# CarMiA – Caring Masculinities in Action

# National Report

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# Contents

## 1.1 Introduction

The phenomenon of gender-based violence can be defined as a veritable 'trickle of killings of women by husbands, cohabitants, boyfriends, lovers, partners, and ex-partners, but also fathers and brothers' (Ulivieri, 2013: 169). The World Health Organisation report shows that globally, one in four women has been physically and sexually abused by partners as early as the age of 15 (WHO, 2013). This is a very serious public health problem that according to the European Union affects society as a whole, so serious that it has prompted many member states to promptly adopt tools and guidelines with the aim of developing effective preventive interventions (Dors, 2019). Also in Italy the last available data from a national survey indicates that 31.5% of women aged between 16 and 70 have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime and 10.6% of women experienced sexual violence before the age of 16 (Istat, 2014).[1]

The official ISTAT report on the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on the phenomenon of gender-based violence shows that since 2020, more than 15,000 women (aged 40 to 56) have sought support from the various Anti-Violence Centres (CAVs) to get out of domestic violence situations (Istat 2021: 3). The report, however, does not mention cases of gender-based violence related to adolescents, but informs us of the increase in cases of bullying and cyberbullying among young people during the pandemic period.

Gender-based violence is generally associated with the adult world, in the dynamics of couple relationships, and is often used as a synonym for domestic violence. However, violence does not only concern violence exercised by men on women, but also those of women on men (albeit to a lesser extent and in different ways), of heterosexual men on other men who deviate from traditional models of masculinity in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity, and among LGBTQIA+ couples (Beltramini, 2020: 18). Countries with high rates of violence against women and girls also have high rates of violence against non-normative sexual and gender identities (xxx). There is a common thread between violence towards women, homophobia and genderism that has its origins in the social and cultural model of heterosexism and heteronormativity (Burgio, 2020).

Other evidence, which makes the theoretical and experiential framework of gender-based violence, the subject of this work, complex, concerns the increase of cases in the adolescent population, indicated as already anticipated by the expression "Teen Dating Violence", which occurs according to

'a series of repeated acts, either actual or threatening, that physically, sexually or verbally harm a member of an unmarried heterosexual or homosexual couple where one or both partners are between the ages of thirteen and twenty' (Pensak, 2015: 499).

Clearly, a picture of the phenomenon emerges that needs specific attention from the scientific world and, above all, from the field of pedagogical-scientific research. The causes for this 'absence of the phenomenon' in the context of gender-based violence lie in the tendency to erroneously associate all

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[1] Data on violence against women collected by the National Institute for Statistics (Istat) are available at: https://www.istat.it/it/violenza-sulle-donne (last access 15th January 2023)

forms of discrimination affecting the world of young people (especially adolescents) with bullying and cyberbullying. In reality, as Olweus pointed out in the 1980s, bullying has very precise characteristics that relate both to the causes that determine its implementation, such as the asymmetry of relational power between those who commit violence and those who suffer it, and to the actors involved (to define themselves as such, one must consider the bully's helpers, who can play both an active and passive role, limiting themselves to merely assisting) (1980).

Society has constructed the differentiation between males and females through the creation of standardised and polarised roles, interests and tastes for women and men, creating a double standard and a double morality for males and females. According to Bourdieu (1998), the norms of conduct for males and females are aimed at creating cognitive schemes that are subject to crystallisation and continuous negotiation with respect to future relationships with other individuals.

The issue of gender-based violence and the push for male involvement to end the problem has highlighted deep dimensions of toxic masculinity that not only affect men, but also children and adolescents, showing that it is a problem that has deep roots in culture and education.

A report published by the American Psychological Association (APA) found that boys experience a deep sense of frustration and discomfort caused by the social pressure of masculinity becoming unwieldy (2018). Such pressures are attributable to traditional norms of masculinity and, in relation to the specificities of cultural differences, shape a heteronormative, hegemonic and toxic ideology of masculinity.

The APA report insists on an approach to the problem that sees hegemonic masculinity not only as linked to gender-based violence but also damaging for boys and masculinity too. In particular, it dwelt on the impact of the double-standard model for masculinity, for example, in medical and psychological studies, leading to an over-representation of children and adolescents associated with a range of behavioural problems, such as aggression and violence. In reality, the issue concerns the lack of de-essentialising work of this type of research, which ends up giving us a reading of the phenomenon linked to the 'nature of being male'. This biased reading of the association of masculinity/aggressiveness/heterosexuality is the result of the widespread dissemination and radicalisation of myths about boys and (heterosexual) men who are by nature strong, aggressive and have a limited capacity to feel emotions.

The CarMiA - Caring Maculinities in Action project aims to work with boys through the methodology of peer education to create awareness on the issue of gender-based violence starting not from girls and women, but from men and, therefore, from the idea that men play a crucial role.

The theoretical framework of reference is to start from the reflection on the model of hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1980; Messerschmidt, 2018) and the damage it can cause, in order to present the binomial care-masculinity, as an antidote to the binomial masculinity-power.

In the Italian context in recent years, there has been important progress in both the provision of legislation and the implementation of educational interventions in schools that promote the fight against gender stereotypes and gender-based violence, however, such interventions rarely include an explicitly masculinity studies-based perspective (Bernacchi, 2022). At the regulatory level, Law No. 107 of 13 July 2015, 'Reform of the national education and training system and delegation for the reorganisation of existing legislative provisions' devotes specific attention to the issue of promoting gender equality. The adopted 'Extraordinary Action Plan against Sexual and Gender-based Violence' of 2015 also highlights the importance of cultural prevention initiatives of sexual and gender-based violence as well as the Ministry of Education Guidelines 'Educating for Respect: for gender equality, prevention of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination' of 2015.

Educational interventions to prevent gender-based violence conducted in Italy that have included a specific perspective on masculinity have been few and discontinuous, mainly by pro-feminist male associations and the result of international campaigns.

This report considers first, a review of national good practices aimed at preventing gender-based violence critically addressing masculinities and involving men and boys in peer education activities. After the analysis of the projects carried out in the national context, the report presents the analysis of the focus groups conducted with experts in the field of masculinity studies, with teachers and, finally, with young people to investigate knowledge and awareness of the problem of gender-based violence and, specifically, of the importance of education on healthy masculinity models to prevent and combat the phenomenon. Since the idea of a biological sex that necessarily determines belonging to a gender is still ingrained, it is necessary to understand what lies behind this conception of masculinity that, with difficulty and day after day, adolescents acquire by denying their inner world, characterised by conflicting emotions regarding their own self, others and the value of masculinity.

## 2. Review of national good practices

For the purpose of this report we have identified three projects aimed at preventing gender-based violence critically addressing masculinities and involving men and boys in peer education activities. The first one is the "White Ribbon Campaign" which in Canada was born in 1991, while in Italy it arrived in 2007 with the aim of spreading a culture of gender-based violence prevention both by introducing a reflection on masculinity and an intervention methodology based on peer education. The second project entitled "Five Men" of 2015 is based on the creation of five short films aimed to convey a clear message to men and boys about 'zero tolerance' for all forms of violence against women and girls and to create awareness on the issue by positively involving men and boys.

The third project entitled "Plural masculinities. From stereotypes to the freedom to be oneself', initiated in 2020, on the other hand, is based on working with boys and girls on education for healthy masculinity models and healthy gender relations.



| Title | **WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN ITALY** |
| --- | --- |
| **Organization** | Anti-violence centre Artemisia (in collaboration with local municipalities, |

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|---|---|
| | commissions for equal opportunities, other anti-violence centres) |
| **Target** | Educators, teachers and adolescents |
| **Lenght** | Italian edition 2007-2008 (some schools continued to use the materials produced by the campaign also in later years). |
| **Focus** | • Countering gender-based violence<br>• New models of masculinity |
| **Setting and format activities** | • There are two types of settings in which activities with adolescents are proposed:<br>– Formal settings (e.g. schools)<br>– Informal contexts (educational centres, sports associations, etc.)<br>• The format of the activities includes:<br>• A theoretical part addressed to teachers and, in general, to those who are going to train peer educators. The theoretical contents of the training concern:<br>a) the definition of gender-based violence<br>b) the social and cultural bases of gender-based violence.<br>c) The construction of heteronormative masculinity in adolescence.<br>d) Homophobia<br>e) The issue of sexual abuse<br><br>• A more practical part in which educators and teachers have to learn educational models and strategies that will be used to train peer boys on the issues of masculinity and gender-based violence, who in turn will have to train other boys.<br><br>The project also includes an awareness raising campaign through the involvement of local municipalities. |
| **Boys and masculinities explicitly dealt with in relation to GBV** | Within the Project, explicit mention is made of masculinity in relation to GBV. Masculinity assumes a central and no longer marginal role in the field of intra-gender and inter-gender violence, taking shape not only as the first international project addressing these issues (the first edition was in 1995 in Canada), but also as the first national project in the educational field that sheds light on the implicit 'predatory' masculinity education and how boys, instead, can be the main agents of positive change. |
| **Are diversity of boys and gender diversity taken into account** | This Project also deals with the issue of the relationship between masculinity and homophobia. With respect to the debate on the different forms of gender-based violence that affect persons of different sexual and gender orientation (trans, non-binary, queer, bisexual, pan-sexual identities, etc.), the handbook produced addresses the problem of homophobia but does not include a specific reference to other forms of violence that have been the focus of attention over recent years such as transphobia, queerphobia, biphobia, lesbophobia, etc. |
| **Promoting alternative** | The main objective of the project is to promote alternative models of masculinity through training aimed at making boys reflect on the stereotypes |

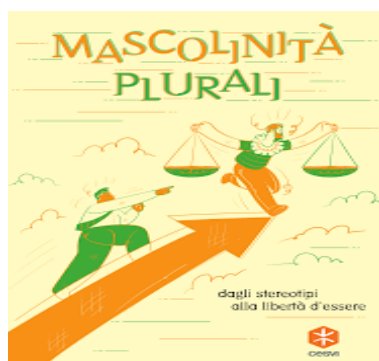| (positive) masculinities | that construct the idea of toxic masculinity. |
|---|---|
| **Peer to peer approach** | The peer-to-peer approach is the main structure on which the project rests. The basic idea from which the programme originated concerns the positive impact for boys in becoming aware of the risks of adhering to toxic masculinity models by peers. |
| **Website** | https://www.provincia.cremona.it/lavoro/all/20111130-1021120.pdf |

Posters





| **Title** | **FIVE MEN** |
|---|---|
| **Organization** | European funded project with the following partners:<br>  -    Department for Equal Opportunities<br>  -    Institute for Social Research |

| | |
|---|---|
| | - Associazione Maschile Plurale (Plural masculinities association)<br>- DIRE (Network of Antiviolence centres) |
| **Target** | Boys and men |
| **Lenght** | 2015 |
| **Focus** | Preventing gender-based violence through the involvement of men |
| **Objectives** | FIVE MEN aimed to develop communication strategies to convey a clear message to men and boys about 'zero tolerance' for all forms of violence against women and girls and to create awareness on the issue by positively involving men and boys and making them become protagonists of change. |
| **Setting and format activities** | The project includes the following activities:<br>a) the production of a webseries 'Men's Things' (5 short films, each 5 minutes long)<br>b) the development and dissemination of a toolkit for schools that was presented in 2015 in 20 pilot schools to create awareness on the topic of male violence against women.<br>c) the dissemination of the project on the territory.<br>The webseries 'Men's Things' use the metaphor of football to provide examples of different forms of gender-based violence and how a group of men can address them without resorting to hegemonic masculinity.<br>There are 5 videos in which 5 men are protagonist of the following situations:<br>   &ndash; Davide receives pressure from his friends to persuade his girlfriend to go out with him (theme of female consent/reputation)<br>   &ndash; Massimo is jealous of his girlfriend and therefore is increasingly absent;<br>   &ndash; Nicola is unemployed, while his girlfriend gets promoted and therefore shows his sense of inferiority and jealousy with her;<br>   &ndash; Stefano has become a father without really wanting to and is not very involved in the family life<br>   &ndash; Paolo is perpetually angry because of his separation from his wife.<br>All episodes describe a situation of increasing tension that can lead to violence until when the group of male friends intervenes to address it in order to make the man protagonist reflect on his behaviour. |
| **Boys and masculinities explicitly dealt with in relation to GBV** | The 5 videos explicitly address the issue of traditional forms of masculinities in relation to different forms of GBV. |
| **Are diversity of boys and gender diversity taken into** | The videos portray men who are different in terms of age and social class, but there is no mention of other kinds of difference and of gender diversity. |

| account | |
|---|---|
| **Promoting alternative (positive) masculinities** | All videos show how men who are caught up in situations that can lead to violence have the possibility to choose alternative models of masculinity that are based on gender equality and the rejection of GBV. This is made possible through the help and support of the group of male friends that invite the protagonist to have a self-reflective attitude and to address in a critical way feelings and emotions. |
| **Peer to peer approach** | The videos are used to reflect in men's groups (e.g. in the association *Maschile plurale* – Plural masculinities) |
| **Website** | • **#COSEDAUOMINI** - **#1 DAVIDE / ATTACCO**, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YW8h3DTQkQg<br>• **#COSEDAUOMINI** - **#2 NICOLA / IN PORTA**, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jFvH1ytY8o&t=666s<br>• **#COSEDAUOMINI** - **#3 RICCARDO / SOSTITUZIONI**, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xf2b3ZH16H8<br>• **#COSEDAUOMINI** - **#4 MASSIMO / A GAMBA TESA**, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apmcfqxkuG4&t=25s<br>• **#COSEDAUOMINI** - **#5 PAOLO / PERDERE**, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J09BiNNJRxo&t=6s |



| **Title** | **PLURAL MASCULINITIES. FROM STEREOTYPES TO THE FREEDOM TO BE ONESELF** |
|---|---|
| **Organization** | Cesvi (NGO's); University of Cattolica, Milan (Italy); Generation FA" Association, Bergamo (Italy); Giovanni Paolo II" Foundation, Bari (Italy); Il Grillo parlante no-profit association, Naples (Italy) |
| **Target** | Boys and girls |
| **Lenght** | 2020 |
| **Focus** | • Masculinities.<br>• Involvement of cognitive and operational aspects but also emotional, affective-relational. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • The body as a mediator of knowledge and communication with the world. |
| **Objectives** | • Promotion of new models of masculinities addressed to boys and young men.<br>• Prevention of gender-based violence.<br>• Dealing with emotions, care. |
| **Setting and format activities** | The proposed setting is the school setting.<br><br>The project is divided into two parts:<br>• Theoretical part: on the construction of gender identity is offered to teachers and caregivers with a specific focus on masculinity starting from basic concept as:<br>a) Sex/gender and sexuality.<br>b) Intersectional approach (gender, sex, race, cultural backgrounds).<br>c) Reference to CSMMs (Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities) in realtion to Youth studies.<br>d) Future perspectives in relation to "doing masculinity from a pluralistic and stereotype-free perspective). (with focus on care, plural and new models of masculinities).<br>e) Brief on national and international masculinities studies references.<br><br>• Toolkit: tested and validated in the educational interventions implemented within the project: 5 Thematic pathways marked by a different color (red, blue, green, lilac, orange) and for each pathway (consisting of 3 meetings) different purposes and activities are provided |
| **Boys and masculinities explicitly dealt with in relation to GBV** | The project has a specific focus on masculinity. The link between masculinity and GBV is important, but the proposed training activities aim at raising awareness on the cultural aspects that determine the creation of a misogynistic, homophobic, sexist, racist perception of masculinity. |
| **Are diversity of boys and gender diversity taken into account** | The project included a series of activities to carry out with adolescents also on the topic of gender diversity. As an example, we list here one exercise called the 'infamous airplanes' in which an attempt was made to work with the boys and girls on the use of discriminatory language based on gender, sexuality, race. The activity involved making a poster (by the teachers before the activity) that will be divided into 6 categories used for insulting<br><br>• faeces (shit)<br>• genitals (fuckface) |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <ul><li>foreigners (nigga)</li><li>disability (cripple)</li><li>misogyny (bitch)</li><li> homosexuality (fag)</li></ul><br>Next, the pupils should transcribe their insults into a category on the board and then the teacher chooses which category to focus on (e.g. sexism, homophobia or racism or all of them).<br>In the end, the only category that is not insulting will be analysed, i.e. white man, native, young, able-bodied, etc. |
| **Promoting alternative (positive) masculinities** | The project, and specifically the toolkit, aims to support parents and teachers in working with boys to overcome internalised patterns of machismo. Although girls also participate in the socialisation of gender models influenced by heteronormativity, it is still boys who find it difficult to abandon the hegemonic and heteronormative model of masculinity. The aim is to create moments of reflection and co-participation with boys to identify with plural models of masculinity, and to be aware of the consequences of violence in all its forms. |
| **Peer to peer approach** | No methodology based on the peer-to-peer approach is included |
| **Website** | https://www.cesvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/VIEW_Mascolinita_plurali_DEF.pdf |

# 3. Focus groups analysis

In this section of the report, the analyses of the focus groups that were conducted with experts (1 fg), with teachers (1 fg) and with adolescents (1 fg with boys and girls and another with boys only) will be reported.

3.1 Experts

| Date and Place | Sample Characteristics |
|---|---|
| 21.06.2022<br><br>Istituto degli Innocenti – Florence | - Director (women) of NGO working with men perpetrators (CAM – Centre for men perpetrators of violence)<br>- Retired teacher (man) with long experience of work with adolescent on gender issues<br>- 4 Practitioners (women) working with NGOs in schools on prevention of GBV: CAM association (Centre for abusive men); ARCO - Action Research for CO-development; NGO Cospe onlus; *Maschi per obbligo* (Males by obligation association) |

Focus participants were selected on the basis of their experience working in the area of gender-based violence and masculinity, with a specific focus on working with adolescents in schools. The focus was held at IDI and lasted approximately two hours.

The interviewees signed a declaration of consent to participate in the interviews. With their consent, the interviews were recorded and anonymized for analysis, transcribed, coded and analyzed. The results of the focus were incorporated into this report and feed also the national research that IDI conducted for the project.

Regarding the first question concerning the state of the art in Italy of projects on gender education, and specifically, of projects with a focus on masculinity and new models of masculinity, the focus group participants reported their direct experience in them.

First of all, in Italy there is a centre called CAM (Centre for Abusive Men) with its head office in Florence, which is part of the RELIVE (Violence-Free Relationships) national network. Even if the main purpose of the centre is to work with abusive men, it also conducts projects aimed at preventing gender based violence through the awareness raising activities with boys and girls.

An expert collaborating with "ARCO - Action Research for CO-development" (Spin-off of the University of Florence) said she works within the project "Global Boyhood Initiative" (https://boyhoodinitiative.org/) launched by Equimundo and the Kering Foundation in collaboration with Plan International, the Bocconi University, Milan (Italy) and with the support of Gucci's Chime For Change. This project aims to support children aged 4 to 13, the adults in their lives and the institutions in which they live, to promote a healthier concept of childhood.

Another expert from the NGO "COSPE ONLUS" Bologna (Italy) presented the "BEE- Boosting Gender Equality in Education" European project, which targets the promotion of gender awareness in early childhood.

Another practitioner from the *Maschi per obbligo* (Males by obligation association) based in Florence explained the activities carried out by the organization that works to promote sexual and affective education with children from primary school on.

Among the experts was also a teacher who has been working with gender issues for years and told about his experience in working with boys avoiding a paternalistic and normative approach. He worked a lot on the narrative dimension, so that the boys would acquire the tools to learn how to express themselves in everyday life. The teacher emphasised that "*through creative methodologies, such as writing and then storytelling, they are able to talk about themselves, their friendships and family, there is an ability to put their emotions into words*". For example, in one of these stories it emerged that a boy "*had wanted a doll as a child but nobody ever bought him one until he grew up and eventually bought it himself*". The teacher also suggested to ask boys and girls to tell about their experiences of discrimination or violence.  The idea was to bring out how patriarchy also harms boys, so it was important to involve boys and girls in a reflection on what violence could be.

Another project presented within the focus group is entitled "RULER - Socio-emotional Education" (https://ruleritalia.it/) which works on the development of emotional competences in boys and girls. It is not exactly a project with a focus on gender and masculinity, but the work with boys on

emotional literacy can be useful to reflect on the implicit characteristics of masculinity that prevent the manifestation of emotions (of which violence is the only form of explication of a discomfort allowed for masculinity).

Participants were asked to present their projects and experiences on the topic. Critical issues, strengths and weaknesses of the various experiences presented were then discussed.

Some of the main points that emerged were:


- Common difficulties in entering schools
- Importance of going beyond the "blaming communication model" for boys by promoting personal narratives about other possible models of masculinity
- Working on social content helps boys speak freely on this issue. An example of work done with music video clips was presented
- Centrality of the topic of sexualities; it is crucial to promote an open dialogue to let the children talk freely on sexuality
- Little knowledge of health aspects often distorted by pornography
- Working in small groups of the same gender makes it easier for boys to open up about these issues
- Difficulty in involving adolescents in peer activities and therefore the importance of motivational rewarding factors is emphasized.


Some recent projects done by NGOs on the topic of caring masculinity among youth were then discussed. Research by the NGO "Equimundo" done in various European and non-European countries on the view of masculinity among boys in schools was presented. Also the EU project "Consent" on consent and sexuality and the EU project "Messanger" on masculinity and intersectionality were presented.

A common critical issue highlighted was the fact that there are many projects done by civil society but a systematic approach at the national policy level is lacking. The centrality of teacher training to promote real systemic change on these issues in schools was also emphasized.

3.2 Teachers

| Date and Place | Sample Characteristics |
|---|---|
| 20.09.2022<br><br>Istituto degli Innocenti – Florence | - Representative of the Regional Office for Schools (teacher expert in gender equality)<br>- 4 teachers working in secondary schools |

Participants were asked to identify some examples/episodes of violence that they had to address in their schools and how they think gender affects those dynamics. More specifically they were asked to reflect on boys' position in relation to gender-based violence and if representations of masculinity have changed over the years. They were also invited to reflect on the role of teachers and of the school in preventing and addressing cases of gender-based violence as well as about the most urgent interventions needed to support teachers in their competences.

Some of the main points that emerged were.
- All teachers had experienced/witnessed situations of violence in their school, especially bulling and cyber-bulling, not only inter-gender but also intra-gender.
- One aspect that was emphasised was the presence of female bullying as an emerging phenomenon.
- The hate speech phenomenon which needs to be addressed more specifically and directly
- The necessity to address the issue of consent in relationship and sexual relationships
- The LGBTQ+ issue: there are a number of topics that are raised by adolescents in class, such as homosexuality, bisexuality, transphobia, gender transition, gender fluidity, the alias career (there has been a clear progress in addressing these issues more directly and freely, but it also depends on the availability of specific teachers)
- The different typologies of schools (predominantly female o predominantly male and how this affects the typology of relationships and episodes of violence among peers)
- Multicultural classes: how students with migratory background relate to these issues, if cultural norms impact on how gender-based violence is experienced.
- The difficulty to address these topics in the relationship between teachers and students.
- From an organizational point of view, proposals were made about which typology of projects could best be used to address these topics in schools (such as those of civic education and peer education projects).
- The centrality of teacher training to promote real systemic change on these issues in schools was also emphasized.

3.3 Young people

**1st focus group**

| Date and Place | First and last name initials | Age | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|
| 02.06.2022 | MG | 18 | M |
| | AL | 17 | M |
| High school in Sesto Fiorentino (Italy) | AJ | 15 | F |
| | YH | 15 | M |
| | RK | 15 | M |
| | SG | 16 | M |
| | TD | 15 | M |
| | LDP | 17 | F |
| | SM | 16 | F |
| | TC | 16 | Non binary |
| | BB | 16 | F |
| | MH | 15 | F |
| | KA | 17 | M |
| | DG | 18 | M |

The first focus group was conducted with a mixed class of 14 pupils. Initially, an ice-breaking activity was proposed by having them introduce themselves and ask their favourite singers.

The first question the girls and boys were asked was about their view of equality between women and men, in general, they all agreed that women and men have the same rights and must do the same things. One boy replied that "*everyone is free to do what they want*" regardless of gender.

They were then asked about the reasons for the high number of cases of violence towards women committed, almost always, by men. One boy answered that: "*it depends on the family situation. Usually there are boys who treat women badly either because of how they were brought up or because of the lack of a mother's affection and then they find the girl as a mother*".

One girl replied, however, that: "*this dynamic depends on the fact that: men believe that the woman has done something and they believe that the woman has no rights It is also not justified for women to hit men*".

After this question it was easier to go more in depth into the question of the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and the socio-cultural and educational models that impact on this.

Almost all of the adolescents (especially the girls) proved to be prepared and participative with regard to the focus groups' aims. The girls showed that they were aware of the issues surrounding gender-based violence. In contrast, almost all of the boys present showed difficulties in discussing the issues of masculinity, its construction and its role in combating violence against women. The boys' answers showed an almost protective attitude of the status of masculinity, through the construction of a barrier made of sarcasm, highlighted by the tendency to minimise the debate on the relationship between gender-based violence and hegemonic masculinity. While girls were aware

of the dangers hiding behind models of toxic masculinity, heterosexual boys almost felt, thus contributing to a kind of gender divide and polarisation.

Another emerging topic concerned the dangers caused by homophobic and transphobic conducts still present among youths. On this question, the young people showed greater forms of resistance with respect to the topic of gender-based violence against women. This aspect shows that there is still a strong male fear in dealing with LGBTQIA+ issues, for fear of putting into question heterosexuality as a normative dimension.

In addition to the speeches by the girls who recounted their indirect experience of a greater propensity to homosexual behaviour on the part of girls than boys, a homosexual boy in the class recounted his direct experience of discriminatory attitudes on the part of peers. He stated that there are many homophobic girls and that they have offended him by saying that:

*"Well, yes boys too... I found myself being offended by boys too, but it's like I got used to it, because it's usually the boys who have these attitudes. But I also found myself being offended by girls many times, but many times also in Florence, and honestly I was very disappointed because I don't expect it from a girl, since I assume a certain sensitivity towards these issues, since a girl, because she is plump or a lesbian, tends to be more subject to insults. So when I happened to be insulted by a girl it really disgusted me, compared to when a boy does it".*

Subsequently, it was asked what view they have of the idea of the "real man" and, some boys, replied that currently it is Moroccan boys who are idolised, especially by girls. When asked why, the boys referred to the penis, bringing up the commonplace of the Moroccan boy with a large and circumcised penis.

The focus group continued with some questions concerning their choice to be in homosocial or mixed groups. They replied that they generally attend mixed groups but sometimes this can cause problems and, in this regard, the account given by a girl who expressed the difficulties of asserting identity for LGBTQIA+ people in some peer contexts, was interesting. For example, she related that because she was considered masculine and he was feminine, they were teased by peers and ended up changing groups.

Apart from the interventions of the girls who told of their indirect experience of a greater propensity to homosexual behaviour by girls than by boys, a homosexual boy in the class told of his direct experience of discrimination attitudes by peers. He too confirmed a greater propensity for homotransphobic attitudes on the part of girls than boys.

In conclusion, this first focus group highlighted that although there is a lot of awareness about the problem of gender-based violence and the focus of intervention on masculinity, on the other hand there is a typology of masculinity that feels uncomfortable addressing these issues. This may reflect the tendency analysed in the scientific literature of a male who is still insufficiently literate and socialised in the work of gender self-analysis.

**2nd focus group**

| Date and Place | First and last name initials | Age | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|
| 22.12.2022 | MM | 17 | M |
| | FM | 18 | M |
| Istituto degli Innocenti – Florence | MM | 16 | M |
| | CL | 15 | M |
| | RS | 15 | M |

The second focus group was conducted with 5 boys belonging to the Boys Scouts' association aged between 15 and 18 at the Istituto degli Innocenti.
After a round of introductions, they were asked what the ideal of the real man was for them. One boy answered that: "*Today there is no longer the traditional model of masculinity, as it was for my father*". Another boy replied that there are different models of masculinity but, in his class context, he feels uncomfortable'. In this regard, he said:

"*I don't even try to socialise with my classmates, I know from the way they look at me that I appear strange in their eyes. It's because of my left-wing political views, the way I dress, and I don't feel like making an effort to interact. I have never been beaten up or offended directly, but I can see it in how they relate to me, so I prefer to keep to myself*".

After this introductory question, he was asked whether models of masculinity represented by some singers such as Damiano (singer of the Italian group Måneskin) could represent a change. Everyone agreed that, indeed, it could be, although one has to be careful that it might only be an appearance and, in reality, the risk is that at the end of the group's success they leave nothing behind in the collective imaginary.
The next question was about their idea of gender-based violence. One boy told of a time when he and a friend found themselves in the situation of having to witness a stranger's predatory attitudes towards her friend. At that moment, he felt bewildered as to why the boy had engaged in that behaviour towards the girl. One boy told of a time when he and a friend were in the situation of having to witness a stranger's predatory attitudes towards his friend. At that moment, he felt disoriented to understand why the boy had engaged in such behaviour towards the girl. Overall, an awareness emerged with regard to a greater focus on male education to reduce gender-discriminatory behaviour. Some expressed the idea that there is a co-responsibility (of boys and girls) regarding gender-based violence.
For some this co-responsibility concerned the fact that girls should pay more attention (in cases of partner violence) to the boy and, should report instead of saying nothing. During the focus group the topic shifted to the construction of masculinity and the nature/culture relationship of masculinity. For some, there are biological differences between males and females which impact on the construction of the masculine and feminine self (while not justifying gender-based violence).

For others, however, violence and evil are an intrinsic component of humanity (male and female) and it is inevitable that they manifest themself in the relationship with the other.

On the topic of masculinity and what a boy should do on the basis of his gender, they were asked how they would react if they saw a boy crying. One of them stated that:

"*It would be strange to see a boy crying. It has never happened to me and I am not used to it...I have a vision of masculinity that does not match with the idea of a boy crying. For me a man must be able to control his emotions. A woman is made differently from a man and is more likely not to control her emotions*"

All agreed that gender education can be useful in preventing and counteracting the phenomenon. Compared to the previous focus group, the boys did not give answers centred on homotransfobia, except for one boy who showed knowledge of the wide range of non-heteronormative identity representations.

## 4. Conclusion

Since the results that emerged from the report, conclusive work should be done on project revision and focus group analysis respectively. As far as the review of projects is concerned, those dealing with the analysis of masculinity in the debate on gender-based violence are almost completely missing.

In the Italian context, research on masculinity in education is in a phase of gradual growth and no national research has been produced with respect to the promotion of good practices. On the one hand, there is the academic educational research that has put in place the need for a problematic framework of masculinity in adolescence, but there is a lack of regulations that decisively open (formal) educational contexts to these issues.

The first project chosen concerns an attempt to adapt the White Ribbon born in the 1990s in Canada. After some awareness-raising campaigns, there was not much follow up, except for its use in some specific contexts such as CAM in some in-house projects. This can be seen from the fact that there are no websites reporting recent news on the subject. This is the only one that meets CarMiA's requirements regarding the choice of peer education methodologies.

"Five Men" project was because it responds to a precise aim of working with masculinity starting with stereotypes that have a bearing on male identity and then influencing both intra- and inter-gender relations. Although it is not exactly a project aimed at adolescents but at adults, it can be a starting point for reflections affecting younger boys experiencing the transition phase to the adult world.

The third project, "Plural masculinities. From stereotypes to the freedom to be oneself", has preadolescence and adolescence as its target audience, compared to the others, it presents itself as a useful guide for working with boys and girls on hegemonic masculinities from an intersectional perspective, thus involving different levels of discrimination (gender, race, class). Although the peer education methodology is not predominant, it could be used to train older boys and girls who, in turn, would go on to train younger boys and girls.

Concerning the focus group analysis, considerations emerged from different perspectives (experts in the field of research and educational design, practitioners and adolescents) that pointed to the need to involve masculinity in the debate on gender-based and LGBTQIA+ violence.

Some experts during the FG reported that they informally attempted to work on masculinity, on emotions with boys with the aim of freeing them from prejudices that, sometimes unconsciously, lead them towards a self-suppression of their self in advantage of some benefits of masculinity.

Other experts, on the other hand, reported their experience in planning and, while identifying forms of openness towards masculinity as a gender category to be analysed, agreed that little has yet been done in this regard. Teachers reported that in their classes they are aware of the issues that affect LGBTQIA+ people and recognise that not everyone has to be cis-etero. Despite this, they have noticed an increase in cases of bullying and especially female bullying. The problem of adequate teacher training on these issues emerges, as they often find it difficult to approach their pupils.

In the focus groups with the boys and girls at school there was a lot of awareness about issues of gender-based violence and discrimination of peers who identify as LGBTQIA+. But this awareness was expressed by girls, while boys tended to express little on the topic.

In the second focus group conducted with only boys, on the other hand, some reported on the issue of masculinity and, most likely, this could be traced back to the fact that they found themselves in a space with only boys, protected by the fear that they might show girls "sensitivity" on issues that require a lot of introspection on their own gender dimension.

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# 6. Annex

## 6.1 ANNEX: EXPERTS FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. INTRODUCTION: Make an introduction round in which all participants of the focus group introduce themselves (their organisation and work).

2. GENERAL ASSESSMENT: In your opinion, what is the state of the art in gender-based violence (GBV) prevention work with youngsters in the country? Is peer-to-peer approach present? What are the prevalent topics/methods (peer violence, family violence, violence in intimate partnerships, sexual violence, on-line violence, peaceful conflict resolution, behavioural change, self-reflection, working with families, community work, stress and affects management, sport and hobbies)? What are targets (zero tolerance, widening perspectives, competences and social skills of youngsters, gender equality)?

3. GENDER PERSPECTIVE: Is a gender perspective (patriarchal structures, harmful gender norms, stereotypes and roles) part of the existing programs? Is there any specific focus on boys, men and masculinities? IF YES: How are boys, men and masculinities addressed? IF NO: Why

not? Do you prefer working with gender uniform (only-boys, only-girl groups) or gender mixed group in GBV prevention? What are (dis)advantages of both approaches?

4. GENDER DIVERSITY: Do you include gender diversity, queer & non-binary identities and sexual orientation as important topics in your GBV-prevention approach? In what way? IF NOT: Why not?

5. INTERSECTIONALITY: What are the experiences with classed, ethnicised, racialized diversities in GBV prevention work? Is there a need for special GBV preventive tools/programs for specific social groups, for instance migrants, refugees, youngsters from economically deprived families? What is needed to effectively address intersectional GBV?

6. HARMFUL TRAITS OF MASCULINITIES: Studies (Salazar et al. 2020) show that harmful traits of masculinities must be challenged and addressed if any reduction on GBV is to be achieved. Because of the gender norms of masculinity (Connell 2012, hegemonic masculinities), men and boys may feel that they have to constantly prove themselves and others that they are fearless, assertive, courageous, strong, 'real' men. In order to do that they often suppress and negate vulnerability connected to feelings of helplessness, shame, sadness and fear. This identity formation offers a fertile ground for GBV like sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, feelings of entitlement to sex, domination, objectification of women, peer control and bullying. Do you recognize harmful traits of masculinity as an important source of GBV? Do you challenge them in violence preventive programs with youngsters? How? What alternative do you offer? What are the experiences? What works well? What does not work?  IF NOT: Why not? What would you need to tackle them?

7. ALTERNATIVE MASCULINITIES: Masculinities can manifest themselves in many ways, not always through harmful traits. Some studies show that many (young) men enact non-violent, positive (Salazar et al. 2020), inclusive (Anderson 2009) or caring (Hanlon 2012, Elliott 2015) masculinities. They are more likely to reject risk and competitive behaviours traditionally associated with masculinity, to defend women's and LGBT+ rights, to reject men's violence towards women and LGBT+ people, to act inclusively, express positive emotions, empathy, awareness of interdependence, and/or to actively be involved in actions preventing violence against women and LGBT+ people. Do you observe alternative forms of masculinities in your work with youngsters? How would you describe them? Do you (intentionally) support them? How? What are the experiences? What works well? What does not work? What is needed to make nonviolent masculinities more visible and appealing in society at large? How do you try to achieve that in your organisation?

8. TRAININIG: Which training related to prevention of GBV, and specifically, to boys, men and masculinities, as well as gender diversity do professionals receive in their education (basic education, further education, obligatory or free of choice, …)? Which training did you receive in your professional formation and career? Have there been any significant changes in training offers during the last years?

9. CONCRETE NEEDS: What is needed in order to properly address the issues of boys, men and masculinities in relation to GBV in your context (training, knowledge, material, methods, support, consciousness-raising, …)? What conditions would support encouraging nonviolent masculinities?

10. Would you like to add something that we did not tackle?

## 6.2 ANNEX: TEACHERS FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

### INTRODUCTION

- **Project presentation**
- **Project objectives**
- **Objective of the focus group (related to a needs assessment based on your professional experience)**
- **Tour presentations by them and us**

1. Based on your experience, we ask you to share some examples of conflicts (violence, bullying) that you have witnessed in your work as a teacher. How do you think gender affects these forms of violence? [If we were to ask you to do a gender analysis with respect to these forms of violence, what could you tell us about the positioning of males in cases of violence towards other males and girls?]

2. How have you dealt with these situations in the past? What are the aspects inherent in the phenomenon of gender-based violence for which, in your opinion, urgent intervention is required? What contribution could direct action by the teacher and the school institution in general make?

3. In your opinion, are specific tools and attention required to prevent gender-based violence towards particular groups such as LGBTQIA+ people, migrants, refugees, young people

from economically disadvantaged families? If so, what could these tools be and how could education promote such attention?

4.  In your work experience have you noticed representations of masculinity models that deviate from the machismo standard? (including boys who define themselves as non-binary, queer, gay, etc.) If so, how did you move pedagogically to show your support for any forms of discrimination on the part of their peers? Furthermore, have you ever directly or indirectly witnessed discriminatory attitudes on the part of your peers and colleagues towards them?

5.  Has your school ever participated in projects, workshop activities with a specific focus on educational work towards alternative models of masculinity to toxic masculinity, promoting their involvement in combating gender-based and homophobic violence? Have you used a peer education approach in these or other programmes? How did they work? What issues did you address?

## CONSIDERATIONS

Do you have any suggestions on how such activities and programmes could be set up at both curricular and extracurricular levels?

## 6.3 ANNEX: YOUNG PEOPLE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

1.  Introductory round in which all focus group participants introduce themselves. Potentially use an 'ice-breaker question' to create a relaxed, confident and open atmosphere from the outset (name, age, your favourite dish,hobbies/TV series/social media you use/ favourite singers or bands what are you good at?

### 2. EXPLORING BOYS' IDEAS ON MASCULINITY

- What does it mean (to you) to be a real man?
- How do you recognise a real man by his physical appearance or behaviour?
- Who, on the other hand, are the sissies? And, again, how do you recognise them by their physical appearance and behaviour? (If they did not go into detail, we could start with some examples: does a real man cry? Is he sad? And if you saw a boy crying, what would you do?) Do you feel obliged to be a boy? (In relationships with friends are there rules of behaviour?) Who are the popular boys? Why are they popular? Who are the sissy/weak boys? Why? Does the body, its size, strength, fitness count for much in your group? In what way? What do you do in your spare time/hobbies/sports? What do you do when you feel

sad? Do you sometimes feel stressed about your masculinity? In which situations? Who are/were your role models?

## 3. RELATIONS WITH GIRLS AND LGBTIQ PEOPLE AND VIOLENCE:

- Do boys and girls have the same rights? (in case they are vague you could integrate the following question: boys are said to be stronger and girls are more fragile, so do the former have more rights over the latter?
- If a girl or boy tells you they are gay or lesbian what do you think about?
- If a boy tells you he would like to be a girl and vice versa? What reactions do you have? Is it more serious that a boy wants to be a girl or the other way around? Do you see girls? (In a mixed group add: How do you see boys?) Are boys and girls the same or different? How? Why? Do boys and girls have the same rights in society? Can you give an example? What about LGBTI, queer or non-binary people?

## 4. VIOLENCE TOWARDS HETEROSEXUAL GIRLS AND LGBTQIA+ GIRLS AND BOYS

- What are the causes of violence towards girls or women? How much does the way they dress, behave influence this? Have you ever witnessed this? Do you know of cases of girls beating boys?
- What are the causes of violence towards LGBTQIA+ girls and boys? If a boy says he is gay or kisses another boy (same for lesbian girls) is it normal for there to be violent reactions towards them? Have you ever witnessed this?
- Do you think it is males or females who are more violent towards gays, lesbians and transsexuals?

## 5. HOW TO BREAK THE VICIOUS CIRCLE CONSTITUTED BY THE MASCULINITY-VIOLENCE RELATIONSHIP?

- Background (current research speaks of a higher percentage of violence towards girls and LGBTQIA+ girls committed by heterosexual boys or boys who consider themselves as such). Shifting the focus to this aspect: How would you support a friend who behaves violently? What would you say to him? Do you know a boy whom you consider very strong and who consistently avoids violence? What kind of person is he? What are his norms, values and behaviour? What would be your message to your peers about masculinity and violence?
- Is it possible to be a boy without being violent? And if so, what could be done?
- What could you say/do with a group of boys of the same age or a few years younger to explain that violence is not 'cool'?