disciplined or well-mannered will most likely mature into a dysfunctional adult who will have a propensity to violence because he sees it as normal and natural. In *The Decline of Males* Lionel Tiger contends that, “Children beaten when young are more likely than usual to become beaters if they have children” (p. 112). Unfortunately, it is these dysfunctional adults who are later prone to mental health issues. The solution is not simply purging violence from masculinity. Our boys and men must not be emasculated and are entitled to their freedom. Masculinity must not be muzzled, and our males cannot be placed on a leash. The solution is the respectful treatment of males and their wellbeing.

Show me a peaceful nation, and I will show you a progressive and visionary nation. Some of the foundation blocks in building such a country are proper policy-making and educational programmes which would feed accurate and balanced information and promote an ideology of equity and equality to its citizens. For instance, Women’s Studies programs that are masked as Gender Studies and stereotype all men as violent are not helpful. Those in academia and activists cannot continue hiding behind confirmation-bias methodology and teaching outdated ideologies to impressionable minds. Such flawed learning environments preserve the status quo and continue their propaganda of fear, mistrust and hate. Not surprisingly, there are no male-friendly Men’s Studies programs at tertiary institutions. This gynocentrism is not confined to academia. An illustration is in Houston, Texas (in the United States) where there are hospitals catering for the needs of women and children. However, there are no similar hospitals for men. Such a specialized hospital for males would be an essential safe space that could deal with health issues as prostate cancer, depression, suicide or erectile dysfunction.

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We can improve male wellbeing by acknowledging the violence done to males and to suggest strategies for ending it. The inaugural observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Men and Boys was on 31 January 2020. Men and boys need a special day that draws our attention to their experience of violence. Regardless of the threatening and ferocious dinosaurs in the room, supporters will continue to promote peace and ensure this day will be annually observed on the last day of January. Indeed, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Men and Boys is long overdue and it is badly needed in our world.

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