



Factors Of Violence And Voices Of Resistance

The Militarised Masculinities In The Democratic Republic Of Congo

My friends, remember this, there are no bad plants or bad men. There are only bad growers.

Les Misérables, Victor Hugo

This study first aims to understand how men and boys living in conflict zones are indoctrinated to become violent. Secondly, the objective of this study is to identify the voices of resistance, by listening to the needs of these male communities.

It therefore seeks to identify the perception, the experience, as well as the practices of powerful men, soldiers and civilians, living in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), who resist violent masculinity, while supporting non-violence, with the aim of developing programmes, interventions and policies to reduce violence and conflict linked to militarised masculinities.

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01

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a study co-ordinated by WILPF DRC in collaboration with the Living Peace Institute (LPI) This report presents the findings of a study co-ordinated by WILPF DRC in collaboration with the Living Peace Institute (LPI)

in Eastern DRC on perceptions, attitudes and practices of militarised masculinities in DRC. The study in Eastern DRC (in Goma, Saké and Ituri) was carried out by the LPI, and in Kinshasa by WILPF DRC.

The qualitative research covers 80 informants divided into eight discussion groups (exchanges) with soldiers in Goma, ex-combatants in Saké, young people in Ituri in Eastern DRC and interviews in Kinshasa with various politicians, religious leaders, traditional authorities and families. In Goma and Saké, half of the participants had previously formed community psychosocial support groups, set up

by the LPI, from 2015 to 2020, while in Kinshasa, some of them had also benefited from gender training.

The research aimed to identify factors that contributed to or resisted the constructions of militarised masculinities.

Another part of the qualitative study was implemented in late 2021 and early 2022 in Kinshasa, and carried out by WILPF DRC.

In this study, the term “masculinities” refers to the roles, behaviours and attributes considered appropriate for boys and men in a given society. We argue that masculinity is socially, historically and politically constructed and defined, rather than biologically directed. It’s shorthand for talking about the range of social expectations and practices of manhood; expectations and practices that are reinforced every day by individuals as well as by institutions, such as law, economics, religion, education and the media.

Both women and men participate in reinforcing these social expectations of masculinity. The concept of militarised masculinities captures the “fusion of certain practices and images of maleness with the use of weapons, the exercise of violence, and the performance of an aggressive and frequently misogynistic masculinity” (Theidon 2009, p5).

As Darwish, Hashim & Afghani (2022) wrote about Afghanistan in a companion article to this WILPF study, “the routinisation of violence, the abuses, incredible hardship and general sense of prevailing insecurity, privileged certain masculine attributes associated with domination and violence on the one hand, and their role in the ‘protection’ of women and the homeland on the other”. This privilege of violence and other masculine norms and behaviours valued by martial institutions have often been described as “military masculinities” (Eichler 2014).

These operate at both institutional and individual levels, and include the promotion of elements such as “bravery, warlike behaviour and the denigration of anything considered feminine” (Darwish, Hashim & Afghani 2022).

Main findings

Militarised masculinities are constructed in interaction with social, cultural, psychological, economic and political factors. Men are not born violent, but they are raised to manifest their masculinity by using violence to survive the various traumas (poverty, impunity and multi-faceted exploitation) caused by structural violence. Thus, soldiers have become so by joining the army to recover the respect due to their generally flouted dignity, and combatants find themselves in armed groups to express their anger and their revolt; in short, they are disappointed men who engage in violence in reaction to the injustices of society. Only those who have received adequate support and appropriate psychosocial care have succeeded in resisting militarised masculinities.

In addition, the various powers (political, religious, traditional and family) recognise their respective influence in the construction of factors that contribute to the emergence of militarised masculinities, as well as in what can thwart said maligned masculinities.

Socio-cultural expectations: from failed masculinities to hyper-masculinities

The norms around social expectations of masculinities, on the one hand, and gender relations, in the context of deep poverty and conflict, on the other, contribute to unrealistic dreams of manhood that increase the risk of failure and disappointment of men to respond to it. Failure to adhere to these norms is often offset by hyper-masculine attitudes that manifest as abuse of power, arrogance, pride, and a susceptibility to feeling offended and reacting with violence. It has been observed that it is difficult for men to escape the weight of socio-cultural expectations, despite their involvement or coaching in gender-related training courses. Thus, social expectations are part of a structuring of life, so that the actions aimed at correcting them must take into account a certain synergy of the actors in the matter.

Participants benefiting from LPI actions adopted a more realistic view of their male role, by developing more friendly and non-violent relationships with women, including their wives. Collective trauma, as well as grief, is a fertiliser of violence, while community psychosocial supports are essential to resist violence.

Ex-combatants and soldiers use violence motivated by grief, anger and frustration. They identify with versions of militarised masculinities to justify themselves as protectors.

Participants in LPI work show more confidence, stability, calmness and non-violence in dealing with problems and emotions, both at home and in the community. They are better equipped to deal with negative experiences and frustration, without engaging in the use of violence. Psychosocial support can reduce levels of violence. Service members and ex-combatants who had received psychosocial support in LPI groups, are better equipped to deal with strong stress-related emotions and trauma, support non-violent and gender-supportive attitudes, resist notions of militarised masculinities and promote positive masculinity.

Failures of state authority

Unaddressed trauma and suffering in a context of poverty, impunity, injustice and the absence of safe and clear state boundaries, are explosive ammunition for violence at all levels of society. The “popular justice” by armed groups and militias to avenge injustice and impunity has thus illustrated how cycles of violence are created and repeated, because of the gaps and non-existence of the authority of the state in certain areas.

Voices of resistance are present in all participants

Boys and men want peace and are therefore determined to resist any destruction caused by war and violence. For this, they ask for help to manage their conflicts and their problems, which are poverty and education in this case. And as a result, they call for a fair and safe justice system. Men in positions of power recognise their ability to positively influence, or not, the environment in order to promote the culture of peace among men.

The ignorant accountability of the state as a driver of a violent environment

The role of the state is not limited to the management of institutions, resources and national heritage; a priority of government policy must be to govern individuals.

Management not being centred on militarised masculinity, the state has enormous responsibility for the current situation.



02

INTRODUCTION

2.1

CONTEXT OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Armed conflicts and protracted wars in Eastern DRC and their implications on sexual and gender-based violence

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has experienced continuous violence and civil conflict for more than two decades. In this context of war and armed conflict, women and girls are exposed to many risks, including various forms of gender-based violence. Sexual violence has been widely and systematically used as a weapon of war in the DRC. This led to the discovery of the gender dimension of the armed conflict in the DRC. Successive violent crises have resulted in millions of women and men, girls and boys, suffering human rights violations and have, in particular, contributed to exacerbating sexual and gender-based violence (Johnson et al 2010; Lawry et al 2013, 2014).

According to a 2012 mixed-method study by Johnson et al, among those who have been exposed to sexual violence, 74.3% of women and 64.5% of men have been exposed to conflict-related sexual violence.

Reported sexual violence related to conflicts, included 41.1% of women among female survivors against 10.0% among male survivors.

The most common type of sexual violence reported by women and men was rape. Using demographic data from that time, this study estimated that 1.31 million women and 0.76 million men are survivors of sexual violence in the provinces of North and South Kivu and Ituri, in the east of DRC (Scott et al 2012).

2.1

Several wars and conflicts over the past decades in the DRC have caused enormous damage to relations between men and women, and have considerably exacerbated sexual violence between partners. An evidence-based study, conducted in the provinces of South Kivu, North Kivu and Ituri, revealed that among the population domiciled in the survey area, 39.7% of women and 23, 6% of men have been exposed to sexual violence in their lifetime. Among these figures, 31% of women have been exposed to domestic violence, against 16.6% of men (Johnson et al 2010).

The results of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), carried out in North Kivu, highlight numerous and complex factors that contribute to high levels of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in a post-conflict DRC context (Slegh, Barker and Levtoov 2014).

The study reveals that the support for traditional gender norms, including male dominance, is high among both men and women in North Kivu.

Men who were less supportive of gender equality, were more likely to have committed physical or sexual violence against a partner in their lifetime.

The study also found that nearly 24% of women said they had been raped during the conflict; women who suffered sexual violence during the conflict were often rejected by their husbands and families.

Additionally, the results show that men who were exposed to violence as children, were more likely to resort to intimate partner violence as adults. Men who were forced into sex or raped in the context of conflict, were also more likely to use physical or sexual violence against their partners.

The construction of violent masculinities in men is strongly influenced by exposure to childhood violence and armed conflict.

2.2

MILITARISED MASCULINITIES IN A CONTEXT OF “FAILED” MASCULINITY IN THE DRC

Socially constructed gender norms associate masculinity with power, violence and control, and play an important role in driving conflict and insecurity. Men must be tough, and are supposed to be born with natural powers to dominate and protect others, mainly women and children.

Stereotypical gender roles prevail in the DRC, where the man is indeed assumed to be the boss, provider and protector of the family; which, therefore, gives him a privileged position and power in relation to his wife and children (Slegh, Barker and Levto 2014).

The instrumentalisation of male socialisation as tough, dominant, aggressive and courageous makes men fit to go to war and adopt the characteristics of militarised masculinities. As soldiers, in times of war and conflict, they have access to uniforms and weapons that give them the power to dominate and intimidate, so they feel empowered, even encouraged, to use violence.

Social norms of masculinity in the DRC require men to live up to social role expectations of being responsible and controlling, which often prompts men to abuse their power through violence and bully others.

And this is what is conceptualised as militarised masculinities.

2.2

Thus, the abuse of power and violence committed by men, including rape and sexual violence, among other forms of SGBV, are manifestations of weaponised masculinities. Therefore, men seeing themselves as allowed to use violence against others, to dominate and control others, including other men, identify with the versions of militarised masculinities.

This question of what drives men to resort to violence and rape, and what type of men in the DRC identify with violent versions of manhood, has been examined by Baaz and Stern in several studies (Baaz & Stern, 2010, 2013).

Certainly, rape and sexual violence have been portrayed primarily as a weapon of war to destroy others. However, according to these same studies, rape and sexual violence must also be understood as an expression of a failed masculinity in a failed state (Baaz & Stern, 2013).

The multiple identities of men in conflict and post-conflict situations – as perpetrators of violence, but also as witnesses and victims of violence – must be appropriately taken into account in any effort to end violence against women and girls, promote gender equality, and facilitate men’s access to sexual and reproductive health resources and services.

Furthermore, when men are unable to fulfil culturally defined male roles as protectors and providers of their families due to war and poverty, the self-perceived failure and loss of power and control lead many of them to resort more to violence at home, as stated in the IMAGES DRC study.

Indeed, the study shows that many men deal with shame and feelings of loss and failure, along with alcohol abuse and violence against women; for some, this sense of lost masculinity is also a reason for joining armed groups.

The construction of masculinity based on rigid and traditional notions of power, control and honour, also contributes to a perspective that fighting and violence is the only way to resolve interpersonal and intercommunal conflict. These findings shed light on a psychological perspective by examining the phenomenon of the “militarisation” of masculinities in the DRC.

Militarised masculinities are neither static nor universal, and manifest in a wide range of forms and versions of manhood, shaped within a given cultural and social context. Militarised masculinities are constructed by specific psychological, social and cultural dynamics and should, therefore, be studied within the cultural and political context (Eichler 2014).

2.3

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The high rates of violence in Eastern DRC, not only continue to affect the whole of the population, but also contribute to increased insecurity in the private and public domains. Violence is contagious.

It affects and infects others who may react to violence, by also using violence towards themselves or others, and it is this ripple effect that fuels conflict and insecurity in this region. Men and boys, socialised to fight, are most likely to use violence, adopt weaponised versions of masculinities, and find entry points for programming. Hence the need to investigate the context-specific dynamics and drivers of violence and the elimination of violence.

This study on militarised masculinities among men and boys, living in the context of Eastern DRC, and men of power, living in Kinshasa, exposed to the militarised violence of war and conflict, explored different factors that cultivated different versions of militarised masculinities and identified elements of resistance to violent masculinities.

Research question:

What perceptions, practices and experiences of men have influenced constructions of militarised masculinities, and which others have contributed to resisting violence and promoting peace in families, communities and society in the DRC?

Sub-questions:

1. What factors (perceptions, experiences and practices) fuel constructions of militarised and violent masculinities?
2. What factors (perceptions, experiences and practices) resist militarised and violent masculinities?
3. What actions are needed to combat this phenomenon of militarised masculinity and to promote positive and non-violent masculinity?



03

METHODOLOGY

3.1

RESEARCH SITES AND SAMPLING

The qualitative study was implemented in September and October 2021 in Eastern DRC, and in October and November 2021 in Kinshasa.

The participants were male soldiers based in a military camp in Goma, and male ex-combatants based in Saké, a village 50km from Goma, as well as in Ituri.

In Kinshasa, the people interviewed were politicians, heads of religious denominations, traditional chiefs, male heads of families, contacted in their places of work or in places set by the interviewees themselves.

The participants were sampled by practical sampling methods, with the support of the authorities of the military camp, associations or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that supervise child ex-combatants, and through personal contacts or recommendations from other people. Former combatants have been identified in Saké with the support of local focal points.

In the case of soldiers and veterans, the design included two groups of soldiers and veterans: those who have

never received training or support, and a group of men who received psychosocial support and training from the Living Peace Institute before 2020. The latter group is indicated as (LPI). The design of the qualitative study with different armies and veterans, politicians, leaders of religious denominations, traditional leaders, male heads of families, made it possible to study the possible differences between the categories of men as well as perceptions, experiences and practices related to militarised masculinities.

In Bunia (Ituri), young boys and girls from the ages of 14 to 21 and their parents were identified, with the support of local leaders of a community (Nyakasanza), made up of different ethnic groups and known for their high rates of youth crime and bandits. Ituri is a region hard-hit by brutal and extreme violence committed by armed groups. The parents of these boys and girls were included in different discussion groups, to separate them in order to allow them to express themselves freely. In Kinshasa, men of power were identified according to their affiliation to power, for example politicians, religious leaders, traditional chiefs and heads of families.

3.2

RESEARCH METHODS

The qualitative study design applied focus group discussions (FGDs) with men and boys, girls and parents in Eastern DRC. All participants were exposed to various forms of militarised violence, not only such as war, violent attacks by armed groups, but also crime as well as various forms of domestic violence. A total of eight FGDs were conducted: (1) military (2) veterans (3) military (LPI) (4) veterans (LPI) (5) boys (6) girls (7) fathers (8) mothers. In Kinshasa, ten interviews were conducted: (1) three politicians (2) three men of religious faiths (3) two male traditional chiefs (4) two male heads of household. Interviewees in Kinshasa were selected from lists provided by WILPF DRC.

A questionnaire guide provided a flexible framework for the open-ended interviews, taking into account the varied experiences and involvement with CCAA of different stakeholders. Interviews were conducted in English, French or the DRC vernaculars, depending on the preference of the interviewee.

A qualitative research guide was developed, with support from WILPF DRC in Kinshasa and the LPI in Goma. The group discussions were facilitated by four field researchers, two in Bunia and two in Goma and Saké, and the WILPF DRC team in Kinshasa.

They were trained by professional qualitative researchers in the use of the interview guide. Field researchers conducted the groups in Swahili and transcribed the data into French.

The transcribed data has been analysed by the WILPF International Secretariat Project Director and the WILPF DRC team, and the search results were checked and validated by the research team.

The qualitative study design applied focus group discussions (FGDs) with men and boys, girls and parents in Eastern DRC.

3.3

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All appropriate ethical procedures (confidentiality, informed consent and anonymity) and “do no harm” were followed when collecting the data.

Psychosocial workers at the LPI were available for possible unintended negative impact, after discussing sensitive topics, related to trauma and violence.

3.4

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Given the great diversity of contexts of militarised masculinity in the DRC, notable efforts were made in three areas to ensure that this study reflects, as much as possible, the full variety of components targeted.

The context in Eastern DRC is extremely volatile and precarious, for participants and field researchers alike. We preferred to investigate in the Eastern zone in the Northern and Ituri provinces, as well as in Kinshasa, the capital and headquarters of the institutions.

This study included only eight focus groups, with a limited group of men and even fewer boys, girls and parents at the Goma level, and its extension to Saké, Bunia and Kinshasa. Due to an upsurge in conflict and the state of siege during the research period, rural areas beyond Bunia were not accessible.

Time and constraints did not allow for a more in-depth design of this study, and therefore included interviews in Kinshasa with key informants and the diversity of participants. Thus, the data must be read with caution and cannot be generalised to all ex-combatants and young people, politicians, men of religious faiths and traditional leaders, heads of households.

Although the results of the study cannot claim to be fully exhaustive, the conclusions and recommendations that result from this methodology are likely indicators of the current situation of militarised masculinity in the DRC.

Despite the limitations of the study related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the available data reveals some very interesting and important trends that require deeper understanding and more research.



04

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1

SAMPLING CHARACTERISTICS

3.1.1. Men in military and veteran camps

Area	Target groups	Attendees	Age range
Goma	Military	10	25-60
	Military (LPI)	10	25-60
Saké	Ex-combatants	10	27-60
	Ex-combatants (LPI)	10	27-60
TOTAL		40	

3.1.2. Civilians in conflict-affected areas

Area	Target groups	Attendees	Age range
Ituri	Boys	10	14-21
	Girls	10	14-21
	Fathers	10	35-50
	Mothers	10	25-40
TOTAL		40	

3.1.3. Men in positions of power

Area	Target groups	Attendees	Age range
Kinshasa	Policies	3	40-60
	Religious	3	35-70
	Traditional	2	60
	Fathers, heads of household	2	35-55
TOTAL		10	

Militarised masculinity is not a new concept in development and peacebuilding in the DRC. However, based on how institutions and organisations implement gender programmes and policies, each component has its own understanding of weaponised masculinity.

All ex-combatant military and armed group participants have spent most of their lives in a militarised environment.

Most soldiers and ex-combatants in this study served between 15 and 25 years in the army and/or in armed groups. The 20 ex-combatants in our sample had served in the army before joining an armed group. The results indicate that a number of men joined the army and/or the armed groups at a very young age and have been involved in several armed conflicts over the past decades.

Participating soldiers were not asked directly about their backgrounds in armed groups, but some participants may have moved from the armed groups to the FARDC due to former DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration) programmes that integrated former combatants into the FARDC.

Half of the participants from military/combatant groups have joined a gender-specific psychosocial support programme in the past five years.

Service members and veterans indicated by “LPI” participated in a 16-week community psychosocial support group, implemented by the LPI in Goma. In this programme, they learned to manage stress and traumatic memories by adopting gender-friendly and non-violent coping strategies. They learned to recognise their own reactions to stress and trauma, and they were encouraged to adopt non-violent and positive behaviour in the face of problems.

The adolescent boys and girls, and parents, live in a region very affected by extreme daily violence, as well as ethnic violence.

The study participants live in a community (Nyakasanza) made up of different ethnic groups. One of the neighbourhoods (Sayo) is known for its high youth crime rates. Adolescents, boys and girls aged 14 to 21, and their parents are exposed to violence and insecurity due to rebel attacks, crime, ethnic tensions and conflicts.

4.2

MASCULINITIES

Perceptions shaped by social norms and personal experiences

P2: Behaviour, intelligence, authority, the man must be the number one, the pillar of the family; he must take responsibility for the family especially when there is a problem (MIL)

The research results highlight the perceptions of military personnel, veterans, politicians, religious leaders, traditional leaders, heads of households, of what they consider to be the characteristics of a suitable man. The results show a wide range of responses that can be categorised into four major expectations about manhood as provider, procreator, protector and privileged person. The way in which individual men respond to social expectations, is influenced by personal and collective experiences relating to them in the context of conflict.

All men share similar perceptions on the role of men in creating a family, taking responsibility for their wellbeing by providing food and income at home to be able to send the children to school. The way men perform these tasks

is different, as some men believe that men should control their wives and families and defend their honour through violence and abuse of power, while others collaborate with their wives and reject violence. While some emphasise the importance of men's sexual power as well as the value of allowing them to have multiple women at the same time, others reject such attitudes and value sexual consent and mutual respect in partner relationships.

All participants, regardless of background and age, refer to one or more of the aforementioned characteristics, as illustrated in the following chapters. Analysis of responses from military and veterans, politicians, men of religious faiths, traditional chiefs and heads of household, indicates that social expectations of masculinities and personal experiences of male affirmation were the main drivers for men and boys to become military and/or join an armed group. The following section presents different practices that men and boys have developed to cope with social expectations of manhood, while navigating their lives in the context of war.

4.3

MASCULINITIES IN A MILITARISED CONTEXT

4.3.1

PRACTICES OF MASCULINITIES

Different practices and experiences related to the masculinities of men and boys are explored and presented in this section, by examining:

- a) What are the dominant social expectations of masculinity and how are these related to violence and abuse of power by men?
- b) What motivated men and boys to serve in the army or as combatants in an armed group and how does this relate to perceptions of militarised masculinities?
- c) What is the impact of experiences as servicemen/ veterans and youth living in a context of crisis and war on constructions of militarised masculinities?
- d) What factors contribute and what factors resist the cultivation of militarised versions of masculinities?
 - i. Constructions of militarised and violent masculinities?
 - ii. What factors (perceptions, experiences/practices) resist militarised and violent masculinity?
 - iii. What actions are needed to fight this phenomenon of militarised masculinity, and to promote positive and non-violent masculinity?

a) Social expectations of men and boys

- **To be an honoured and respected person**

Real men are honoured and respected people. A real man is respected by his wife and children as a boss; he makes decisions for the wellbeing of the family and is responsible for everyone. As head of the family, he is superior to his wife, who must be obedient and submissive to him. Having power and control over his wife and family will improve his reputation with his neighbours, as it shows that he is fulfilling his role as head of the family well.

P6: Good behaviour, be exemplary 1+1=1, I can never speak to my wife if she does not obey me because I am the only one responsible for my wife, otherwise I will be this kind of man. A real man is love, family orientation. (MIL)

P2: A man should have a strict order in a family, eg decided that after 6pm I must not see anyone outside, after giving an order if you become weak that's all, tomorrow the wife or the children will return to the same errors, order to the house of authority and control on order given; and there must be a correction on the power there. (He means follow-up.) So I'm saying over there a man shouldn't go back on his decision. (MIL)

4.3.1

Servicemen and veterans who participated in the “LPI” described similar views, but added how they discovered how to dismantle their “pride and arrogance” of manhood. The sharing of household chores and mutual respect on both sides changed their personal ideas and attitudes, as well as the risk of claiming respect through abuse of power and inequality.

P2: The military order remains military with the principle of flawless execution. But, I separate my military life from my civilian life. My wife and my children are not soldiers, that is to say, whatever my rank in the army, when I am with my family, I have to adapt my reactions. At home, sometimes women and children resist orders. For example, my wife, when I go to talk in a thundering voice, she always says to me: “Tika ki Captain nayo awa.” [Leave your rank of captain when you are here.] (MIL LPI)

P3: Men have masculine pride and think they are the real ones. With social norms and customs, men develop malevolent characters. They cannot involve their wives and children in decision-making. (MIL LPI)

P8: What I can add is first of all to thank, to live in peace because whoever took part in the sessions discovered that being a “haiko ku yala barabara tu”

man [not only to walk all the way, to do reference to pride] but also to have the maturity to understand that it also means living peace in the family. (XC LPI)

Analysis

Deeply rooted socio-cultural norms and values about masculinities are based on norms of gender inequality and promote male dominance over women and others. Perceptions of power inequalities are internalised in male identities and self-esteem. Thus, failure to feel respected and honoured as a superior person, easily evolves into abuse of power and violence by men imposing order and discipline on others. Poverty and crisis undermine men’s self-esteem, so that they don’t feel respected as men.

Stigma and social exclusion as unemployed or as men from minority ethnic groups, generated strong emotions that became major drivers for revenge by joining armed groups. Men who participated in LPI gender transformation groups, revealed that social identities and norms are not static when they resist the superior role of men and gender inequality.

- ***To meet the needs of the family***

A man should earn the respected position of power

mentioned above, by earning money and sharing the income with his family. Failure to do so will lead to disrespect from others, which can lead to violence against women in the home, as the stories of a military and ex-military LPI participant illustrate. The frustration and shame of not being able to meet the needs of the family can undermine the respect of one’s wife and children, often leading to the use of violence. Men, unable to care for their families, are called “women” and downplayed as useless.

P2: When he no longer meets the needs of the family, people will start saying leave him, he has nothing to contribute, leave him, he is useless, he will no longer have respect in the house, the woman can start prostitution, children can steal, disrespect. (MIL)

P10: Some men behave like women and run away from their responsibilities, yet they are heads of households. (MIL)

Due to the crisis, conflicts and poverty, families face many problems: men have lost their right to their leadership role because they are unemployed and unable to support their families. Their wives work and earn money, and the husbands are unemployed and have lost the respect

4.3.1

of their wives, which has led to a serious devaluation of manhood and affected men's self-esteem. Several fighters revealed how unemployment and a sense of worthlessness had driven them to crime, and to escape judgement and punishment, they fled into armed groups.

P5: I had a difficult life. I went to the armed group to get money and ease my memory. I couldn't resist the fact that in the community I didn't have a job and every time there was a robbery in the neighbourhood people thought it was us who didn't have a job. Work and took advantage of the finger points. That's why I went. (XC)

Members of the military have low (or no) incomes and struggle to provide for their families. The data suggests that in general the military are less bothered by low self-esteem and frustration related to poverty: their uniform and weapons compensate for their difficulties in providing for their families. Military men's identities are less beleaguered when they are not providing, because they know that their uniform and weapons can help them have something to eat and be seen as a respected person by others.

P4: Being a soldier, I already know that I am a civil servant, I have stability because I know that I am

a state agent, there is the other who is not a civil servant, he does not know where to touch, for example here in Goma there is no field.

When it is the end of the month I know that I will have the harvest, but if once I find myself with a problem I know that I will harvest at the end of the month. (MIL)

P7: I know today that if I die I will be buried with honour, my family will not worry, my comrades in arms will bury me with honour, my family will not say where I will be buried but the state will take care of it.

FGD results with LPI reveal that men are less likely to deal with their frustration by using violence against women. In the LPI groups, the men had reflected on themselves, their personal behaviour and the use of violence at home. Reflections that resulted in the recognition of their actions as bad behaviour, which they regretted. Feelings of remorse were important for them to let go of violent attitudes, and to resist critical remarks from their military colleagues and community members (who did not participate in LPI).

P3: Living Peace really helped me too because I was very mean to my wife, when I was earning my money,

I never gave my wife money, and I was very bossy, but ever since we met Living Peace, we are already well, we no longer have this bad conception of man that others have at the moment. (MIL LPI)

P2: In the communities, people talk badly about us. "Ski osombi dose te, babandi koloba que yo okomi mwasi." [If you don't buy the drink, people start saying you've grown into a woman.] I know a normal man can never spend all his family's money on his own. (MIL LPI)

Analysis

Unemployment and poverty prevent men from taking care of their families. The shame and frustration generated may lead some to crime or to join armed groups as an alternative means of providing food and income. Powerlessness and shame also fuel violence and abuse of power at home and against the wife. Men's unemployment-related stress has been found in IMAGES studies to be important predictors of men's use of violence against women (Slegh, Barker and Levtoov 2014).

The uniform, the weapon and the military status, increase the control and the self-esteem of the men, but do not prevent them from abusing power. It is not

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men's power and control that drives them to resort to violence, but rather their sense of failed masculinity that triggers violence, as studies of men in the DRC by Baaz and Stern show (Baaz and Stern 2013; Lwambo 2011). Masculinity is not only a social but also an intra-psychological construct, that defines what men think of themselves, when they feel hurt, and how they will defend themselves when their self-esteem is at risk (Dahl and Cook 2020).

Failure to meet social expectations will trigger a sense of personal failure championed by power and violence as manifestations of masculinity to counter weakness. However, men who found alternatives by feeling confident – as we found among men who participated in LPI groups – were less likely to impose power on others and use violence.

- **Having sexual power and being procreative**

Masculinity is strongly associated with a man's fertility and his ability to start a family with children. "Real men are supposed to be sexually active and have sex whenever they want," according to most respondents. Some respondents believe that men with lots of girls/wives are very powerful, while others dismiss this as irresponsible behaviour. All men agree that

having many children is a sign of their sexual potency, which makes them real men. Sexual power makes a man attractive to women and gives him the power to compete with other men, also to ensure that he maintains control over his own woman.

P4: The man must be virile with full sexual power. When a man is not manly, there are problems in married life. Many households end up breaking up because men's lack of virility creates sexual weakness. Women do not resist the sexual weakness of man, otherwise it is as if there were two women in the house. (XC)

P9: Lack of sexual potency is a big problem for men. You feel that you are nothing and the consequence is that many women become unfaithful because of this. (XC)

- **Be protective of the family**

Men must protect their families from the dangers that can destroy them. When the family is affected, the man and his reputation are hurt. A real man is like a soldier, able to defend his family.

P2: There is someone who can say that I will try to see if this one is really a real soldier, then he will try to

assault your family to see what your reaction is, so in this case, I must also defend the family to show them that they have a soldier. (MIL)

The failure to protect the family, including the extended family and the ethnic group, is experienced as very traumatic. Overwhelming emotions of anger and hatred turn into violence at home and in society. Experiences of extreme violence towards family and/or ethnic group members have driven men to seek revenge, as servicemen or as veterans seeking revenge. The impact of exposure to extreme violence in times of war and conflict on men and boys are explored in more detail in the next section.

P8: What made me join the armed groups is that when shokulu wangu was killed with a hammer [shokulu means grandparent in Kinande and Kuhunde, two tribes of North Kivu], I felt anger, terrible anger, terrible I say, because our father made us suffer, I lived with the shokulu and then he too baka mu buma [he was killed] and the shokulu remained there and the rebels stayed by cutting it with a machete at the time, it was bad, bad, bad and then I also joined the rebellion because of anger. (XC LPI)

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Analysis

The identification of men with their role as procreators is first presented as a logical manifestation of his “sexual power” which allows him to find a wife and have a family. This sexual power is also considered an important strength to compete with other men and to control one’s own woman. The loss of his wife to another man, infertility, even the rape of his wife are signs of the failure of his sexual performance and the failure of masculinity. Women and girls who are raped are shunned by men and their families, because their bad reputation affects the family and honour of men, since they were unable to control and protect (Liebling and Slegh 2011). Although the data from this study did not explore practices of sexual violence, the high rates of sexual violence and rape of women and men in Eastern DRC illustrate how rape and sexual violence are used as weapons to threaten, destroy and harm others. Sexual violence is often used as a weapon to defend wounded male identities in revenge against other men who have taken their wives, to prove and display male power. Perceptions of men’s sexuality as a power to compete and control others indeed fuel destructive sexual behaviours that include sexual violence.

b) Men’s motivations for joining military/armed groups

Why men joined the army

Men in the military emphasise the role of “control, respect and honour” in being a soldier, a patriot who defends his people, who is the boss of the family and superior to his wife.

The motivations for joining the military have been explained as the desire for honour and respect through military status, and a weapon that gives power and control. Being respected by others is explained as being “feared by others”; it expands opportunities for income generation and care of the family.

Some servicemen chose the military because they were inspired by family members in the military, who were well respected in the community and family, and felt motivated to defend and protect the country.

Men, and boys, joined the military to defend and protect their country, earn respect and honour from others while wearing uniform. Others were primarily motivated to find sources of income to support the family. Discipline, order and military status are

mentioned as important incentives to feel proud and respected at home and in the community.

P6: I think I started to envy my uncle colonel, I saw his outfit, I thought ah? I have to become a soldier and I immediately told my father to stop paying for my studies, then I went to do my training there and came back in uniform. (MIL)

P8: After going through a lot of disappointment and abandonment in the neighbourhood, that’s when I say to myself, maybe I can go to the army to find respect because the military is really respected.

However, the military did not give all of these men the respect and power they hoped for. Humiliated and attacked by members of other ethnic groups, and even by poor soldiers looting their fields and crops, some soldiers have abandoned the army and joined armed groups to take justice into their own hands and defend their land, their community and their families.

P4: I joined rebellion groups because I was disappointed with our army. This is the reason for my joining the MAI-MAI group. (XC)

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P5: Theft can make you join armed groups, for example, when I take a gun, everyone in the neighbourhood will be afraid of me and I can do whatever I want. (XC)

Why men joined armed groups

Veterans who participated in this study were disillusioned with the military. They felt neglected and abused, poor and disrespected; and some were driven by poverty, frustration with impunity in the military. They wanted revenge for the ethnic violence and conflict that harmed their families and communities and robbed them of their lands and properties. Ethnic conflicts are often linked to claims over land ownership, a complex issue as the claims can originate from colonial times or even earlier. Internal and regional labour migration, but also internal displacement and refugees from neighbouring countries, refugees repatriated to their homes, have caused enormous tensions over access to land and water as the main resources for livelihood. Grief and loss, poverty and impunity create a volatile cocktail that continues to fuel ethnic conflict and immense suffering. Armed groups offered a space for revenge, but also for shelter, to find income through

looting, to exercise power over others and to regain the self-esteem of being men.

P10: It was the setbacks of life that pushed me to interact like that and to join the armed group. (XC)

P3: My reasons are almost similar to the previous ones because it didn't feel good for us to grow crops and then have our produce harvested by others. It was frustrating to see it, and if we didn't act, we would be seen as accomplices. (XC)

P7: I went to the armed group for revenge. All our lands had already disappeared. We had nothing left in the family, I went there to claim our land and I recovered it, then I returned to civilian life. (XC)

Why men left armed groups

Former combatants left armed groups as part of a DDR programme (2008–2013). This former DDR program offered combatants the opportunity to abandon armed groups and join the army, the police or return to civilian life. Most of the men left because they were disappointed, traumatised and saw no gain in their life in the bush. They received basic training and socio-

economic packages before returning to family and communities. However, families and communities were not waiting for them to come home.

As former combatants, they went through a very difficult time: feared by community and family members, threatened by fellow armed groups, and stigmatised by community members. Former combatants are in danger, because they have enemies among former comrades who are still in armed groups, but also because they may be recognised by people as perpetrators of violence and other criminal acts. Traumatized, poor and unsuited to civilian life, many of them relapse into crime, serious drug addiction and other antisocial behaviours. Many armed group fighters have undergone rituals to render them bullet-free and untouchable by enemies.

You're afraid of certain people, you tell yourself that this one shouldn't see me, that he shouldn't see me either, all day you spend in hiding and it's around midnight that you can go out with your disappointed pair, with fear in your stomach and it's either after five months when people will have already adapted to your presence, it's now that you'll start to integrate, but really it's not easy to integrate. (XC LPI)

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P9: As soon as you leave the army you are not well received, first of all people are afraid of you, very afraid, 100%, and even if you can camouflage yourself there in the neighbourhood, if only people find out, you will even see another person in the neighbourhood who was not a fighter, stealing a chicken from someone else but then you become the first one to be targeted, saying that this guy stole that chicken, because it is the behaviour where it comes from [in the army or armed groups] in order to regain the confidence of this population “in baada ya siku mingi sana” [after days and days]. (XC LPI)

P4: Really since we left the army, our families don’t respect us either. So we’re too neglected. (XC)

Analysis

Men, and boys, join the military to earn respect and recognition and exercise their masculinity in a positive way: as providers, protectors of family and country. They emphasise discipline, order and justice as characteristics of a good soldier and condemn violence, indiscipline, aggression and abuse of power.

The experience of disrespect, neglect due to injustice, poverty, loss and grief are the most important reasons

for joining armed groups (and/or leaving the national army) and adopting versions of militarised masculinities. Former combatants had joined armed groups by negative choice: feeling frustrated in the army was a reason for all ex-combatants in this study to join an armed group at some point. Anger, grief and extreme poverty played a key role in seeking revenge for their loss through an armed group. The helplessness, injustice and frustration of the military have cultivated negative masculine behaviour and shaped versions of militarised masculinities. Many of them have found an alternative arena to engage in violent male behaviours in armed groups.

Military in landscapes of war and violence

The experiences of men and boys navigating the landscape of war and conflict as soldiers or combatants, in the military or in an armed group, experienced many issues that contributed to the construction of masculinities militarised in attitudes and use of violence.

1. Neglect and devaluation of military status

“If a thumb is cut off from the body, the whole body suffers.”

The military status in Goma has been greatly devalued in recent decades according to all FGD soldiers. All respondents provide examples and experiences illustrating their bad reputation and neglect of their military status due to excessive abusive and violent behaviour by soldiers, which has destroyed the reputation of all FARDC soldiers. This has serious consequences for the personal and family life of service members. Many servicemen from the non-intervention groups have expressed feelings of frustration and shame, because they feel humiliated and excluded by civilians who see them as bandits, irresponsible and losers in society. They were looking for respect and reputation, but they found the opposite.

It is true that we knew that a good soldier is one who knows violence, which is scary, but with the teachings of Living Peace, we have seen that it is important for a soldier to know how to manage emotion to avoid damage in the community.

Poverty is seen as one of the main reasons for violence and abuse of power by the military who loot and steal food.

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The soldiers with the lowest military salaries were paid GDF156,000, or US\$92 per month, according to a 2020 report. In addition to salaries, the military depend on various bonuses of all kinds such as provision for mission, intelligence, funerals, among others. Salaries are paid into bank accounts and bonuses are paid in cash. Embezzlement by commanders, embezzlement of cash in ambushes organised by other colleagues, inability to access bank accounts, and theft of money from bank accounts via phantom accounts, are mentioned among the reasons why the military are poor, and why they are very unhappy with the army (Wondo Omanyundu 2020). Poverty also seriously affects people's self-esteem, including their social relationships within the family and community. Joining a wedding, funeral or other social ceremony requires some contribution and due to poverty, men and families who have nothing to share, are excluded from social networks. The exclusion and neglect exercised by other members of one's own group fuel frustration and anger, but also despair, pushing many to engage in violence.

However, servicemen who participated in an LPI group, explained how the servicemen are sometimes involved in looting and robbing civilians because their salaries are very low, and many have not even received a salary

due to internal fraud by their leaders. In the LPI groups, they had thought about such practices and decided to take responsibility not to harass other innocent civilians anymore, but to manage their own lives in a positive way.

They learned the importance of maintaining good social relationships, controlling emotions of anger and frustration, and managing little money in a positive way. The LPI groups had taught them to restore mutual trust in others and not to spend money on alcohol and drugs, but to manage it within their households.

P10: You cannot justify the use of violence against civilians on the basis of poverty. A good soldier must know how to manage his relationships.

Because if he takes good care of his relationships, it will be easy for him to live and to be helped by others. There are soldiers who don't know how to manage money.

Examples of Disrespect

P1: There are soldiers who do terrible things, they carry out clandestine patrols to loot the population. (MIL) This uniform is worthless even if you say I'm a commando.

P5: Here in Goma a soldier is "banaonaka soda tu sa kintu kya ovyo" [as an unimportant object]. (MIL)

P4: In Goma, the soldiers are perceived as enemies because some soldiers steal, harass and manipulate the population. When soldiers steal, they create offences. The population thinks the military is worse than the ADF/NALU. (MIL LPI)

Lack of order and discipline, uneducated military personnel and poverty are cited as the reasons for a severe debasement of military status. Disorder and chaos that facilitate various forms of abuse of power, corruption and violence, as explained by the military of both groups. The anger and frustration of civilians at the serious human rights violations committed by soldiers and/or men in uniform, have created strong tensions in and around Goma. Interviewees disclosed several accounts and experiences of violence committed by civilians targeting the military.

Examples of violence by the military

P5: Here in Goma it is a rebel headquarters. Imagine a biker today, but after tomorrow without training, he becomes a soldier without training and he becomes an idiot colonel; so in this context, will a soldier be respected, will this uniform still matter?

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P2: When we worked with Mobutu's army, we worked well because we were educated, but today the soldiers are acting badly. Weapon shops are no longer controlled. No-one questions the military about the use of ammunition. (MIL)

P5: If you even see the ministers, the generals, they are people who have to go through sensitisation, they too promote disorder. (MIL LPI)

P1: With the poverty of the military, some people resort to violence against the civilian population to feed themselves and have very brutal reactions. (MIL LPI)

Examples of military insecurity

P2: In Goma, if a soldier lives in the neighbourhood with a civilian, he can die; I know a friend in Neosho, his wife and children were burned in the house; here in Kyeshero, a soldier was cut with a machete. (MIL)

P9: Here in Goma our women are humiliated, we see them as if they don't deserve it, for example when you're wrong, they tell you "ukosa bibi ya sod" [you behave like a soldier's wife], so it's as if a soldier's wife is an insult, so much so that a soldier is seen as worthless and it becomes like an insult so our children and our soldiers are suffering. (MIL)

P10: The use of violence against civilians cannot be justified by poverty. A good soldier must know how to manage his relationships. Because if he takes good care of his relationships, it will be easy for him to live and benefit from the help of others. There are soldiers who do not know how to manage money.

II. Ex-combatant stigma

Former combatants who have left armed groups, face severe stigma and social exclusion from family members and the community when they return home. They are feared by others because they have committed serious crimes, including murder. They are accused of all kinds of problems and criminality that occur in the community, so many ex-combatants have been hiding for some time during the day. Many grapple with memories of the past, trying to control themselves despite their fears and sorrows; some also suggest a desire for revenge and returning to armed groups. Accounts of former combatants who have left armed groups show regret, fear.

P10: I can give my case, and you will see here that everyone regrets having taken up arms. Our families have not benefited from anything. I left my wife with a pregnancy and a two-year-old child, five years later I

came back and the children did not know me like their father. It was too painful, I felt grief and to this day the affection is not yet restored.

P7: The name of ex-combatant puts us in too much danger because any suspicious case (theft, rape, kidnapping, protest march) that arises in your environment, you are the first suspect.

P1: I regret how I left and why I left because I am very despised in society.

P9: We are above all hurt by the fact that even the state, which could help us, does not take care of us, it has abandoned us.

P4: Really since we left the army, our families don't respect us either. So, we are too neglected.

P7: There is an endowment (mill, chicken coop, carpentry, bakery) that SEVCO gave us after training.

The minister in charge of ex-combatants was there; but after his departure it's all gone. The local authorities have hijacked this and don't want us to be able to ask.

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P8: The children take us to be worthless people because we have nothing to afford.

P9: Our families and our children are very neglected even in schools and in neighbourhoods. They are singled out everywhere and face insults. It hurts us, it makes us want to fight back and get revenge. You know in the armed group, when you have a rank, you command people, but when the community neglects you it makes you think about a lot of things and decisions to make.

Veterans also expressed feelings of regret, of guilt for what they have done. They faced social exclusion and stigma, as mentioned above. But after participating in LPI groups, they discovered ways to deal with their past and the emotions that can be triggered when they feel left out. However, they still fear the former combatants and comrades who are still in the armed groups, because they have not yet changed and therefore, they are negative and violent towards them. They call them names such as “marios” or “wives” due to their non-violent attitudes towards women.

The former combatants (LPI) are very satisfied to have left the armed groups; they have found a peaceful life

through what they learned in the LPI groups. They are confident and in control of themselves in the face of their past, and when confronted with feelings of anger and hatred.

Ex-combatants

P8: I felt the guilt and I said to myself that if the people in the neighbourhood are going to laugh at me, let them laugh at me, but deep down I know that this wild behaviour no longer exists in me, I have become regular. (XC)

P10: How it feels depends, imagine you were a colonel, but waiting for your home village to be ravaged or your brother still among the casualties in “tuko bana damu” [we are human], and being a human I must feel anger at first but since I had been educated despite the rank I had in the army but by following the teachings I will be consoled because I can’t go back to this bad life again that we live. (XC)

III. Why men use violence

Service members and veterans were asked to define the characteristics of a good service member and/or

a good ex-combatant. Respect, control and discipline are mentioned, while violence and abuse of power are not seen as positive traits of being in the military. In other words, weaponised versions of masculinities – promoting violence and abuse of power – are not viewed as positive, but respondents believe that men are vulnerable when pressured into using violence. All respondents (military and veterans) agree that men are more often violent than women, and admit that their masculine identity makes them prone to become involved in violence. Explanations for male involvement in violence differ between former LPI participants and those (military and ex-combatants) who did not participate in the training courses.

The military think men are born to be more violent, and men and boys are more at risk because they use drugs and alcohol, which make them violent. Veterans have pointed to the hardships and traumatic experiences that drive men to want to kill if necessary. Despite their mental suffering, they stress the importance that a man must never give up and must be tough and strong, “a real man can measure himself against an obstacle” according to an ex-combatant. Military and veterans believe that men are not born to be violent, but are brought up by cultural norms and

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social expectations to be bossy and arrogant. Ex-combatants cite men's pride as the source of their use of violence. Men's pride and arrogance in being the boss can prevent them from communicating and solving problems at home and in the community. An ex-combatant recounted how a small problem turned into an ethnic conflict due to men's pride and arrogance.

P6: The pride of man causes many conflicts, I will tell you why. Pride can lead to an inter-ethnic war as for example in Goma we heard the story of the Kumu and the Nande [two tribes located in the peri-urban areas of Goma called Buhené, district in which the lava of the Nyiragongo volcano had flowed). For example, we may be together in a drinking house you touch the table where my kargasok (a locally made drink containing alcohol) is and by accident you drop my bottle on the floor, due to hubris can't accept forgiveness from the other "ndakuwa obliged kutosha kofi" [I will be obliged to slap the other] and when I slap the other directly the fight will start, you have already participated in the emotional management session "utashusha roh" [you will calm down]) and you will see that everything will be normal and maybe if you had had it. But the pride of men can make you create conflicts with people and you lose a lot of things and you go to munzenze [central

prison of Goma] where either the two families come into conflict or the whole community.

These attitudes are culturally learned, not inborn, because LPI groups have demonstrated that men can change.

MIL LPI

I am the man; I have to prove my masculinity. Culture also weighs heavily and promotes violence. I saw a man who pushed a woman away because she ate the chicken's eyes. The woman and her children were pushed back. I think custom gives men pride in using violence.

MIL

P1: On closer inspection, it is men who commit violence, and very often their excesses of violence are motivated by drugs "ma pombe" [alcohol].

P8: They were born that way, they can't change.

Ex-combatants

P7: I think conflict is necessary and it's natural. So there is a close relationship between these two things. Although there are conflicts, but we can't

worry too much about trying to save lives.

Boys' experiences of cultivating militarised masculinities

Participants in FGDs (ex-combatants and military) highlight the impact of continuing conflict and crisis on the wellbeing of young people and mainly boys. Young boys are seen as prone to adopting attitudes of militarised masculinity and highly likely to join armed groups for two main reasons: to seek revenge for the murders of their parents and other family members, and to gain money easily through criminal activities, kidnappings and looting of civilians. This behaviour is condemned by all the interviewees, but some accounts by parents – soldiers/ex-combatants – reveal a certain understanding and acceptance of young boys engaging in violence and in armed groups to earn money. Their stories reveal pain, discomfort and shame at not being able to parent children well. A father (XC) revealed how his anger is transmitted to his children and illustrated the discourse of intergenerational trauma fuelling ethnic conflict.

The results show that the desperation and trauma of military/ex-combatant parents affect their children, and suggest that it is primarily boys who try to escape 34

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the desperate vicious cycles of poverty and conflict by engaging in criminal practices and armed groups. (Other studies indicate that girls are more likely to engage in prostitution and sexual abuse.)

Militarised masculinities are not inborn, but are cultivated in a landscape of abuse and violence (UN Security Council, 2016).

P2: Imagine when a man has no job and has children. His children manage to grow up alone [grow up alone without the help of their parents] to take care of them, try to see if these children are really normal, at first, they will be traumatised. And when these children find a job, then they will commit violence and crimes. (MIL)

P10: When, for example, you as a parent have nothing and a child comes to you and gives you the money, and you as a parent take the money, will you have still something to say to this child, you won't even find a word to say to this child or even ask the child where he got the money from.

P3: For example, when I know very well that it is you

who would have killed my father by looking at my heart, you have to devour yourself and say that to my children even and that will cause eternal anger over time. (XC)

4.4

YOUTH IN ITURI: VULNERABILITIES OF BOYS AND GIRLS

Perceptions of masculinities and gender relations

The data reveals a wide gap between the examples drawn from young people's lived realities and their perceptions of what they consider to be a "real and ideal" man.

The boys reported high levels of violence at home, committed by fathers against mothers due to "cultural traditions" such as polygamy, but also caused by "men's pride and desire to be respected". Girls and boys face abuse from fathers, other family members and teachers, that adds to the daily tension and violence of ethnic conflict.

Interestingly, boys and girls' perceptions of what they consider to be a real and ideal man show support for gender-egalitarian attitudes, despite the multiple negative examples they saw at home and in the community. Witnessing violent relationships between parents at

home is painful for children, and the answers below show first of all their need for a good father: they want, for themselves, non-violent fathers, and non-violent husbands for their mothers.

Girls' expectations

W: *A real man is the one who understands his children, even if his daughter is pregnant, he does not pursue her like a dog, but he takes the time to listen to her and understand her, then he advises his children.*

W: *A real man is a father who loves his wife and does not try to have several wives, but he is satisfied with one wife.*

D1: *I will add that a real man is a man who "ye pana makali" [is not violent] because we see here in our country bad guys who often fight with their wives and with other men for small things.*

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Boys' expectations

- I:** The real man is the one who is faithful to his wife and is in good relation with everyone.
- D:** The real man is the one who doesn't insult people for no reason, but if he has reason to fight then he can do it to defend himself.
- D:** The real man should not be violent towards women. He should not take his wife forcibly for sex, but he can listen to her and wait if she is not ready. Because of gender, men don't get along well with women.

Young people want peace but struggle with the impact of extreme violence and militarised versions of masculinities

Girls and boys in Ituri are exposed to serious forms of violence, linked to the ethnic conflicts that have erupted in the region for five years. Witnessing extreme and brutal violence, attacks, killing of people, dissipation of livestock, looting, burning property and forced displacement is the collective experience of young people in Ituri. High tensions between ethnic groups have created an inflammable environment, where small problems easily escalate into serious conflict and violence. Different armed groups have drifted to defend their ethnic groups.

This explosive and hostile environment has left severe marks on the psychosocial development of boys and girls, caused by psychological injuries. On the one hand, the boys of the FGD collectively put forward their desire for peace, to put an end to all ethnic conflicts and to find a modus operandi of living together. They want their parents to end the violence, and they want support for young people to end the violence, because many of them struggle with the negative experiences that put them at risk of becoming violent.

Young people, both boys and girls, join violent gangs and armed groups to escape poverty and abusive parents, to seek revenge for the murders of their families, or even to seek revenge on their own abusive parents.

The multiple traumas and lack of hope for the future, push many young people into the arms of armed groups, as their stories explain.

The temptation to get involved in violence and hatred is explained by the confrontation with violence and humiliation. The phenomenon of militarised masculinity is described by one boy as "very mean and violent young men who are even feared by the police and the army. Here in our village, there is a place called Somalia where you cannot go without being subjected to violence of all kinds." (Boy from Ituri)

- F:** Yes, this phenomenon of violent men also influences us as a young boy because these violent people are feared by everyone, so we want to be like them so that people can't joke with us.
- E:** This situation leads us to develop attitudes of violence especially when we are faced with a person of the ethnic group that we think is an enemy, the reaction is very strong.
- B:** Although some young people are less violent, but in our minds, the conflict situation makes us violent. Even among us young people, the Hema do not like the Lendu and if there is a bad situation in which one is involved, the others kill them without thinking.
- A:** Other young people befriend these violent ones to get help when they are in a difficult situation where they are attacked by others.
- D:** What friends just said is true because sometimes we meet people who intimidate us and we find ourselves helpless. That's why we want to be so violent to scare others. Otherwise, people will trample you and even your little brothers.

4.4

- J:** *There are those young people who don't like to use violence because of their parents' upbringing, but when they learn that members of their ethnic group have been killed by another tribe, there is a spirit of revenge in the language.*
- F:** *This phenomenon of very violent men influences us especially me as a boy because we also want people to respect us too. And above all there are people who like to humiliate others and I don't appreciate that.*

Parents

Today, most young boys grow up with a war spirit, and they have no respect even among themselves, they behave strangely and violently. (Mother)

FGDs with parents reveal immense struggles of parents to stay in touch with their children. The mothers refer to the violent and hostile atmosphere at home, the children are afraid of the moods and violence of the fathers, and in the community and schools. Ethnic conflicts multiply and reach schools and children and conflicts between families. *In the schools for example, you will find an ethnic group which is disappearing, their children no longer go to school because they are neglected. This creates hatred in the minds of*

parents and even discrimination. Parents of one ethnicity do not want their sons to marry daughters of another ethnicity who have not had the chance to go to school. (Mother 3)

Mothers' accounts reveal that they see their sons copying the behaviour of violent militia groups and even the police. Boys are involved in violence and mothers feel helpless and guilty for not being able to protect their children.

Mother 1: *No parent wishes the misfortune of their child, but with the killings in broad daylight, the mentalities of the children have changed considerably, when a child decides to join an armed group or a militia, the parents are powerless.*

Mother 2: *We parents can be the source of the disorder [weird behaviour] when we are not able to meet the needs of our children.*

The fathers highlight the problems of discrimination and exclusion of their children in schools due to ethnic conflicts, which fuel hatred and violence. They refer to boys who join armed groups to avenge their parents who have died or lost property to looting. Conflicts and crises have impoverished many families to the point that children can no longer find enough to eat at home, leading them to seek food in the streets and join criminal groups.

Fathers believe girls and boys are affected differently, as they see many girls being raped and kidnapped, which creates high levels of fear and anxiety. The boys, on the other hand, join the armed groups and commit all kinds of violence, including looting throughout the province. "The fathers expressed their shame and despair at having failed to be good fathers and men. Today, we, parents are in difficult situations. There is nothing that works for us that makes us indecisive men at home. This crisis makes us men take alcohol to forget what we are going through. No-one can even go into his field, and that traumatises us and makes us develop hatred." (Father Benoit) The fathers fear that their sons will get involved in armed groups, but still see a positive side to it. They find that men are more respected in their community when they have a child in an armed group or what is called a "self-defence" group. Having a son in a vigilante group facilitates some protection for the family and the village.

Education for peace, patriotism and respect for human rights, and having a safe and secure family, will prevent young people from being traumatised and developing a militarised version of masculinities. In addition, fathers ask for the support of the state, which should punish the consumption of drugs and strong alcohol and punish violence.

4.4

Parents emphasised the need for security, work, food, income and psychosocial support for their traumatised children, and for themselves as parents feeling traumatised and helpless.

Analysis

Parents, fathers and mothers, are extremely worried about the welfare of their children. The testimonies of parents draw a dark scenario of young people, mainly boys but also girls, ready to engage in violence and armed groups. Parents' perceptions of the characteristics of a good man emphasise the importance of men's responsibility to care for the family, provide them with food and income, and that fathers should guide their sons into adulthood. However, fathers and mothers feel guilty and unable to provide their children with what they need.

All participants have been exposed to extreme violence, injustice and other serious human rights abuses.

The multiple traumatic experiences of young people in Ituri do not automatically lead to the adoption of militarised and violent versions of masculinities. On the contrary, the results reveal that both boys and girls believe that real men should be caring, non-violent fathers, who will not humiliate and abuse their wives.

They want peace between ethnic groups, they want to develop their lives. Nevertheless, they grapple with negative experiences that trigger strong emotions and bring many of them to the brink of revenge. The drivers of violence and vulnerability of boys, and less of girls, to join armed groups are rooted in experiences of humiliation and traumatic stress reactions, and not in the idealisation of norms of militarised masculinities. A study in Kenya of poor boys in Kenyan slums, showed that young boys resist the prevailing norms of their masculinity that limit their aspirations to escape hardship. They become caring and non-violent fathers, different from their own fathers.

<https://www.icrw.org/publications/young-men-poverty-and-aspirational-masculinities-in-contemporary-nairobi-kenya/>

The results also mean that young people, faced with trauma and adversity, don't have to emulate the negative and violent, because they know very well what kind of father they would need. However, it is the lack of proper support for all the negative and violent experiences that puts one at risk when emotions spiral out of control.

4.5

MEN IN POSITIONS OF POWER

**Kinshasa is the largest city in the DRC,
and one of the largest cities in
sub-Saharan Africa.**

It is also the centre of a wide range of power dynamics related to political, economic and cultural influence. The city is also shaped by huge contradictions in wealth, where extremely rich and extremely poor civilians navigate their lives to access wealth. While the eastern part of the DRC is well known for its armed conflicts between state and non-state groups, Kinshasa is known for its numerous street gangs, known as *kalunas*, the urban violence associated with them, and the police response to them. Kinshasa is over 2,400km from Goma in Eastern DRC, which is only accessible by air. The Kinshasa context creates an environment where the promotion of militarised masculinities is intersected by several elements, including the roles or influences those men adopt in shaping their lifestyles and beliefs, as well as in constructing the values in which people believe.

A community is composed mainly of individuals who each represent a common education, that is to say a sum of values and beliefs.

Thus, the community, through state rules, tries to make a harmonious symbiosis of all that these individuals represent, in order to create a societal cohesion acceptable to all.

Moreover, this intrinsic part of individuals, that is to say, this pyramid of values and beliefs (cultural, ideological, emotional and others) accompanies the individual in all the phases and interactions that he builds within his community. Indeed, this intrinsic pyramid is consequent of several factors of its environment, which are often embodied by men invested with certain powers, namely, political, traditional or cultural power, religious and parental. These four types of power represent the pillars influencing the behaviour of individuals in any society.

4.5

Masculinity is defined as the perception of men and women of the role of men in society. These perceptions, as social expectations, are therefore not determined by biological characteristics. Traditional and rigid gender norms predicted high levels of male use of violence in public and private spaces.

The context favouring the promotion of militarised masculinities is interspersed with several elements, among which are the roles or influences those men play in the conception of lifestyles and beliefs, as well as in the construction of the values to which the populations adhere (Diallo and Ahmed 2019). Therefore, it was imperative, in this research, to understand the understanding of men in positions of power of their role, as well as the actions likely to generate an environmental context favourable not only to the promotion of militarised/violent masculinities, but also to the deconstruction of this masculine militarisation or, in other words, the demilitarisation of the context.

A. Perceptions of masculinities and gender relations

The people in a position of power interviewed (political, religious, traditional and family) all agreed on the primordial role of men within the family. A real man is the one who bears the family burden, that is to say, able to provide for the needs of the wife and children, particularly in terms of food, housing, healthcare, education and schooling.

The religious men interviewed relied in their arguments on the Bible, which gives a man a large number of responsibilities within his family, as the role model and provider of his family's needs. Men in a position of traditional power and at a family level have not deviated from the logic asserted above on the authority and responsibility incumbent on men, especially in the home. A slight nuance should nevertheless be noted about the comments of the people interviewed who had already taken part in the activities of the gender dimension.

Analysis

Most of the people interviewed brought us back to the perception of the man as responsible or the head of household, losing sight of the fact that the man is above all a male being. The idea behind which is conveyed in the answers obtained during the interviews: the man is perceived according to the role he assumes in the household. The men, having taken part in the activities on gender, bring a certain attenuation to the authority of the man in the family, without exempting him from his role of providing for the needs of the family.

Politician 1: *A man in the family, although he is a father, he must be exemplary, especially to educate future generations. He must also teach children, especially*

boy children, that there is no difference between a girl and a boy. Anything a man can do, a woman can do too. A homemaker should be co-operative and diplomatic. He must not be hard on the wife and children.

Priest: *Within a family, the man is the head of the family, but this should not give the man the feeling of selfishness. The fact of being a leader is not an absolute leader, the strongest, it is he who decides, etc. It goes against what the Bible says. There is equality between men. The man is there, as in any business, it is he who directs and directs in the interest of all.*

Customary chief 1: *A man, he must know himself, know what he is and take his responsibilities in hand, in the family, as a parent.*

Mr A: *I think I have a perception opposite to that which is conveyed in our societies which try to give men a primordial place, but I believe that women and men can live in a certain equality. But, there are constraints, when the man is asked to pay the dowry, he is forced to have a certain ascendancy over the woman.*

4.5

Probability of a negative side in the behaviour and role assumed by the man.

Men in positions of power are unaware of their role in the negative behaviour of the men they shape. All the men interviewed recognise the existence of a very negative side in the exercise of their authority as men, among others the use of muscles, the lack of dialogue, dictatorship, imposition, abuse of power, banditry, drugs and physical violence, hatred and selfishness.

Some men consider the negative side of man in his interaction with woman, while others try to present the negative side of man in general in his interaction with any human being. None of the interviewees connects the negative side of the man to militarised masculinity. Rather, they link it to lack of education, lack of religiosity and other related factors.

Analysis

This negative side of the man is often reported in his relationship with the woman, rather than in his relationship with others (professional relationship, couple relationship, friendly relationship, community relationship, etc).

It is all the clearer, in the minds of the interviewees, that the man is a priori the chief, but they try to attenuate this by saying that he must not abuse his power (because he is automatically head of the woman due to his biological state). However, this notion of recognition of the state of leader, a priori, for the man, conditions his attitude of violence, because it is completely normal for the “leader” to have his decision respected, even by coercion, which “legitimises” his violent side.

Politician 2: *Yes, there is a negative side. As it has always been said in society that the man is the head and the head of the family; when given this degree of responsibility, man abuses it. It applies violence against women [beating] something that I experienced in my childhood with my parents. My father beat my mother. So that's the negative side, that is, the use of muscles.*

Priest 2: *The negative side of the man is the abuse of his power, the exercise of violence or brutality on the wife and children. This often comes from a failed education or sometimes even from having grown up in an environment of violence that pushes the man to duplicate the same behaviours experienced.*

Traditional chief 1: *There can be a negative side, if you do not give the floor to the woman. We must favour dialogue within the home.*

Knowledge of the concept of “militarised masculinity” and its manifestations

Speaking of militarised masculinity, men in positions of power, although they have raised the negative side of masculinity, still fail to make the connection between the negative side and militarised masculinity. For the majority of people interviewed, it is through this study that they tried to understand this concept and give an approximate explanation.

Men in positions of political power, through the questions that were asked, tried to explain militarised masculinity through the reality they experience in the political realm. Indeed, Congolese politics is renowned for its great violence due to its structuring, its history and functioning, similar to an arena of gladiators, where the rules of the strongest reign. This explains the penchant of politicians to illustrate militarised masculinity comparable to the Congolese political scene. For politicians, negative masculinity is manifested by dictatorship, work in personal and selfish interest, mismanagement,

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bad governance, the cult of personality, everything is done to honour the man. The other categories of men in positions of power, have recognised their lack of knowledge of this concept of militarised masculinity, despite some explanations that some have tried to provide, based on the socio-political realities that the DRC is going through.

Analysis

The explanations given by some interviewees, perfectly express militarised masculinity, but none seems to make a connection between the negative side of the man they mentioned in the chain of construction of militarised masculinities. Tackling the root causes of conflict in all its forms, through a fight against the emergence of militarised masculinities, requires men in positions of power to have a real perception and understanding of this phenomenon.

Politician 3: *This militarised masculinity exists in society. For example, what we are experiencing in politics: corruption, the desire to take everything alone, to seek to dominate others. This is what is at the root of the frustrations and, therefore, those who feel oppressed use violence to defend themselves.*

Moreover, the negative side of man being in politics is this desire to have everything; working for the personal interest instead of the interest of all, the poor distribution of the country's wealth: the mistreatment of workers who cause strikes, some go so far as to possess weapons to claim their rights. This leads to civil disobedience among the population in reaction to this mismanagement.

Priest 2: *This phenomenon, I understand it when I see the rebellions in this country; it is the males who are at the origin of the violence, who bear arms and moreover, blind and useless violence.*

They are carried out either for ulterior interests, or by pride, or by selfishness. You will not easily see this phenomenon in women, but easily in men. For a small problem, one is ready to resort to arms to fight with the other, just for misunderstandings.

Mr A: *Militarised masculinity is a new concept for me, I didn't know it before. I understand it perhaps through the negative side of the man in politics. These are dictatorial drifts that we observe. We do everything to assert ourselves, to control the institutions, we make ourselves more important than the institutions. Some go so far as to refute the presence or leadership of*

women in politics. There is a link between the way in which we perceive patriarchy in the family and in the public space.

Gender equality and positive masculinity

Despite what they confirmed about their perceptions of what a man is in opposition to a woman, the majority of interviewees believe that the only difference between the two sexes lies at the biological level and not at the professional level, nor in the public sphere.

Analysis

There is reason to question this reversal of the interviewees, the majority of whom believe that the man is the head of the family and automatically the head of his wife and children, and at the same time, confirmed that the difference between man and woman is only biological. This masculine hypocrisy reveals again that for each man, his restricted family remains his guarded hunting ground, where the rules must remain to his "advantage".

Despite the reforms of the Congolese family code, which tries to restore a legal balance between man and

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woman, it remains in its application a dead letter, in the face of the realities and practices within families still leaning towards religious beliefs, traditional beliefs and other balances of power. Hence the need to reinforce the applicability of the republican state, in which the state rules should constitute a single reference of values commonly shared and applicable to all.

Politician 3: *Despite biological equality, there is even a difference in other aspects. I believe that women still retain a bit of dignity unlike men, especially in politics. But, in terms of professional responsibility, the difference no longer exists.*

Mr A: *I think so, there is a difference. Avoid essentialism. There are differences related to the behaviour that we see on the ground. In the foyer, the man is presented as the president and the woman, the prime minister. But I think that the woman must participate in the decisions of the household. In politics there is a reality, women are not interested in politics. The mass of women in politics is reduced. This insufficient number influences their participation. Positive masculinity is a new concept, it is the fact that men behave like normal human beings for their own good. Do not charge the man, present him as an invulnerable being to the point of hurting himself,*

because we have a certain perception of what a man should be, we would pose masculinity to him if he wants to turn away from it.

B. Relationship between militarised masculinities and different crises (conflicts, criminality, poverty) in the DRC

This part of the study tries to describe the perception of men in positions of power, in their level of understanding and apprehension of the context favouring the emergence of militarised masculinities. In addition, it also tries to know the reading that they establish between these different situations of crises, conflicts and criminality, in their relationship with the militarised masculinities that can be consequent of their direct or indirect influence.

When asked whether men in positions of power understand the real difficulties that men encounter today, as well as their vagaries, the majority of interviewees believe that it is the family responsibilities that fall on men, faced with the poverty which prevails in the DRC and which, consequently, does not allow the man to easily play his role of provider of the family, as the society wants it. Once again, in this analysis, the image of the ideal man is apprehended within the home.

Few interviewees alluded to the man in general, without categorising him within the household. Thus, and in summary, the difficulties encountered by men are: the inability to meet the needs of his family, the growing insecurity that paralyses socio-economic activities in certain provinces, widespread poverty and poor governance in the country. However, they believe that these difficulties are the same and even worse for women, given the prejudices, stereotypes and structural discrimination that women generally face. Once again, through the responses of men in a position of power, we understand that the very first difficulty of the man or woman lies above all in the role assigned to them within the family and within society.

The interviewees recognise that the difficulties mentioned above affect the man in his masculinity. And so, this feeling of powerlessness often leads him to harmful practices and particularly to violent behaviour.

In addition, they affirm that this male violence aligns as a prerequisite obtained by each boy in his education at the family level, as the use of force and muscles is advocated there to get by in certain situations.

Analysis

For the interviewees, the person responsible for this situation that men are going through, is above all the politician who manages the city. It is therefore up to these politicians to create better conditions capable of enabling men to fully assume their societal responsibilities as providers within their respective families, through good remuneration (decent wages), the creation of jobs, social security, in short good legislation and regulation of life in society. Moreover, an in-depth analysis reveals that the major problem of man, upstream, is immaterial and it is his conviction to be the provider of his family. Consequently, whatever the environmental context and as long as his convictions remain in this logic, man will always experience this difficulty.

This architecture of values that man constructs is, in short, the fruit of religious, traditional, cultural and educational convictions, which proves the discreet but obvious influence of these powers on man. Despite the degrading socio-economic context of Congolese society, the role of gender as defined and applied these days already constitutes a steep downward slope on which the degrading socio-economic context exacerbates hardship.

Mr L: *This is a very broad question. Difficulties can be national, professional and family, etc. It is at all levels that we encounter difficulties. The remote causes of these difficulties are due to the deterioration of the social situation, the power is not well organised and everything falls on the man in the household. The man must do everything to assume his responsibilities within the home. When there is not a good harmony between the man and the woman in the home, it is besides among the causes of death of the men in the home. It also affects the education of children. I think the difficulties for women are different from those for men.*

Politician 2: *The man feels helpless. He no longer feels this militarised masculinity. It's like a lion that has lost its claws. He is shot. It is also among the causes of family abandonment among men. The difficulties affect the man in his masculinity because he has the impression of no longer being a man.*

Motivation of boys/men to join violence (banditry, armed groups, etc)

In general, the majority of men in positions of power consider, in their analysis relating to this concern, that the reasons underlying the adhesion of boys to

urban violence or armed groups are summed up in the frustration linked to the aforementioned poverty, the lack of occupation, that is to say the high rate of unemployment, the cost of living in cities, the poor distribution of national wealth, not to mention the political manipulation that pulls the strings of ethnic fibres for the benefit of selfish interests. Some recall education in violence; which means that there is a psychological preparation of the boy, from an early age, to be the symbol of strength and bravery, and that this state of mind makes it easy to adhere to violent organisations, either in town or in the countryside.

Analysis

As far as the context is concerned, it is obviously interspersed with two major postulates already listed. The first is this moral obligation imposed on boys/men to succeed in life, and at all costs, because they must take care of their families. The second is the socio-economic situation of the country, which does not allow men to respond satisfactorily to societal expectations. It should be noted that, while emphasising the key responsibilities of state power, the weakness of which favours the emergence of violent behaviour by men, we must bear in mind that other men in positions of power,

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such as religious leaders, traditional chiefs and heads of families, also contribute, through their doctrines, to the maintenance of gender roles.

Politician 1: *In front of the difficulties, the man and the woman, each one develops these mechanisms of survival. Men develop violence in their actions because of difficulties, while women lose the sense of humanity and their dignity, but not necessarily violence. They engage in practices that bring in little money. But they can also participate in or encourage violence when they enjoy the fruits of human violence.*

Mr A: *When you observe these street gangs or armed groups, you will see that it is dominated by boys. In society, the boy must fight, he is already violent from an early age. Preparation for violence is family and social. Man is the symbol of courage and bravery.*

C. Promotion of non-violence and positive masculinity

How can men in positions of power contribute, through their ability to influence, to the deconstruction of militarised masculinities within their community?

The interviewees consider, on the whole, that the greatest responsibility lies with the public authorities. First, public power favours the emergence of these militarised

masculinities because of widespread mismanagement, the culture of entrenched and structural corruption, selective justice, the absence of state authority, the abusive exploitation of natural resources, illicit enrichment of state actors, non-equitable distribution of national wealth, reduction of civic space, youth unemployment, deterioration of the education system, tribalism, lack of a policy of welfare, the predominance of patriarchy and the traditional system, to the detriment of the effective application of national legislation on the cultural level, etc.

Politicians, for their part, fully establish their primary responsibility in conditioning this degrading environment favouring the emergence of factors that they consider to be at the root of this deterioration of youth, as well as the violence observed.

There is also a certain capitulation on their part, thinking that they can do nothing to fight against the emergence of violent masculinities or rather against the factors that cause them. The religious, for their part, reject the responsibility for the political mismanagement which is at the root of this phenomenon of violence, especially among young people, and have not hesitated to point the finger at the politicians, to be behind armed conflicts in the DRC for their own profit.

This state responsibility is also part of the search for solutions to counter this phenomenon of violence among young men. Religious denominations believe that they have little influence to play a significant role in combating the development of violence.

The traditional leaders for their part believe that it is necessary to question the societal model copied from the West, which does not adapt to African values. In addition, the fact of having abandoned the traditional African system, where the chief played an important role in the regulation of community life, even using the mysticism attached to his traditional power, only increased all these disturbances of society.

Analysis

From the above, it is apparent that, despite this empowerment of public power, it appears that the factors that have favoured the growth of militarised masculinities, among men and boys, have been more generated by cultural and religious influences. To better fight against the development of violence and cultivate positive masculinity, the state, as the number one responsible, must strengthen its authority in the regulation of individuals as well as structures or other organisations in order to prevent violence.

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It is also up to the state to better organise society in order to educate the population on state citizenship, which must have predominance over local cultures, given the demands and irreversibility of modernity.

In fact, the situation in the DRC, an atypical country bringing together more than 400 distinct ethnic groups (cultures), is such that state laws, of a national and social nature, suffer from non-application, being stymied by the attachment of individuals, on certain aspects of life, to their spiritual and cultural convictions. Strengthening state authority also alludes to good state governance, that can gradually reduce economic hardship and inequality. However, not all men in positions of power are aware of their influences in the emergence of militarised masculinities through their actions, their doctrines, their customs and their education, that they convey from the masculine gender, and that, therefore, men, feeling entitled to power and control, are prone to commit crimes by resorting to violence and adopt various violent versions of masculinities.

Politician 3: *Politics is responsible for this situation, that is to say, responsible for militarised masculinity, but it is also responsible for the non-application of positive masculinity in the sense that we have a majority of*

political actors who have bathed in militarised masculinity throughout their political careers and they can only reproduce this same type of masculinity in governance.

We must think of the future generation, or even include these notions of positive masculinity in the national education programme. The goal is to grow the new generation with new ideologies of positive masculinities and they will not turn away even when they are in charge of governance of the country. The only thing to promote is education, while planning to create a new generation that will embody these ideologies. Politically, I don't think so. Many youth coaching sports initiatives are designed to influence young people to use their muscles more than their brains.

Priest 2: *Businessmen play with this phenomenon. For example, they take advantage of the war raging in the eastern part of the country. There is no civic-mindedness, citizenship education, education in respect for the environment. Civil society also works effectively against the promotion of this militarised masculinity. There is a great work to be done. Churches must uphold their denominational values. Consideration should be given to young girls and women.*

We need a change in mentalities, which must also go through religious denominations, because it is very difficult to change the mentalities of men. But if the religious do it properly, with state support, we can manage to reduce this phenomenon of violence.

Mr A: *Militarised masculinity is a way for people to revolt because of frustrations. There is a gap between political actors and citizens. Militarised masculinity is an expression of anger in the face of injustice. Religious denominations are part of the problem, because they encourage militarised masculinity through their teachings, that is, they present a certain hierarchy between man and woman. The church is already applying pressure on the man by presenting him as the leader. The initiatives that would eradicate this militarised masculinity are schools and education. I have a way of talking to my children. I already teach my children a certain equality to avoid predisposing my children to inequalities. We have to work on the educational programme, readjust it to address these issues. We must fund community-based projects, youth centres, sports clubs, in short, all the school and extracurricular framework that young people attend.*

4.6

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE CULTIVATION OR RESISTANCE OF MILITARISED MASCULINITIES

a. Hyper-masculinities: high self-esteem and pride

The findings suggest that versions of militarised masculinities find fertile ground to exploit in a context of extreme poverty and non-existent or weak rule of law. And in such an environment, there is an intense need for respected men and boys, with power, and responsible for defending the honour of both family and ethnicity, in matters of social role.

Such expectations relating to the “greatness” of man are nevertheless unrealistic and fuel false beliefs. In fact, men and boys have countless experiences of failure to achieve idealised forms of hyper-masculinity. Vulnerability and weakness are masked by attitudes of arrogance and pride, that easily evolve into violence and abuse of power. Gender inequality, and the various forms of subsequent GBV violence, illustrate men’s struggle for power at microscopic levels.

b. Collective experiences of trauma and loss

The collective experiences of trauma and loss, have created an environment of overwhelming emotions that include grief, anger, hatred, sadness and despair. Abuse, including abuse of children, is mentioned as one of the reasons young people join armed groups, just to avenge their parents. Thus, strong tensions and conflicts between ethnic groups create vicious circles of violence. The bereavement and loss of family members and property, the attacks on the honour of the groups that result from it, fuel feelings of hatred and revenge. Parents, in turn, pass on their trauma to future generations in different ways: mistreating their own children as well as conveying feelings of ethnic hatred and revenge. This is how collective trauma, when not properly addressed, is another dangerous fertilisation of violence and conflict.

4.6

c. Extreme poverty and shame

Poverty affects everyone, causes mental, physical and social illnesses, and undermines wellbeing and self-esteem when one is unable to provide for one's family. Men who are unable to support their families financially, or contribute to social and community activities, are generally socially rejected. It is these humiliating and embarrassing experiences that affect self-esteem, creating the feeling of being useless to society. Escaping poverty and fighting feelings of shame are important drivers that lead boys and men to engage in crime, in armed groups, and even justify violent behaviour and looting by the military.

d. Weakness or non-existence of state authority: mob justice

Lack of respect, stigma and social exclusion from the community and the state, lead men and boys to engage in negative and violent behaviours. Violence and abuse of power are justified as a form of "mob justice", as the state (including the military) does not protect and deliver justice. Frustration and grief, linked to the absence of genuine fair justice and state protection, are thus

important factors that push men and boys to join armed groups and to participate in all kinds of deplored violence.

e. Factors of resistance to violence and practices of militarised masculinities

i. Positive masculinity norms

Changing social norms promoting men's hegemonic power and heroism, as a male characteristic, are exemplified by LPI responses, where men found ways to let go of their "pride and arrogance".

ii. Psychosocial support and mental healthcare

Community-based psychosocial support for men and families is crucial to creating stability and peace in the minds of men, their families and communities.

Containing the explosive and overwhelming emotions of anger, fear, sadness and frustration is a first step towards lasting resilience.

Responses from LPI groups reveal significant differences from non-LPI groups in dealing with past

and current experiences: they are better equipped to deal with negative experiences and frustration without resorting to violence.

The results of the LPI assessments confirm, in fact, a significant improvement in men's mental health conditions, the reduction of violence and stability and peace at home. One ex-combatant called for strengthening the LPI groups in the DRC to create this desired stability, as he was convinced that it was impossible not to change after the LPI groups.

P9: *These groups can help those who don't yet understand, like the rest of us who have understood, because finishing 15 sessions without changing is impossible "ata kichwa kyako haki regeyake kita regeya ju kili tu regeyaka siye" [even if your head doesn't go soft it will go soft because we've gone soft]. (XC LPI)*

iii. Young people want peace

The young people of Ituri are ready to oppose all the bad examples they are confronted by.

4.6

They want healthy, non-violent relationships between their parents; in short, peace between ethnic groups.

Tired and frustrated in their isolated space, they want to take advantage of life's current opportunities to grow.

And for this, they are very motivated and eager to create peace with the different ethnic groups. As a result, they ask for psychosocial support in schools, to manage tensions there, and manage feelings of anger and pain.

They want to help create a youth-friendly environment to break the cycle of violence.

iv. Good governance: an enabling and secure environment

Respect for the rule of law, and good governance, to end impunity were mentioned by experienced soldiers as crucial factors in protecting the population from violence and abuse. Access to work, income and health is also essential to create a safe environment to prevent violence.

Safe boundaries are basic psychological needs, that serve to protect against dangers from abroad as well as from within, as destructive emotions and powers. A well-functioning state protects its people from violence through fair justice systems, ensuring proven political stability and equal access to economic development.

05

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study suggest that an amalgamation of negative experiences of failure, loss and grief cultivates versions of weaponised masculinities. None of the categories of men (military and veterans) indicated that they aspire to militarised masculinities as ideal versions of man. Violence is produced in the interactions between people and the use of violence by men. This is directly linked to attacks on the identity of men as individuals and as a group. Not all men exposed to hardship and crime use violence, just as not all men who use violence identify with militarised masculinities.

Men, feeling entitled to have power and control, are likely to commit crimes that encourage the emergence of the use of violence and the adoption of violent versions of masculinities.

Several military personnel joined armed groups, and engaged in crime and violence, in response to disrespect and offences by authorities. Armed groups are filled with disillusioned men and young boys who have joined these

groups, just to find protection, seek revenge for abuses suffered by their loved ones, or gain easy access to food by looting. However, all the ex-combatants in this study regretted the time wasted in armed groups, because in the end they gained nothing lasting, and felt stigmatised and rejected by family and community, thus lost everything. The results clearly show that the use of violence and variations of militarised masculinities are facilitated and cultivated in a context of neglect and abuse, without safe limits at the institutional, community, family and individual levels. Service members and ex-combatants who had participated in LPI groups, are more resilient in coping with adversity and traumatic experiences, helping them resist violence, compared to their colleagues who did not benefit from LPI groups.

Men in positions of power do not realise their influences in the emergence of militarised masculinities through their actions, their doctrines, their customs and their education that they convey to the male sex.

Recommendations:

A. Re-examine the patriarchal norms that predispose man in an infernal struggle for the affirmation of his masculinity

- Re-examine the general state of the family to reaffirm the fundamental place of the family as the basis of the family.
- Strengthen the authority of the state over the various forces with the capacity to influence the behaviour of individuals in the control of structures.
- Develop positive masculinity programmes for the benefit of boys and men.
- Include the fight against violent masculinities in a certain synergy of action.
- Improving rigid gender norms related to masculinities – alongside femininities – is necessary to create space for men and boys to develop healthy self-esteem and effectiveness in the face of adversity and problems.

B. Addressing the intergenerational transmission of trauma and ethnic conflict

- Implementing school-based psychosocial support programmes, with a gender-transformative perspective, should address the multiple and different traumatic experiences of boys and girls exposed to violence at home, at school and in their communities.
- Creating peacebuilding initiatives in schools and communities with young people, should connect and build on the motivations of boys and girls to create peace and end ethnic conflict.
- Parents, teachers and other youth educators should be fully engaged in positive masculinities, psychosocial and peacebuilding programmes.

C. Create a safe and supportive environment with safe boundaries

- Advocate for good governance and a fair and accessible justice system to end impunity.
- End corruption and abuse of power in the military and society by the authorities.

- Put in place a mechanism for economic development, employment and access to health education.

D. Strengthening Living Peace International groups (see Appendix)

- Integrate into the FARDC, the LPI methodology, by training soldiers as facilitators to implement LPI groups at the national level.
- Use DDR with ex-combatants before and during their reintegration into their communities and families.

E. Research

- Deepen research into the ability to influence men in positions of power in societal dynamics.
- Emphasise further research on cultural aspects of mental health responses of ex-combatants, military personnel, youth and men in positions of power.



06

APPENDIX

6.1

LIVING PEACE INSTITUTE METHODOLOGY

The methodology is based on several studies conducted since 2010, on the impact of wars and crises on gender relations and perceptions of masculinities.

Research findings have shown that high levels of traumatic stress in men are associated with men's use of violence in the home, and men's vulnerability to join armed groups and engage in crime (Kobach et al 2015; Slegh et al 2014).

The therapeutic group therapy model was developed with Dutch and Congolese psychologists/anthropologists and piloted in the World Bank's LOGICA project, 2012-2014.

Since then, Living Peace groups have grown in Eastern DRC, North and South Kivu and Ituri, with an impressive positive impact on restoring peace and stability to families and communities.

This community-based psychosocial approach combines gender-specific and group psychotherapeutic knowledge, adapted to the cultural context of Congo and its target group. Men and boys, severely affected by conflict and war, are not only perpetrators but also victims of violence, and LPI groups focus on their gendered responses to trauma and stress.

Family members and community members are involved in various ways during the change and treatment process. The success of the model is partly attributed to its focus on men's mental suffering, and the strong cultural and contextual integration of the model, which is fully managed and implemented by Congolese staff.

6.2

RESEARCH

Preliminary results from a randomised controlled trial indicate a significant and sustained reduction in the use of violence, and a significant decrease in symptoms related to trauma and substance abuse.

Results that are confirmed by the improvement in the mental health and psychosocial conditions of men and families who have participated in the LPI groups since 2015. Similar results have been found in several other studies conducted since the first pilot groups in 2015 (Tankink and Slegh 2017).

The LPI methodology was successful for traumatised youth and men in the Far North of Cameroon, Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Syrian men in Iraq, adolescents in Mali, and in 2022 with Yazidi men in Kurdistan/Iraq.

The pilot results in these countries suggest that the model is suitable to adapt and implement in other contexts.

We return to the question of accountability later in this paper, and analyse the extent to which Resolution 35/10 fosters accountable practice.

6.3

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6.4

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COMEN: Congo Men’s Network	LPI: Living Peace Institute
DDR: disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration	NGO: non-governmental organisation
DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo	SGBV: sexual and gender-based violence
FARDC: Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo	WILPF: Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
FGD: focus group discussion	WILPF DRC: Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, DRC Section
GBV: gender-based violence	WPS: Women, Peace and Security
IMAGES: International Men and Gender Equality Survey	
LOGICA: Learning on Gender & Conflict in Africa	

07

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