

# Masculinities and (Non)Violence

## Exploring Determinants of (Non)Violence in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, Philippines

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### Introduction

Since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda has called for a gender perspective on peace and security. Too often, however, policymakers have used “gender” and “women”<sup>1</sup> interchangeably, which, in practice, has frequently meant placing the responsibility (and risks) of achieving gender equality solely on women’s shoulders. The WPS Agenda has been slow to engage with men and masculinities;<sup>2</sup> only in 2015 did UNSCR 2242 recognize the importance of engaging men and boys as agents of change.

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continues to hamper WPS efforts. In a global environment characterized by worsening conflicts, a resurgence of patriarchal authoritarianism, and backlash against women’s rights, we see an urgent need for the WPS Agenda to develop new approaches. Incorporating a masculinities lens will enable WPS efforts to more effectively mobilize men and boys as agents of change and counter the recurrent ways narratives of masculine strength and patriarchal dominance are used to justify gender inequality, violence against women, and participation in armed conflict.

Since then, several initiatives have demonstrated the utility of incorporating a masculinities lens into gender equality work and peacebuilding.

However, a failure to more broadly recognize and address the complex links between masculinities, peace, and conflict

This is part of a series of three policy briefs that seek to contribute to ongoing conversations about the most effective ways to engage with men and masculinities to advance the WPS Agenda. Each brief builds on findings from the report published in 2023 by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS), *Beyond Engaging Men: Masculinities, (Non)Violence, and Peacebuilding*, providing additional nuance and insights into key themes.<sup>3</sup>



The series is brief is based on a larger research project on masculinities, violence, and peacebuilding conducted in 2022 and 2023 by GIWPS and local partners in Aceh and Maluku in Indonesia and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in the Philippines.<sup>4</sup> A survey was administered to approximately 2,000 people in each case, with men and women roughly equally

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represented.<sup>5</sup> The findings presented in this brief are drawn from the survey responses from all three locations, plus focus group discussions and key informant interviews held in the BARMM.

Our analysis identifies trends in both men’s and women’s attitudes toward violence. Based on our findings, we offer policy recommendations to the BARMM, the government of the Philippines, and other national governments; to the designers of gender-focused programming, and to civil society actors. These recommendations are designed to bolster efforts to achieve gender equality and sustainable peace.

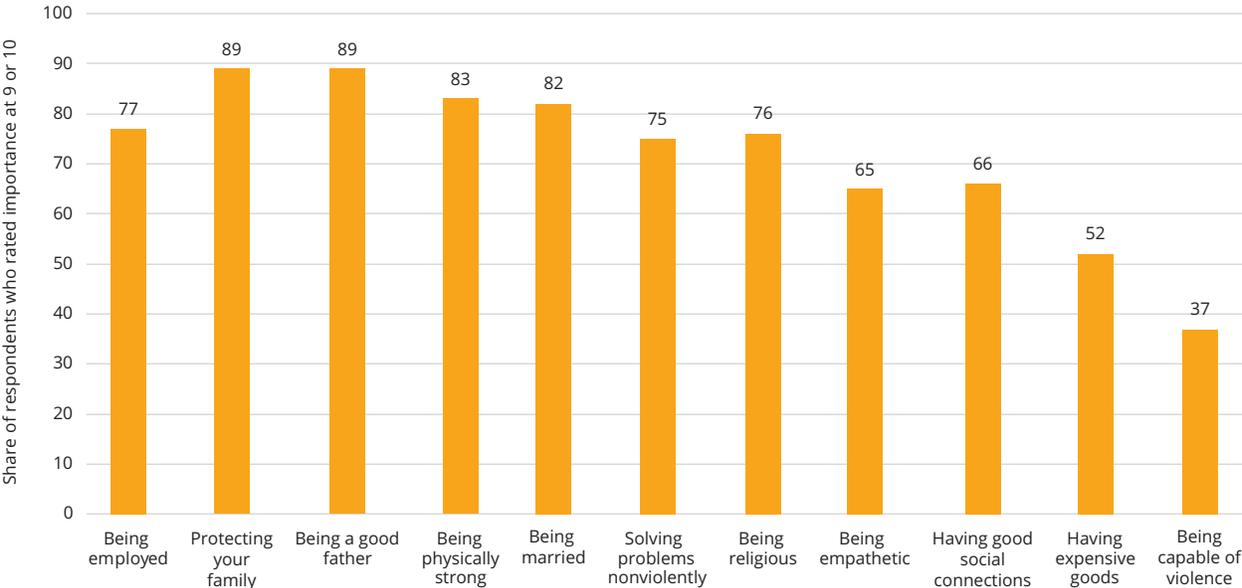
## **Key Findings**

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- Violence does not appear as a core quality of men’s understanding of or investment in masculinity. Across all three cases, men consider being capable of violence the least important quality of a man. Even in the BARMM, where a higher percentage of men express support for violence, that view is shared by only a minority.
- Women hold similar attitudes toward violence as do men.
- A heightened state of insecurity seems to contribute to the general acceptability of violence. For instance, ongoing forms of organized violence in the BARMM help explain why we find relatively higher rates of support for using violence to defend one’s community, family, and reputation among both men and women there.

**Violence does not appear as a core quality of men’s understanding of or investment in masculinity.** Men consider being capable of violence the least important quality of a man (see figure 1). Further, more than 75 percent of men in the BARMM say that the ideal man should solve problems nonviolently, and only 37 percent rate “being capable of violence” as a nine or ten on a scale of one to ten. These findings challenge the common assumption in research and practice that violent forms of masculinity are dominant.<sup>6</sup>

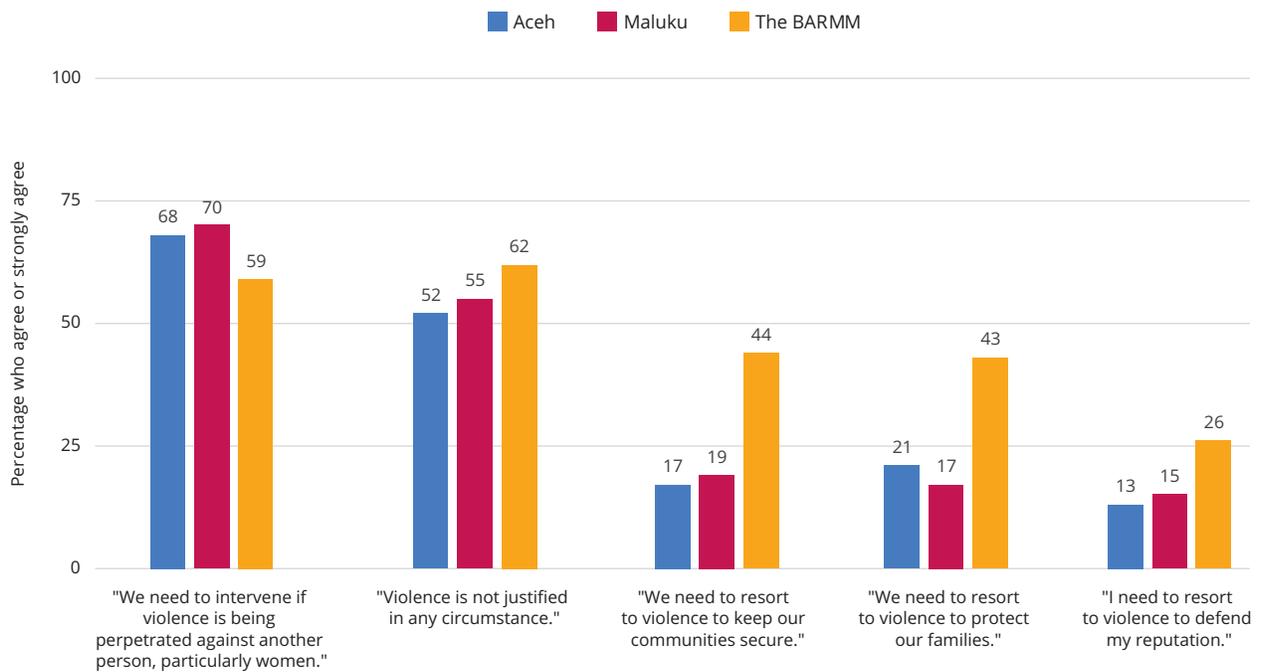
**FIGURE 1. Qualities rated 9 or 10 by male respondents in response to the question, “How important are the following qualities for being a man?”**



In the BARMM, we find a complex story about violence and nonviolence. While three out of four men in the BARMM indicate that men should solve problems without violence, they are divided about whether men should still be *capable* of violence, with 37 percent rating that capability as critically important (nine or ten) and 23 percent rating it as not at all important (one or two). Further, as figure 2 shows, men in the BARMM support the use of violence to defend their communities (44 percent), families (43 percent), and reputation (26 percent) at substantially higher levels than men in Aceh and Maluku.

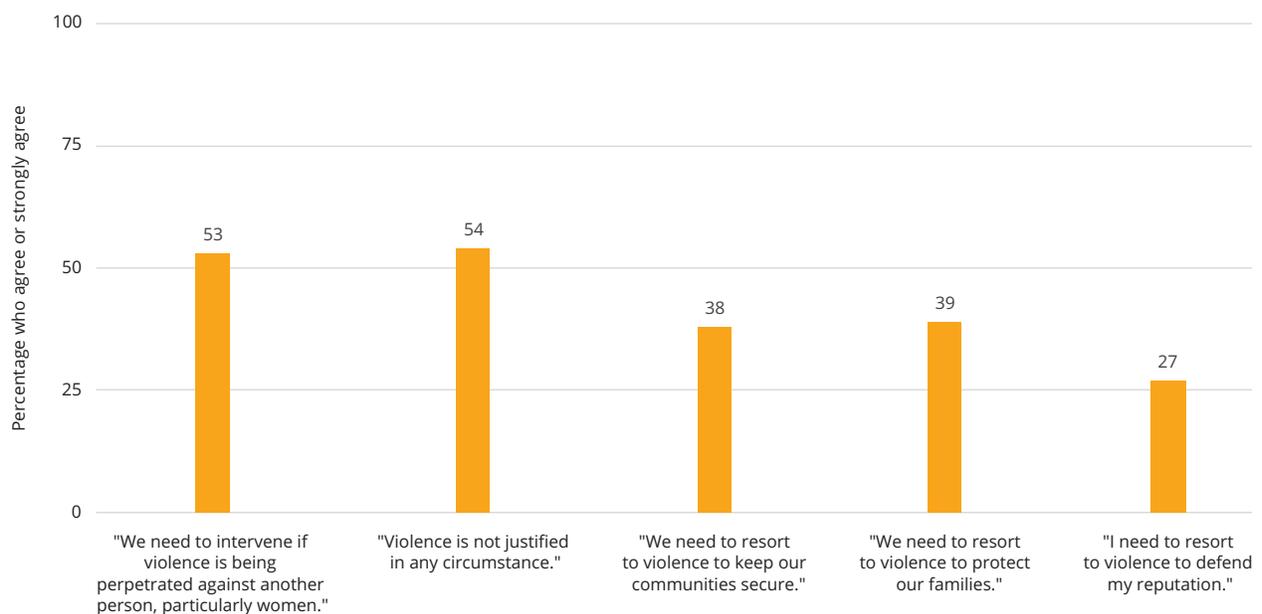
Regional differences play out even on a smaller scale. Respondents’ views of the importance of “being capable of violence” between the two areas of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur (LDS) vary substantially. In LDS, only 19 percent of men see the capacity for violence as an important trait, whereas in Maguindanao, 54 percent of men subscribed to the idea that being capable of violence is an important masculine characteristic. These subregional differences underscore the need for targeted and localized interventions.

**FIGURE 2. Male respondents' rates of agreement with statements relating to the acceptability of violence**



Women hold similar attitudes toward violence as do men. As figure 3 depicts, the levels of support among BARMM women for the use of violence to defend their communities, families, and reputations are similar to the levels of support among BARMM men.

**FIGURE 3. Female BARMM respondents' rates of agreement with statements relating to the acceptability of violence**



The minimal differences between men and women in the BARMM underscore how violence is not an exclusively “male” phenomenon and how nonviolence is not an exclusively ‘female’ phenomenon. The similarities between men and women suggest that the context and environment rather than gender differences are driving attitudes toward violence.

One interviewee noted that the clan is an influential vector of social power that helps explain the proclivity for violence of some women. Women from powerful families appear to be less hesitant to inflict violence against others, including their spouses, because they are protected by powerful male kin.

**A heightened state of insecurity seems to contribute to the general acceptability of violence.**

As analyzed in more detail in *Beyond Engaging Men*, ongoing forms of organized violence in the

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BARMM can help explain why we find relatively higher rates of support for using violence to defend one’s community, family, and reputation among both men and women there. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), since

2016, the Philippine military has been involved in 1,018 incidents in the BARMM, which resulted in 2,878 fatalities. In comparison, since 2015, the Indonesian military has been involved in only six incidents in the province of Aceh and three incidents in the province of Maluku, which resulted in six and one fatalities, respectively.

Armed skirmishes in Maguindanao, especially in localities occupied by the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (Shariff Saidona Mustafa, Pagatin, Mamasapano, and Salibo, also known as “the SPMS box”), drive these numbers. Moreover, lingering *rido*, or clan feuding, among powerful political families is prevalent in Maguindanao, producing horizontal violence and insecurity.

The proliferation of armed groups and threats of *rido*, combined with easy access to guns and made-to-order weapons (especially in the SPMS box), increase insecurity and the militarization of everyday life. In our focus group discussions, men reported feeling the need to arm themselves to protect their families from these threats.

Thus, our findings show that violence is not a universal feature of ideal manhood and that support for violence appears to be contingent on external sources of insecurity. Therefore, transforming men’s ideals of masculinity and reducing the number of men who believe that being capable of violence is an important quality for men requires improving local security.

## Policy Recommendations

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Our findings inform the following policy recommendations for governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), and gender-focused programming.

### Governments

- ***Reduce insecurities.*** To address pervasive insecurity linked to the proliferation of weapons, governments should enact and enforce stricter laws limiting the manufacturing and possession of firearms. The government should reinvigorate disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs. The disarmament branch of those programs has been a conspicuous failure. As long as surplus weapons fuel insecurity, violence will continue. Integrating a masculinities lens in DDR can facilitate ex-combatants' reintegration by helping them form new identities outside of the armed group that are not centered around carrying arms and perpetrating violence.
- ***Include women in DDR programs.*** DDR programs often exclude women and neglect them as potential instigators or perpetrators of violence. DDR programs should not assume that women serve only in noncombat roles and should instead be gender responsive to ensure women's meaningful participation. Implementing a masculinities lens in DDR can help identify men and women who value being armed because it gives them political power and can help highlight the need for alternative paths to political power and authority.
- ***Address inequities in development, peacebuilding, and security sector funding policies.*** Existing socioeconomic inequalities often shape access to and participation in development and peacebuilding initiatives. Government funding policies need to mitigate inequities by accounting for who holds and does not hold social and political power. Policies should explicitly earmark funds for targeted aid for marginalized men, women, and communities.

### Civil Society Organizations

- ***Host violence-response workshops that include men and women.*** In collaboration with local leaders, CSOs should create participatory programs that integrate a masculinities lens, enabling men and women to speak about the role of violence in expectations for being a man and violence in their communities more broadly and to jointly author plans to address this violence. Further, violence-response and peacebuilding initiatives should leverage men's preference for nonviolence to increase men's participation in those initiatives.
- ***Establish a dialogue series with state and nonstate security actors.*** To be effective, conflict transformation and peacebuilding activities need to involve potential spoilers. Engaging in dialogue with the actors who have the capacity to disrupt peacebuilding initiatives can help safeguard processes and provide entry points for actors outside of the process to

join. Applying a masculinities lens in understanding insecurity and violence can help bring potential spoilers to the table and identify paths for nonviolent conflict resolution.

- ***Integrate a masculinities lens in building capacity on how to engage with armed actors.*** More capacity is needed to support DDR programs. CSOs should seek out demobilized former combatants to learn from them how to best engage with armed actors, support DDR programs, and build capacity to lead discussions in peace dialogues. Integrating a masculinities lens can help examine both current and former combatants' expectations for life after leaving the group—a departure that can also mean the loss of social ties, status, and power. It can also help in identifying how best to address these concerns and thereby encourage current and former combatants' participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.
- ***Conduct regular internal audits to determine whether CSOs are relying on gender-essentializing tropes.*** Gender-essentializing tropes that present women as intrinsically peaceful and men as intrinsically violent commonly contribute to international actors misinterpreting violent dynamics; they also cause international actors to bury local voices by imposing oversimplified narratives on men's and women's complex experiences. International actors should host participatory workshops during program design that enable local actors and CSOs to offer feedback on proposed interventions that highlights local realities.

## **Gender-Focused Programming**

- ***Do not assume that all men are predisposed to violence.*** Gender-focused programming should engage with masculinities in ways that do not focus exclusively on those instances where masculinities are associated with violence and militarism. In particular, the WPS community should pay more attention to nonviolent masculinities, creating new research streams and areas of programming.
- ***Facilitate the establishment of networks of local male allies who already support gender equality and nonviolence.*** Supporting these networks will capitalize on the buy-in for gender equality and nonviolence that already exists in many communities, improve a project's ability to mobilize diverse sections of a community, and build capacity for locally led transformative efforts.

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- 1 Bias, Leandra, and Yasmine Janah. "Masculinities, Violence, and Peace." Swisspeace, November 2022. [https://www.swisspeace.ch/assets/publications/Reports/Final\\_Scoping-Study\\_EN.pdf](https://www.swisspeace.ch/assets/publications/Reports/Final_Scoping-Study_EN.pdf).
  - 2 Duriesmith, David. "Engaging Men and Boys in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Beyond the 'Good Men' Industry." *LSE Women, Peace and Security Working Paper Series* (blog), December 5, 2017. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2017/12/15/engaging-men-and-boys-in-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-beyond-the-good-men-industry-david-duriesmith-112017/>.
  - 3 Nagel, Robert U. Joshua Allen, and Kristine Baekgaard. *Beyond Engaging Men: Masculinities, (Non)Violence, and Peacebuilding*. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2023. [https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Beyond\\_Engaging\\_Men.pdf](https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Beyond_Engaging_Men.pdf).
  - 4 We are indebted to our local partners: Intersectional Gender Research and Learning (InteGRAL) Asia; Conciliation Resources; the International Center for Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies (ICAIOS); PASKA Aceh, Mindanao State University; and Pattimura University in Ambon, Maluku. Their expertise was invaluable in shaping the conception, execution, and output of this project.
  - 5 The methodology and detailed case backgrounds can be found in Nagel, Allen, and Baekgaard, *Beyond Engaging Men*.
  - 6 For a similar argument, see Kunz, Rahel, Henri Myrntinen, and Wening Udasmoro. "Preachers, Pirates, and Peace-building: Examining Non-violent Hegemonic Masculinities in Aceh." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 24, no. 3 (2018): 299–320.

