

MenCare in Latin America: challenging harmful masculine norms and promoting positive changes in men's caregiving

Key messages

- Across Latin America, men tend to spend less time than women caring for their children and undertaking domestic work. Deeply ingrained stereotypes and gender norms discourage men from taking on caregiving roles.
- When men do become involved in care, their support for gender equality increases. More equal responsibilities in caregiving can lead to decreased male violence and increased opportunities for women to work outside of the home, take on leadership roles and improve their education and health.
- The MenCare campaign in Latin America works with men to help break down traditional gender roles around care.
- The campaign includes training for service providers, education and awareness raising activities for both men and women, media campaigns and targeted advocacy work.
- The work has brought about several positive changes, including shifts in individual attitudes toward fatherhood and more positive attitudes among service providers around engaging men as fathers and caregivers.



MenCare poster from Nicaragua. The caption says 'I feel that you love me when you hug and kiss me. You are my father'.

Image supplied by Promundo

Introduction

The MenCare campaign in Latin America seeks to promote men's roles as equitable, non-violent fathers and caregivers, in order to achieve family wellbeing, gender equality and better health for mothers, fathers and children. Across Latin America, men spend less time than women in caring for their children. For example, in Brazil, while men spend almost the same amount of time as their partners engaging in activities like playing, taking children to school, and helping with homework, they spend just 77 percent of the amount of time that women do in direct childcare work (Barker 2008). Even when men do participate in care and domestic work, they are seen as 'helping' women, rather than being full, equally responsible partners. The ways that men

are socialised, and the dominant gender norms around masculinity, sustain this unequal situation, as well as perpetuating other harmful behaviours such as violence against women and other men.

The MenCare campaign in Latin America works with men to help break down traditional gender norms around care. It is part of a global campaign which began in 2011, coordinated by the organisations Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice and active in over 35 countries. In Latin America, MenCare is implemented in partnership with non-governmental organisations in Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Peru and Puerto

Rico. While only limited evaluation evidence exists on the direct impact of MenCare in Latin America, representatives of the campaign see MenCare as a contributing factor in a cumulative process of positive change toward gender equality, at both individual and institutional levels.

Changes at the individual level

- Shifts in attitudes toward gender and fatherhood
- Increased openness to redefining manhood and fatherhood
- Increased awareness of paternity leave as a right for families to take up

Changes at the institutional level

- Improved quality of care in the health sector for men
- Successful national level advocacy around men's health and paternity rights
- More positive attitudes among health sector staff around engaging men
- Local communities feel more empowered to demand more gender equitable health care services

How were men and boys engaged in the intervention?

The MenCare campaign engages men to be allies in supporting women's social and economic equality. Through 'Program P', MenCare supports the engagement of men as caregivers in three ways. It produces guidance for healthcare providers on engaging men in prenatal consultations and primary health clinics; it offers a series of interactive training modules for gender transformative education with men and couples; and it provides a step by step guide for communities on creating and launching a MenCare campaign. By targeting men in this way, primarily through the health sector, Program P engages fathers and their partners at a critical moment – usually during pregnancy – when they may be more open to new caregiving behaviours.

Program P is programmatic approach of the MenCare campaign. It is a direct and targeted response to the need for concrete strategies to engage men in active fatherhood from prenatal care through to birth and children's early years. It was developed by Puntos de Encuentro in Nicaragua, CulturaSalud in Chile and the Brazilian Ministry of Health.



MenCare poster from Brazil. The caption says 'You take care of me. You are my father' Image supplied by Promundo

What processes and strategies were used?

MenCare partners across the nine Latin American countries have been guided by MenCare's global work, but they have adapted methods and strategies to suit their own local context and dynamics. Some of these are set out below.

Identifying diverse entry points

Some MenCare partners have identified entry points for their work across several sectors. In Brazil, MenCare partner Promundo implemented Program P in the health and education sectors, as well as in local communities. In Mexico, MenCare partner Cómplices por la Equidad has undertaken direct work with professionals in the education, healthcare and development sectors in five cities. It also holds community workshops and a fatherhood festival which tours Mexican cities.

Focusing on specific entry points

In Chile, MenCare partner CulturaSalud has used the health sector as an entry point, training healthcare workers to carry out Program P. In Nicaragua, Puntos

“ Involving men in prenatal medical appointments, in the birth and first four years of the child, is crucial in order to create new synergies between father and children, prevent mistreatment of them and the mother, and to involve men in domestic work and baby care work. ”

MARIA EUGÉNIA VILLARREAL, ECPAT GUATEMALA

de Encuentro and REDMAS also focuses on the health sector, holding seminars for health professionals to equip them with the tools they need to better engage men in the health sector on issues of care and parenting.

Working in networks for wide reach and sustainability

As part of Program P in Brazil, Promundo worked with the Ministry of Health and with other organisations working on early childhood development and improving paternity entitlements. Promundo joined national networks in order to make these links, strengthen its work and situate it within a wider context.

“By creating and being part of networks, our programs last longer than their funding and their specific activities. Drawing on the work of fatherhood and caregiving [we could] also approach other important topics related to gender inequality and to violence.”

MARCO AURÉLIO MARTINS, PROMUNDO

In Chile, MenCare work has been supported by key partnerships with the national government, UNICEF and the MenEngage network, and in Nicaragua, MenCare partners have linked with grassroots movements working with men, women, children and adolescents, as well as with the Ministry of Health.

Media campaigns

In Nicaragua, the educational media campaign ‘Vos sos mi papá’ (‘You are my father’) focused on real life stories, conversations and testimonials about fatherhood, and included television, radio and video outputs. Guatemala, Uruguay and Brazil’s MenCare media campaigns used posters telling positive stories of fathers involved in caregiving, and in Brazil a photographic exhibition was organised, featuring images of fatherhood submitted by Program P workshop participants.

Research

Nicaraguan MenCare partners undertook initial research identifying barriers to engaging men in healthcare services. This research helped to guide future work. In Chile, CulturaSalud also conducted preliminary research, in order to learn more about health professionals’ attitudes and practices around men’s engagement in the maternal and child health sector.

Public education

In Guatemala, men are invited to attend ‘Fathers’ Schools’ in health centres. In the schools men are engaged in discussions around fatherhood and caregiving, which often highlight other gender equality issues. Following this, ECPAT have set up ‘Mothers’ Schools’, in which women also discuss the gendered norms at work around care, and are encouraged to involve men more in caregiving. In Uruguay, MenCare partner Centro de Estudios sobre Masculinidades y Género has organised workshops in large institutions such as Antel, Uruguay’s national communications company.

Targeted advocacy

MenCare partners undertake advocacy work at national level, attempting to influence government policy around issues such as men’s health and paternity leave entitlements. MenCare partners also engage in joint advocacy; for example through the collaborative development of recommendations in the recently launched report ‘State of the World’s Fathers’.

Lessons learnt

By working with partner organisations across countries at multiple levels to engage individuals, communities, institutions and policy makers in both holistic and targeted work around fatherhood, MenCare illustrates the potential of approaches that take the issue of fatherhood as an entry point for promoting gender equality more broadly.

However, some challenges and gaps remain. Some MenCare partners note that while men participating in workshops have moved towards more equitable relationships with their partners, they still ultimately see household work as women’s responsibility. Others have encountered resistance from unexpected stakeholder groups, such as doctors. In order to understand these challenges better, there is a clear need to improve the evidence base on the impact of MenCare work on the ground.

The example of MenCare in Latin America offers the following lessons for work to promote men’s roles as equitable, non-violent fathers and caregivers.

- Use comprehensive, holistic and multilevel approaches in key sectors, creating strong institutional partnerships to push for effective and sustainable change.
- Work with governmental organisations to ensure that men’s roles as caregivers can be included and promoted in national policy, and that the work to promote these roles has broad impact and reach.
- Encourage the inclusion of fathers’ involvement in caregiving within practitioners’ planning strategies,

for example around antenatal care, as an entry point to transforming unequal gender dynamics in the home.

- Increase public awareness of the role of fathers in child development and promote changes in gender norms related to caregiving. This can be done through media campaigns and educational activities.
- Include women when engaging fathers in caregiving, creating a transformative process for both women and men. Including women's organisations in networks focusing on men's caring roles is also important.
- Push for full sharing of caregiving responsibilities, rather than men taking on a 'helping' role. This should be emphasised frequently in programming, citing the benefits to all family members, including fathers themselves.
- Anticipate resistance when planning strategies to involve men in caregiving.
- Improve the evidence base on successful interventions to involve men in caregiving.

Further reading

Barker, G. (2008) *Engaging Men and Boys in Caregiving: Reflections from Research, Practice and Policy Advocacy in Latin America*, Division for the Advancement of Women Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations: New York.

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Santos, S. (2015) 'MenCare in Latin America: Challenging harmful masculine norms and promoting positive changes in men's caregiving', *EMERGE Case Study 5*, Promundo-US, Sonke Gender Justice and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton: IDS

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Methodology

This Story of Change is based on the EMERGE case study:

Santos, S. (2015) 'MenCare in Latin America: Challenging harmful masculine norms and promoting positive changes in men's caregiving', *EMERGE Case Study 5*.

The case study is based on a literature review on the topic of caregiving and gender equality, globally as well as in the Latin American context. Included in the review was an independent report on the global MenCare campaign. The author also conducted in depth interviews with representatives of six MenCare country partners. These partners are Promundo (Brazil), CulturaSalud/EME (Chile), ECPAT Guatemala, Cómplices por la Equidad (Mexico), Puntos de Encuentro and REDMAS (Nicaragua) and Centro de Estudios sobre Masculinidades y Género (Uruguay).

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