

# MASCULINITY AND VIOLENCE INTERCONNECTEDNESS: DEFINING AND RECONCILING THE GENDER PARADOX AMONG MEN WITH CUMULATIVE LIFETIME VIOLENCE HISTORIES

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*Sage Open*, 14(3), (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241266998>



## BACKGROUND

Societal expectations of male gender include the use of violence as a way to demonstrate and maintain masculinity. While the relationship between masculinity and violence is complex, much current research focuses on violence that has been narrowly defined as a particular type in a particular context. We define cumulative lifetime violence (CLV) as physical, psychological or sexual violence or abuse that occurred during childhood and/or adulthood, as a target and/or perpetrator in many contexts including within the family, community, school, workplace or partner relationships. In this qualitative analysis, we examined the complex relationship between gender and violence for men who have experiences of CLV.

## SAMPLE

These interviews were conducted as a part of a larger mixed methods study of 685 participants from Eastern Canada who self identified as men, spoke English and were between the ages of 19 and 65 were recruited for the larger study. 32 men who experienced CLV completed qualitative interviews.



## KEY MESSAGES

- Men's descriptions of gender and their sense of self as men consistently connected violent as a way to demonstrate gender, especially traditional notions of masculinity. We labelled this interrelationship masculinity and violence interconnectedness (*MV Interconnectedness*).
- *MV Interconnectedness* addresses the complex ways that gender and violence interact and to inform men's sense of self and interactions with others. It is shaped by broad societal expectations and pressures that position violence as a normal and acceptable part of being a man. Because enacting violence is a way for men to live up to societal expectations to demonstrate masculinity, *MV interconnectedness* can result in benefits for men. However, *MV Interconnectedness* can also contribute to considerable harm.
- *MV Interconnectedness* is present regardless of whether men's CLV experiences have been mostly as a target or perpetrator. Perceptions of masculinity are tied to violence, based on CLV experiences that violence is normal, acceptable, and demonstrates masculinity.
- However, men began to question *MV Interconnectedness*.
- The conflicting nature of *MV interconnectedness* and the tension that arises when men ponder the link between gender and violence, the related harms, and their desire to separate violence from how they define themselves as men, was labelled *The Paradox*.
- Grappling with *The Paradox* was a struggle for men because violence simultaneously led to positive and negative outcomes. However, for most men, the harms outweighed the benefits and men started to disconnect gender and violence and redefine their own gender in less traditional ways.