Changing attitudes is not enough: The role of men and boys in the prevention of violence against women and children.

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This presentation draws on the most recent overview of male-focused primary prevention programs in Australia undertaken by Professor Moira Carmody, Dr Michael Salter and Dr Geir Presterudstuen. It emphasises a two-dimensional approach to the engagement of men and boys in primary prevention: firstly, the need for male attitudinal and cultural change and, secondly, the importance of improving women’s autonomy. The presentation discusses the recursive and mutually reinforcing relationship between these two issues particularly as men necessarily have a role in expanding the space for the exercise of women’s agency.

The presentation reports on five key strategies that were identified in interview by prevention stakeholders as effective in engaging men and boys in primary prevention:

- **Negotiating masculinity:** Stakeholders stressed the importance of moving beyond a one-dimensional view of masculinity (e.g. “real men”) and addressing the multiplicity of masculinities between and within men and boys.
- **Recognising disadvantage:** Experts emphasised that intersectional issues of race, class, and social status as well as gender must be incorporated into primary prevention work with men and boys.
- **Framing prevention for boys and men:** Rather than focusing on an abstract “responsibility” to prevent violence, stakeholders recommended situating this responsibility within the social aspirations and life goals of men and boys.
- **Peer to peer approaches:** Reframing prevention in terms of the aspirations of men and boys can position them as active partners in prevention rather than clients or participants.
- **Ensuring accountability:** It is important that male-orientated prevention programs draw upon established expertise in the field of domestic violence and sexual assault and are accountable to communities, institutions and women.

The presentation emphasises the role of whole-of-community and whole-of-organisation interventions in addressing the two-dimensionality of primary prevention, drawing on evaluations of two best practice programs. The first is the Strong Aboriginal Men program developed by the NSW Education Centre Against Violence, and the second is the NRL’s Respectful Relationships Program. Both programs embed face-to-face pedagogical strategies into broader efforts to transform the circumstances and factors that contribute to violence against women. By addressing gender norms and structural inequality simultaneously, it is argued, change is more likely to be sustained and the risk of backlash is ameliorated.