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INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

“Capacity-building for mainstreaming a gender perspective into national policies and programmes to support the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS”

Written statement*

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Engaging Men and Boys in Caregiving: Reflections from Research, Practice and Policy Advocacy¹

Introduction

Promoting equal responsibilities between men and women in caregiving is at the heart of one of the most challenging and lingering aspects of gender inequality: the historical social division of labor. As women have moved increasingly into paid employment and production outside the home, time use studies confirm that in many parts of the world, their burden of labor has increased as their work outside the home has been added to hours worked inside the home. In the interest of gender equality, how can we engage men to a greater extent in caregiving activities? What kinds of policies and programs can promote men's involvement in caregiving?

First off, what do we know about men's participation in caregiving? It is important to start off by affirming that whether in the daily conversations of women and health or child care service providers, and often in research, men are frequently portrayed incompletely or as deficient or irresponsible in family life and caregiving. It is possible, of course, to make a list of men's commonly perceived "deficiencies" in relation to their families, ranging from not providing child support, to limited involvement in domestic chores and the care of children and others.

But this research and these discourses of deficient and non-caring men tell only one part of the story, and too frequently seek to blame or focus on individual men without adequately questioning the social and contextual constructions of gender relations that are behind the inequalities. In recent years, researchers have begun to include men's own perspectives of their roles in families and as caregivers and in the process uncovered important nuances. Much of this research is affirming that men participate in caregiving, in their own ways, more than is commonly thought, and has offered insights on the challenges to promoting greater equality in caregiving and policy efforts to do (NCOFF, 2002; Brown & Chevannes, 1998).

This paper will provide some reflections about engaging men and boys

female participation has increased from 40 to 46 percent (in Engle, 1997; Buvinic, Guiffrida & Glassman 2002). These trends have led to shifts in arrangements for childcare and have called into question men's limited involvement in domestic tasks, including childcare. Men who feel they are not able to live up to social expectations of being providers are more likely to abandon their families, or may be expelled from the home in cases of use of violence against women, for example. On aggregate, what we see throughout the region is that women are working more – at home *and* outside the home – while men are working slightly less outside the home, and for the most part not yet taking on domestic activities in proportional ways.

the vast majority of childcare outside the home in the LAC region (and in most of the world) is provided by women, and the vast majority of teachers at primary level in the region are

Sweden use this month, with 12 percent of fathers using leave beyond one month. Use of the parental leave by fathers is higher among fathers with higher education and higher income; lower-income fathers say they cannot afford to lose 20 percent of their salary (Cohen, 2000).

public sector. Impact evaluations with these kinds of interventions has found that young men change attitudes and behaviors as a result of participating in such groups (Barker, Ricardo & Nascimento, 2007).

Target the workplace and employers to create more flexible employment policies and as an environment for fatherhood campaigns. Considering that work is an environment in which men spend the largest portion of their time, and that have a tremendous impact on gender norms on work-life balance, interventions should target workplaces and trade unions to a greater extent to enact workplace-based campaigns and policies to allow men (and women) greater flexibility to be with their children and to promote a more appropriate work-life balance. In **Brazil, Promundo** and partners have used the workplace to reach men with messages on negotiating flexible time to be with their families and sensitizing managerial staff to allow workers to have this time off. The campaign used the slogan: “At work and at home, what kind of a man are you? One who negotiates time off to be with his children.”

Review current policies and how they influence men’s participation as fathers. The issue of men’s role as fathers has seldom been included in policy initiatives in the region, beyond the issue of child support. The literature consulted here confirms the need for greater information on existing policies and how they already effect men’s participation as fathers. In **Brazil, the Network of Men for Gender Equality** is carrying out an advocacy campaign and seeking to influence public policy. A bill, with the support these NGOs, is currently pending in Brazilian Congress that would extend paternity leave from its current five days to 15 days. As part of the campaign, a public service announcement has been developed with

promote gender equality from the earliest ages and promoting gender equality in the play activities promoted in ECD centers.

Making health and other social services more friendly to men. If men are often lacking in their caregiving, men themselves are often not cared for and seldom care for their own bodies and health. Numerous studies confirm that health and social services are often seen as female spaces or as “foreign to men.”

Conclusions

The social division of labor is probably the most complex and difficult aspect of gender inequalities. The association of production with men and reproduction with women is so deeply ingrained in the organization and structure of workplaces and family life that changing it via policies and programs is not an easy task. Nonetheless, the evidence confirms that men’s and women’s involvement and division of caregiving is constantly in flux, and that men can – in specific conditions and settings – be encouraged to become more involved in domestic chores and caregiving. These conditions include policies that promote paternity leave, flexible work policies, economic necessity and in some cases program interventions that can and should be supported by public policies.

Above all this is an area where we can appeal to the positive in men. Most of the world’s adult men will become or are already fathers; nearly all men describe positive relationships and happiness in their interactions with some children in their lives. Appealing to men’s self-interest and the well-being derived from their connections to children is a tremendous potential engine for driving changes in gender equality. Of course, men’s involvement in children does not – as we have seen – always mean that women’s burdens of work are reduced. But it is clear that appealing to men’s interest in engaging in the lives of children – their own daughters and sons – and other children, is a way forward in the cause of gender equality.

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