Masculinities and Patriarchy

Exploring Trends in Men's and Women's Beliefs about Masculinities and Patriarchy in Aceh, Indonesia

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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" interchangeably,[1] 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;[2] only in 2015 did UNSCR 2242 recognize the importance of engaging men and boys as agents of change.

A failure to more broadly recognize and address the complex links between masculinities, peace, and conflict continues to hamper WPS efforts

Since then, several initiatives have demonstrated the utility of incorporating a masculinities lens into gender equality work and peacebuilding.[3]

However, a failure to more broadly recognize and address the complex links between masculinities, peace, and conflict 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 mobilize men and boys more effectively as agents of change and counter the recurrent ways in which narratives of masculine strength and patriarchal dominance are used to justify gender inequality, violence against women, and participation in armed 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.[4]

The series 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.[5] A survey was administered to approximately 2,000 people in each location, with men and women roughly equally represented.[6] The findings presented in this brief are drawn from the survey responses and focus group discussions in Aceh. We explore trends in men's and women's beliefs about what men should aspire to be and who teaches them these expectations. Based on our findings, we offer policy recommendations to bolster efforts to achieve gender equality and sustainable peace by the Indonesian and other national governments, civil society organizations, and gender-focused programming.

Key Findings

- Men value being a protective family man who is strong but nonviolent, religious, and an economic provider.

- Men and women largely agree that men should be leaders in the private and public spheres.

- Women's apparent support for the status quo should not be interpreted as blanket support for patriarchy.

- Women are critical in shaping expectations around ideal manhood.

- Male respondents express a desire for new definitions of masculinity.

Men value being a protective family man who is strong but nonviolent, religious, and an economic provider. As figure 1 depicts, Acehnese men consider many qualities as critically important (i.e., ratings of nine or ten) to ideals of masculinity, and men think that qualities related to family roles (e.g., being a father, a husband, a protector, and an economic provider) are particularly important.

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?"**
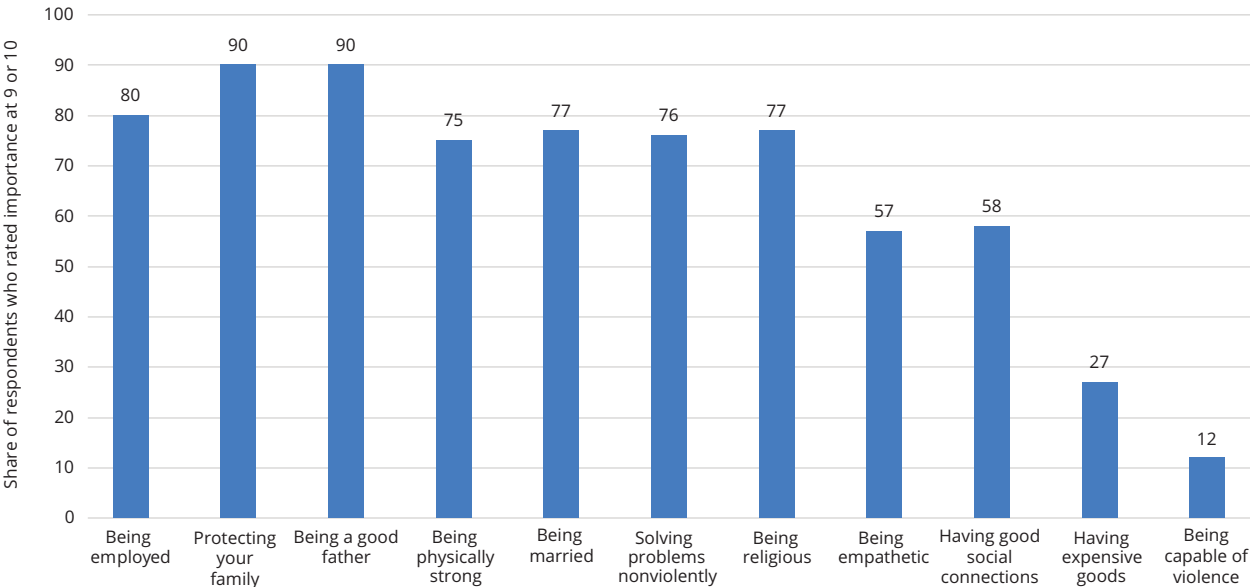

Notably, contrary to a common tendency to associate men with violence, "being capable of violence" is not a quality supported by a majority of men in Aceh. We discuss this interesting finding in more detail in the context of the BARMM in our full report and in our Masculinity and (Non)Violence policy brief.[7]

Men and women in Aceh largely agree that men should be leaders in the private and public spheres. In the surveys, men express support for a patriarchally organized household, and women largely hold the same views (see figure 2). Men are defined as breadwinners in the public sphere and women as nonpaid laborers in the private sphere. This consensus creates a critical ideological obstacle to women's empowerment and the creation of more equitable societies,[8] even as economic data in our survey suggests that many women hold jobs and contribute to the household income. This cross-gender support is a significant finding because it indicates that both men and women uphold patriarchal structures and that transforming them requires working with both. Simply integrating women into the workforce is not enough to shift gender norms.

While a majority of respondents across all of Aceh province support men's leadership in the public and domestic spheres, there are some differences across districts. Of the five districts in our Aceh sample, respondents in Pidie and Pidie Jaya show a higher rate of support for a patriarchal organized household than the other three districts. Our data also shows that religious leaders hold greater influence in Pidie

and Pidie Jaya, suggesting that religious patriarchal interpretations shape respondents' perceptions. At the same time, compared with the other districts, Pidie and Pidie Jaya have more women in public leadership roles, which highlights the complex and inconsistent relationship between perception and reality. These district-level differences demonstrate the need for context-specific and localized interventions.

FIGURE 2. **Respondents' rates of agreement with statements about the patriarchal household**
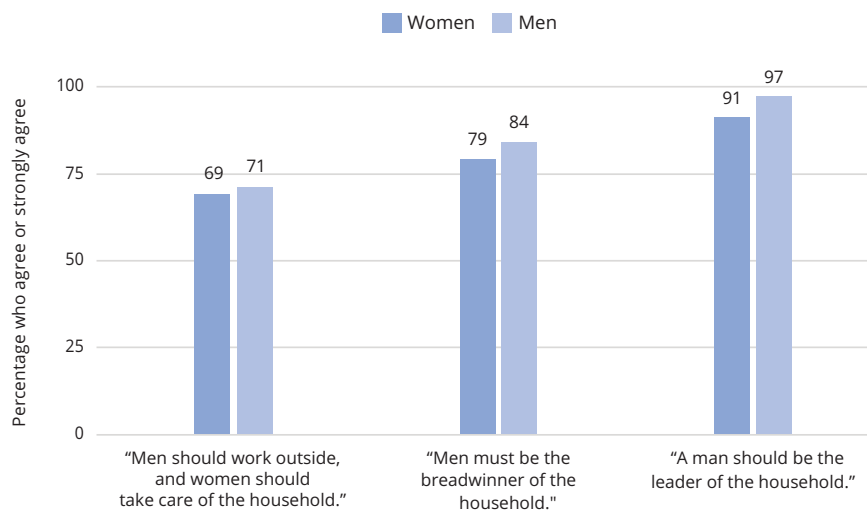
It is important to note that relations between women and men vary from household to household. Although survey responses position men as the leader and breadwinner, the household hierarchy is usually negotiated, and 73 percent of Acehnese women agree with the statement that they "deserve to make decisions in the household." Especially in extended families, household power-sharing is more complex when the wife's parents or other family members from maternal lines reside within the compound.

Women's apparent support for the status quo should not be interpreted as blanket support for patriarchy. Women exhibit slightly lower levels of agreement than their male counterparts regarding men's roles. While the vast majority of women support men's position as leaders, breadwinners, and protectors, this support should be understood in the context of the patriarchal realities that women navigate and how patriarchy forces women to play by its rules.[9]

Women play significant roles in shaping expectations of masculinity. Despite a popular tendency to focus on how men shape other men's beliefs and behaviors,[10] our survey finds that mothers and wives are particularly important figures in setting expectations for men.

In focus group discussions, participants noted that mothers are often closer than fathers to their children and serve as the primary role model for both girls and boys at a young age, a role that includes teaching boys about how to be a man. At the same time, participants stressed the importance of the father or another male counterpart as a role model. The influence wives have in

setting expectations for men suggests that men continue to learn about what it means to be a man throughout their lives and that interventions that engage women in shaping healthy masculinities could be particularly impactful.

Participants also noted that in a few regions, religious leaders are playing important roles in socializing ideals of manhood through sermons, as well as through teachings in congregations or Islamic boarding schools (pesantren/dayah). The role of religious leaders in Aceh underlines that in order to achieve equitable and peaceful societies, it is necessary to create inclusive programs that engage individuals who command influence in a given community. Overall, these patterns underscore the importance of working with both men and women to transform patriarchal norms.[11]

Male respondents express a desire for new definitions of masculinity. Although the majority of men feel they are able to achieve the qualities of an "ideal" man, 61 percent of men in Aceh also hope that the next generation of men will face different expectations. Additional research is needed to explore the specific expectations or changes men would like to see; however, focus group participants noted that the current generation's attitudes toward sharing domestic duties between spouses differs from the attitudes of earlier generations, suggesting that younger men might be open to more equitable divisions of household labor.

While we were not able to examine why these men desire change, which expectations they would most like to see changed, or why so many men who indicate they can fulfill current expectations nonetheless want different expectations, the fact that this desire is evident suggests opportunities for gender-transformative programs that engage with masculinities in Aceh and other study sites in the region where similar trends are present.

Policy Recommendations

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

National Governments

- *Substantively engage with masculinities in WPS National Action Plans (NAPs).* Some NAPs, such as Indonesia's 2014 NAP, make no reference to men or masculinities.[12] Other NAPs refer to men as allies in efforts to achieve gender equality or as victims of conflict-related sexual violence.[13] However, very few NAPs integrate a masculinities perspective. When they do, the focus is typically on forms of masculinities that contribute to violence and gender inequality.[14] NAPs should engage with men and masculinities beyond rigid binaries of "good" and "bad" men and consider the context-specific economic, political, and security conditions that shape expectations of masculinities.

- *Provide funding for context-specific research on masculinities as part of broader efforts to advance gender equality and WPS commitments*. Our research indicates that variations in beliefs and norms exist across Aceh, even at the district level. Such variations no doubt exist in other countries. To create effective policies and programs aimed at improving gender equality, governments should thus explore local and regional differences and ensure that interventions are context-specific and evidence-based.

- *Collaborate more closely with local actors in developing WPS NAP implementation plans attentive to masculinities.* Local stakeholders and CSOs can help to identify harmful forms of masculinities hindering progress on WPS and opportunities for NAP implementation efforts to promote healthy masculinities.

Civil Society Organizations

- *Co-create spaces with men and women to work on transforming harmful masculinities and promoting gender equality.* CSOs should carefully balance the need to engage men with the need to preserve safe spaces for women. Some cases might require hosting separate groups for men and women to enable open conversations to be held about masculinities. Other cases might benefit from mixed-gender groups, in light of findings that show men learn about what it means to be a man throughout their lives from both men and women. Interventions for men and boys should also address their needs and aspirations at different life stages: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age.

- *Facilitate conversations about different forms of masculinities in communities.* Participatory approaches should be used to engage with local men and boys to identify what changes in conceptions of masculinity and what new expectations of masculinity they would like to

see. Capacity-building workshops should guide men and boys in deciding how the identified changes and new expectations can be put into action in everyday life to support gender equality and sustainable peace.

- *Partner with local role models to teach more men how to be allies*. Local champions for gender equality can promote positive expressions of masculinities and can be especially effective in fostering buy-in from men and boys. In Aceh, for example, religious leaders could be valuable allies in promoting more peaceful and gender-equitable masculine norms. Additionally, organizations should not assume that male role models will necessarily be more effective than female role models and should seek out ways to engage women in transforming harmful masculinities.

Gender-Focused Programming

- *Seek to transform power imbalances between men and women*. Program design should be informed by consultations that engage local actors to understand the conditions under which men and women support certain patriarchal norms and identify opportunities to drive norm change around the perception of leadership in the public and private spheres.

- *Integrate a masculinities perspective to identify programs susceptible to backlash.* Our research shows that men value the role of breadwinner and household leader. This finding suggests that programming aimed at women's economic empowerment could provoke backlash and may require additional safeguards. Incorporating a masculinities perspective into program design can help reveal how men are likely to react to changes in women's status and which changes will likely be perceived as particularly threatening.

- *Work with both men and women across all projects engaging with masculinities.* Given that our findings show that women play a significant role in teaching men what it means to be a man, initiatives should not focus exclusively on men. Programs will be more effective in changing expectations of masculinities and promoting gender equality if they leverage women's influence on shaping expectations of masculinities.

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.

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/; and Wright, Hannah. "'Masculinities Perspectives': Advancing a Radical Women, Peace and Security Agenda?" *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22, no. 5 (2020): 652–674.

3   Greig, Alan. "Men, Masculinities, and Armed Conflict: Findings from a Four-Country Study by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom." Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 2022. https://www.wilpf.org/mmffp_documents/men-masculinities-armed-conflict-findings-from-a-four-country-study-by-the-womens-international-league-for-peace-and-freedom-alan-greig/.

4   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.

5   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.

6   The methodology and detailed case backgrounds can be found in Nagel, Allen, and Baekgaard, *Beyond Engaging Men*.

7   https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/beyond-engaging-men/

8   Boyd, Susan, B., ed. *Challenging the Public/Private Divide: Feminism, Law, and Public Policy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

9   Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Bargaining with Patriarchy." *Gender and Society* 2, no. 3 (1988): 274–290.

10 Ide, Michael Enku, Blair Harrington, Yolanda Wiggins, Tanya Rouleau Whitworth, and Naomi Gerstel. "Emerging Adult Sons and Their Fathers." *Gender and Society* 32, no. 1 (2018): 5–33.

11 Kerr-Wilson, Alice, Andrew Gibbs, Erika McAslan Fraser, Leane Ramsoomar, Anne Parke, Hussain M A Khuwaja, and Rachel Jewkes. "A Rigorous Global Evidence Review of Interventions to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls." What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Global Programme, January 2020. https://www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/374-evidence-reviewfweb/file.

12 Indonesia's most recent NAP (2021–2025) is not publicly available.

13 See, for instance, those from Australia, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United States.

14 Ireland's NAP is an exception, engaging more thoroughly with masculinities than other NAPs. It might serve as a model for other countries.