

"THIS ISN'T THE LIFE FOR YOU":

MASCULINITIES AND NONVIOLENCE
IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homicide and other forms of violence persist at high levels in Rio de Janeiro. This violence overwhelmingly affects low-income, young black men. Past research has rarely examined the relationship of this violence to gender norms nor has it focused on the interplay between urban violence and family and intimate partner violence (IPV). While most studies focus on pathways into violence, only a few studies examine at factors that encourage nonviolence.

In favelas³ and other low-income, marginalized neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro, boys are exposed from an early age to multiple forms of violence in the household and in their communities. At critical points in life, boys and young men who lack attractive economic opportunities are invited to participate in drug trafficking and, oftentimes, encouraged to use arms or use violence in everyday life.

Amidst high levels of urban violence, how do many men adopt and sustain nonviolence in their lives? **This research led by Promundo seeks to address two key questions:**

3. While there is debate on the appropriate translation of *favelas*, they are often described as low-income “squatter” communities with informal land rights and less access to government services compared to services available in the more privileged parts of the city. Favelas are highly heterogeneous and vary in size as well as levels of poverty and levels of violence related to drug trafficking, the police, and militia groups.

1. What factors support groups of men who are surrounded by social and economic inequality, high exposure to violence, and incentives to use violence (e.g., members of drug gangs and the police) in avoiding, abandoning, or lessening their use of violence in complex urban settings?
2. How does higher and lower exposure to urban violence (defined by homicide rates) influence construction of masculinities, experiences of violence during childhood, attitudes and self-reported behaviors about gender among the broader population?

Promundo examines these questions in “IMAGES–Urban Violence”, a study that adapts IMAGES, the International Men and Gender Equality Survey, to focus on gender and urban violence and the interactions between violence in the public and private spheres in Rio de Janeiro. IMAGES is a comprehensive, multi-country study on men’s practices and attitudes toward gender norms, gender equality policies, household dynamics, caregiving and involvement as fathers, intimate partner violence, sexual diversity, and health and economic stress. Promundo’s offices in Brazil and the United States coordinated the study, which was part of Safe and Inclusive Cities (SAIC), an initiative of Canada’s International Development Research Centre and the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development.

IMAGES STUDY ON URBAN VIOLENCE IN RIO DE JANEIRO

- **1,151 household surveys** were conducted with adult men and women in two sites: “South,” in the city’s southern zone where homicide rates are lower, and “North,” predominately in the city’s northern zone where homicide rates are high. The sample was drawn using public security administrative areas.
- **14 key informant interviews and 45 in-depth life history interviews** were carried out. The in-depth interviews sought to capture factors that promote men’s trajectories away from the use of violence in complex urban settings. Former drug traffickers, members of the police force, and local activists were invited to participate because these groups of men play crucial roles in using and experiencing of violence and nonviolence in the city. Female partners and family members were also interviewed.

KEY FINDINGS

Throughout the analysis, the research seeks to understand the relationship between exposure to “public” forms of urban violence and forms of violence in “private” spheres such as between intimate partners and among family members. Survey results from the quantitative component of the research are further informed by interviews in the qualitative component of the research. Results offer multiple implications for inclusive citizen security policies and programming aimed at reducing urban violence in Brazil and other Latin American cities facing chronic urban violence.

1. **Fear of urban violence as well as childhood experiences of violence** both contribute to the use of violence and create trauma at individual, family, and collective levels. Such trauma is more prevalent in neighborhoods where homicide rates are higher. Both fear and childhood experiences of violence are associated in the survey with family and IPV.

2. **Exposure to urban violence before age 18** is strongly linked to perpetration of violence as an adult. An average of 82.8 percent of men in the total quantitative sample experienced or witnessed at least two of the following before age 18: aggravated assault, violent treatment by the police, battering, exchange of gunfire, house or workplace hit by bullets, death threats, or being shot by a firearm – all of which increase the likelihood that they will perpetrate violence.
3. **Exposure to violence outside the home** is highly related to violence in the home. Individuals in neighborhoods with higher rates of homicides overall (in the North of Rio) consistently report higher rates of use of nearly every kind of violence – public and private. They also have higher rates of fear of violence than those living in areas with overall lower homicide rates (in the South of Rio).
4. **Exposure to domestic violence against one’s mother during childhood** is linked to perpetration of violence during adulthood, and this link is clearly seen in both the qualitative and quantitative results.
5. **Use of intimate partner violence**, use of sexual violence, and use of public violence are higher in neighborhoods with higher rates of homicide.
6. **Fear of the police** is reported by more than half of all survey respondents (59 percent from the city’s North and 53 percent from the South). Survey findings suggest that individuals residing in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas and other low-income neighborhoods fear the police almost as much as they fear the militia, thieves or criminals, and drug dealers.
7. **More equitable gender norms** are associated with lower exposure to urban violence. Both men and women demonstrate less gender-equitable attitudes where exposure to urban violence is high (North) compared with the area with less exposure to urban violence (South) – suggesting that chronic fear of violence contributes to more adversarial or inequitable norms related to gender.
8. **Economic stress related to lack of work and income** is highly prevalent among participants in the study and is associated with entrance into drug trafficking, as well as use of violence in general.
9. **Gun ownership and use** is viewed favorably by nearly 95 percent of men surveyed, though a relatively small proportion of individuals report that they own or have ever used firearms; women have less favorable attitudes. Men who favor gun use/ownership are more likely to have used some sort of violence in their lives.

- 10. Urban violence shapes and interacts with violent constructions of masculinities** and creates family stress and individual trauma that likely contribute to the social reproduction of violence in the public and private spheres. The constant “transfer” of violence from public spaces to the family and intimate partner relationships suggests the need for integrated prevention efforts that combine citizen security approaches with psychological support in the form of trauma therapy, in addition to community-based prevention initiatives to reduce gender-based and other forms of family violence. Such efforts must be accompanied by approaches that seek to change social norms about manhood from supporting “being tough” and playing with guns to promoting caregiving and nonviolence.

FACTORS THAT REDUCE VIOLENCE

Former traffickers, police, and activists as well as their spouses and family members employ remarkable strategies to overcome violence or avoid using it in the first place. The qualitative interviews focused on men who showed evidence of having nonviolent trajectories.

Fatherhood is a central factor in moving a man’s life trajectory away from violence and toward nonviolence, according to both household surveys and interviews. Factors associated with nonviolent trajectories include: (1) fatherhood; (2) men’s participation in domestic tasks; (3) connection to social support circles; (4) men’s educational attainment; (5) employing mechanisms to “cool down” and step away from conflict; (6) widening life perspectives and gaining urban mobility in the city; (7) individual traits such as emotional and pro-social skills, resilience, and motivation; and (8) rejection of masculine norms tied to violence and adoption of more gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors.

By group, men can identify key factors associated with promoting nonviolence in their lives. Former traffickers cite four factors: (1) assistance in leaving drug trafficking provided by nongovernmental organizations; (2) family pressure or support in leaving; (3) exit because of traumatic events and risks, such as the death of friends and being shot; and (4) rejection of masculine norms tied to violence and trafficking along with a redefinition of what it means to be a “real man.” Police emphasize the need to prevent transfer of stress from work to home, and some reinforce the importance of seeking the underutilized psychological services within the military police force (PMRJ). According to activists who promote peace, their life trajectories show early rejection of violence, having nonviolent peer groups, and urban mobility (i.e., the ability to access resources and opportunities outside favelas and other low-income areas).

CONCLUSIONS

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE NONVIOLENCE SHOULD BE AT THE HEART OF A NEW AGENDA FOR PUBLIC SECURITY AND FOR SAFER AND MORE INCLUSIVE CITIES

• This agenda should focus on promoting nonviolent, equitable, and caring versions of manhood. It should also focus on boys and girls, employing strategies to promote nonviolence and mitigate the effects of violence. Strategies to promote nonviolence must also reflect shifting patterns in urban violence in Rio de Janeiro related to the failure of the Police Pacification Units,⁴ the changing nature of drug factions, mega-events held in the city (e.g., 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games), and repressive public security policies that continue to take a disproportionate toll on the lives of low-income, young black men.

New programs and policies are needed to carry out the new agenda. In their design, decision makers must move beyond a repressive model of policing, which is responsible for many of the city's homicides. Decision makers must also move beyond the blaming of individuals, in light of our finding that exposure to urban violence promotes violent trajectories for boys, whether through personal experience of violence or by simply living in areas with high homicide rates.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

- Prioritize evidence-based programming to prevent gender-based violence and urban violence and transform gender norms;
- Offer spaces for youth to receive psychological support for addressing violence they have witnessed or experienced throughout childhood (including specific services to meet immediate needs such as healthcare) located in schools and other spaces youth frequent, in order to prevent intergenerational transfers of violence;
- Offer evidence-based interventions for adult men who have used or may use intimate-partner violence and sexual violence;
- Adopt integrated strategies that support nonviolent trajectories within settings of urban violence, including investing in civil disarmament efforts and programs that support and sustain young men to exit out of drug trafficking;
- Address practical employment concerns so that economic necessity does not push men toward entry into drug trafficking;
- Adopt approaches that recognize intersecting forms of vulnerabilities, i.e., interventions that reflect participants' age, race, childhood experiences, and aspirations (rather than replicate uniform approaches targeting youth);
- Address police violence committed primarily against low-income, young black men including via comprehensive police reform with transparency and reporting mechanisms;

4. Community policing model adopted in some favelas of Rio de Janeiro, from the Portuguese name: Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora.

- Promote mediation training for young adolescents and adults to equip them with skills for nonviolent conflict resolution in communities and within their relationships and families;
- Foster caregiving, involved fatherhood, and role models who are positive and nonviolent; and
- Address the interplay between violence in the public and private spheres as a matter of urban violence by implementing integrated prevention of public violence and gender-based violence and other forms of intra-family violence. More information about these strategies is available in the full report.

Few studies address the gendered aspects of urban violence. By applying this perspective in more than a thousand surveys and interviews across varied settings and groups related to urban violence in Rio de Janeiro, this study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced dialogue and facilitate the start of new efforts to develop more integrated approaches that look at gender – specifically masculinities – and the interplay between public and private violence. Urban violence is likely to decrease when improvements are made in the welfare of youth including opportunities in education, employment, social equality, and income equality.

IMAGES–Urban Violence highlights the importance of bringing gender, and particularly masculinities, to the table when developing solutions to urban violence and public security. Responses can be more effective when policymakers understand that masculinities are shaped by urban violence, especially given the statistics on homicides in cities like Rio de Janeiro. Advancing gender equality and promoting nonviolent masculinities from boyhood onward are actions linked to lower levels of violence in both public and private spheres, and as such suggest directions for future initiatives in Rio de Janeiro and other Latin American cities that are becoming increasingly insecure.



IDRC | CRDI

International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

Canada

