**Submission to the report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 35/10 of the Human Rights Council**

**Introduction**

Rutgers is the Dutch center of expertise on sexual and reproductive health and rights. For many years, we have been working to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Netherlands, and in Europe, Asia and Africa. Rutgers empowers people through education and improve access to information and services. We strengthen professionals, organizations and societies. We connect research, implementation and advocacy.

This submission focusses on our work in the Netherlands to engaging men and boys in promoting and achieving gender equality and challenge gender stereotypes and the negative social norms, attitudes and behaviours that underlie and perpetuate violence against women and girls.

Concrete steps to engage boys & men

1. **Engaging boys in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls through comprehensive sexual education**

One of the core objectives of our work in the Netherlands is to make comprehensive sexual education a structural part of the education of all young people by implementing effective sexual education programs in schools and to reach young people direct with reliable online information and interventions. Prevention of sexual violence by challenging gender stereotypes and negative social norms, attitudes and behaviours is an important aspect of comprehensive sexuality education. Most of the information and interventions on this subject target both girls and boys, but specific campaigns and interventions are developed to engage boys in preventing and responding to sexual violence, like the campaign *Beat the Macho* and the serious game *Can You Fix It?*.

**Campaign & workshops on masculinity & macho behavior: Beat the Macho & LEFgozers**

*Setting new norms on masculinities with boys*

Beat the Macho is a campaign made by and for boys about masculinity and macho behavior. In several workshops, seventy boys came up with seven situations that bring up a well-known dilemma: “Are you your own man? Or do you play the macho?”

These situations are depicted in a photo series, like this one:



*Translation: “*You're at a party with your friends and there are nice girls on the dancefloor. One of your friends challenges you: “I bet you ten euro that you don't go up and grab her tits.” “Bad idea”, you think. But what do you say?”

These photo strips were used in a social media campaign to start a dialogue about masculinity and macho behavior with many more boys. Almost 7,000 boys commented to the photo strips. Two popular rap artists put all these boys' thoughts into a song. Their advice to teenagers is: “Don’t worry about proving you are a real man, But listen to yourself.” Boys reacted very positively to this song. It was played on the internet over 81,000 times while the clip had more than 50,000 views and the song got air-play on popular national radio stations.

*What are our findings?*

The Beat the Macho campaign confirmed the conclusion of Pulerwitz et al.[[1]](#footnote-1) that a combination of interactive, small-scale, male-only education sessions and a social marketing campaign is an effective strategy to open boys up to more divers and positive forms of masculinities.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Boys really like to talk to each other about the pressure they experience to prove their masculinity. In workshops boys immediately recognized it was hard to do their own thing, because of this pressure. They experience this difficulty among boys, but also with girls. The topics boys want to discuss mostly fall into two themes: peer pressure to be tough and fear of being rejected if you don't act like a man. 66% of the boys found these strips about relations and sexuality most important.[[3]](#footnote-3)

*From Beat the Macho to LEFgozers (Guys with guts)*

With the successful elements of the Beat the Macho campaign we developed a series of workshops to discuss masculinity and macho behaviour with boys. We trained more than 40 youth workers to work with the LEFgozers program and the fist groups of boys started this summer.

*“What’s strong about the LEFgozers, is that boys are not targeted as the problem, but given tools to make their own choices. The workshops strengthen their own moral compass, that make them less vulnerable for group pressure.”* (Ben van Ardenne, youth worker)

**Serious game to prevent nonconsensual sexual behavior: Can You Fix It?**

*Making boys more resilient in sexual situations so they can intervene in a timely manner to prevent nonconsensual sexual behavior.*

Can You Fix It? is a 'serious game' in which the player can influence the course of a video clip by interfering and choosing from two different options for behavior of one of the characters by hitting the Fixit button. Can You Fix It? is played on a website: [www.canyoufixit.nl](http://www.canyoufixit.nl). There are teacher guides for the guidance of young people when playing Can You Fix It. This intervention is for both boys and girls, but is very popular among boys.

Can You Fix It?' Is intended to reduce nonconsensual sexual behavior of young people between the ages of 12 and 18. The goal is to teach adolescents to recognize moments that can lead to nonconsensual sexual situations, and then intervene in a timely manner. Another goal is enforce the social norm that both genders are responsible and capable to create a positive outcome. Players can choose diverse perspectives: heterosexual boy, homosexual boy, heterosexual girl, lesbian girl, transgender, of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Boys are stimulated to play the game also from the perspective of the girl or of another character that does not represent their own perspective ( e.g. someone with another sexual orientation).

As gender norms and group pressure to conform to these norms are underlying factors of much sexual nonconsensual behavior, many of these films tackle the issue of unequal and unhealthy gender norms and how to deal with the pressure to conform to these norms.

The game is often played (more than 50,000 times a year). The average playing time is 11 minutes. 25% of the visitors play the game more than once. A trial evaluation among young people shows that the game is appreciated with a 7+ (out of 10).

An effect study shows that Can You Fix It? is potentially effective in achieving the set goals.[[4]](#footnote-4)  The study found clear differences between control and experimental groups on intention to set clear boundaries in sexual situations, but also showed how difficult it is for young people to actually talk about boundaries and wishes.

1. **Engaging boys in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls through group and one on one counseling**

In our program prevention of sexual violence we focus (among other things) on the implementation of effective interventions for boys and girls with a higher risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator. Lower educated boys and boys in specific settings such as residential youth care are at risk of becoming perpetrators (and victims) of sexual harassment. Also boys who already crossed the line once, have a higher risk to become a perpetrator once more.

For the prevention of nonconsensual sexual behavior and the prevention of becoming a perpetrator, *Make a Move* has been developed. In addition, *Ken je grens (Know your Limit)* is available, an intensive individual program for boys who already crossed the line once. *Halt Sexting* was developed as a short intervention for young people (mainly boys) who have distributed online sexual material without permission, in order to prevent recidivism.

**Sexual Harassment Prevention Program: Make a Move**

*Working with boys with a higher risk of becoming an perpetrator*

Make a Move is a group intervention program targeting lower educated boys and boys in a residential youth care setting to prevent that they become perpetrators of sexual violence.  Make a Move targets known determinants of sexual violence. Identified determinants include gender attitudes, attitudes about gender roles, acceptance of verbal pressure in obtaining sex, rape myth acceptance, acceptance of interpersonal violence, adverse sexual beliefs, rape empathy, and self-efficacy.

In Make a Move boys are motivated for positive and acceptable sexual behavior. Themes they work on are boyhood/manhood, girls, dating and sex. There is focus on topics such as peer pressure and social media. The program has a cognitive-behavioral approach and includes eight group meetings guided by a trainer. This program was implemented and evaluated among boys in Dutch residential youth care.

In the process evaluation both trainers and participants evaluated the program highly positive. The boys really liked to talk about sex in a positive way, think about ways to deal with complicated situations and practice their skills in roleplaying. They gave the program an eight out of ten. The trainers all decided to implement the program as a structural part of the training boys receive.

A version for boys with mild intellectual disability (Make a Move+) will be available in 2018.

1. **Lobbying for Paternal leave**

In the Netherlands, there is still a lot of gender inequality in the work/home arrangements of men and women. Women’s share of care time is considerably larger than men’s—almost double. Policies aiming for more gender equality mainly focus on supporting women towards the labour market instead of encouraging men’s role as caregiver. To achieve gender equality men’s role as caregivers should be supported too. Fathers matter deeply to child development, leave for fathers promotes women’s equal pay and advancement in the workforce and men’s connectedness at home. Furthermore, fathers with close connections to their children live longer, have fewer health problems, and are more productive and generally happier.

The overall aim of the project ‘Parents and Income’ is to increase support for working parents with young children in the Netherlands. There is a special focus on advocating the extension of paid leave for partners as a way to support both children, parents, employers and society. Project strategies and outcomes relate to research, advocacy and strengthening public support.

Our combined efforts resulted into the adaptation of extension of paternity leave by the new government, more caring-friendly policies of companies and engagement of fathers in the Platform Fatherhood.

Paternity leave policies that are well-paid and non-transferable can be some of the most effective policies in encouraging men’s caregiving and promoting greater equality in the household, workplace and society as a whole. It can address the root causes of gender inequality.[[5]](#footnote-5)

As a next step, it is crucial that the cultural norm concerning caring for young children will be adjusted in the Netherlands.

Challenges

**Funding**

Gender norms play a role in how funds are divided. On one hand it is easier to find funds to make girls sexual resilient than to make boys sexual resilient. Although both genders need to be empowered to talk about wishes and boundaries and know how to intervene at moments that can lead to nonconsensual sexual situations. Especially when it comes to implementing intervention, girls more often are seen as in need of empowerment than boys. On the other hand is it easier (but still not easy) to find funds to transform harmful gender norms with boys as it is to find funds to transform harmful gender norms with girls when it comes to sexuality. Although research shows that gender synchronization is a necessary step in the progress of challenging gender stereotypes and transforming negative social norms.[[6]](#footnote-6)

*Steps to address these issues*

* Rutgers aims to make all programs gender transformative, so challenging gender stereotypes and transforming negative social norms is part of all the work we do.
* Rutgers takes part in different alliances to build a strong movement in the Netherlands to put transforming restrictive and unhealthy gender norms on the agenda. For example the Alliance Gender diversity with different stakeholders of women’s, men’s and LHBTi emancipation and youth organizations, supported by the Dutch Ministry of Emancipation; and the Platform Vaderschap, supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation.
* Gathering evidence on how making girls *and* boys sexual resilient and transforming harmful gender norms with boys *and* girls is needed to end sexual violence.

**Implementation**

Interventions to transform harmful and unequal gender norms often need to be implemented in the education system and/or the health system. These institutions and the people working in these institutions are not gender transformative by default, meaning they do not always recognize the need to challenge gender stereotypes and transform harmful social norms. Professionals sometime even reinforce gender stereotypes, contributing unintentionally to harmful social norms by doing so.

*Steps to address these issues*

* Most of our intervention come with a train-the-trainer, so professionals working with these interventions are aware of the importance of gender and challenging gender stereotypes.
* Rutgers started the coalition Zorg op Maat (*Custom made Care*) together with Women Inc (a women’s organization) and COC (LHBT organization). Goal of this coalition is to make care more inclusive for all genders and better aware of the specific vulnerabilities of women and LHBTi people.
* We disclose all relevant information to professionals on how rigid gender norms and harmful social practices contribute to poor health outcomes for women & girls, men & boys and LHBTi people.

**Working simultaneously on all levels of the ecological model**

Evidence shows that the most effective way to transform rigid gender norms and harmful social practices is to work on all levels of the ecological model simultaneously.[[7]](#footnote-7) There are high expectations from working with young people, but we cannot expect them to change if the world they live in does not transform with them. Focus of many interventions are on the personal or relational level. More efforts are needed to transform social norms on community and institutional level. Also policies need to be inclusive for all genders and investment in the women’s & LHBTi movement is needed. In addition, an investment is needed to scale up effective interventions to transform rigid norms and harmful social practices. As changing norms is not a project, but a continues practice.

Inclusion of women’s rights organizations

Most of the interventions are in collaboration with other organizations working on preventing sexual violence or on the emancipation of women, LHBTi-people and/or men. The advocacy on Paternity Leave is in partnership with a women rights organization and an organization focusing on the welfare of children. This combination resulted in a balanced message to show that paternity leave can be beneficial for all these groups and should be made as inclusive as possible to ensure that the multiple effects are achieved: more gender equality, better development of children and more welfare of men.

1. Pulerwitz, J., Michaelis, A., Verma, R., & Weiss, E. (2010). Addressing gender dynamics and engaging men in HIV programs: Lessons learned from Horizons research. *Public Health Reports*, vol. 125, 282-292. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cense, M., Blécourt, K.E., Oostrik, S., (2016). Activating boys to reflect on masculinity norms: The Dutch Campaign Beat the Macho. The European Health Psycologist, vol. 18, 13-17 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Idem [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gruijters, S., Massar, K., Pletzers, J. & Kok, G. (2013). *Effectevaluatie ‘Can You Fix It?’* Eindrapport. Work & Social Psychology Universiteit Maastricht. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Levtov R, van der Gaag N, Greene M, Kaufman M, and Barker G (2015). State of the World’s Fathers: A MenCare Advocacy Publication. Washington, DC: Promundo, Rutgers, Save the Children, Sonke Gender Justice, and the MenEngage Alliance. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Greene, Margaret & Levack Andrew / Synchronizing Gender Strategies A Cooperative Model for Improving Reproductive Health and Transforming Gender Relations. - Populations Reference Bureau Interagency Gender Working Group (IGWG); Washington, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bronfenbrenner, U., The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention. - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention, March 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)