

ZERO TO THREE JOURNAL

Taking a Global View on Infants, Toddlers, and Their Families

IN THIS ISSUE

Supporting Parents
Around the
World to Provide
Nurturing Care

A Worldwide
Focus on
Mental Health

Inclusive Early
Childhood Development
for Children With
Disabilities

Changing the
Global Mindset
on Fathers



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Around the World With ZERO TO THREE: A Sample of Global Engagement
by Members of the Board, Academy Fellows, and Staff



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

This Issue and Why it Matters

We are delighted to bring you this expanded issue of the *ZERO TO THREE Journal*, which features a global focus on infants, toddlers, and families. This marks the first time that an entire issue of the Journal is devoted to an international perspective on meeting the needs of the youngest and most vulnerable children around the world.

The catalyst for this issue is the growing recognition, both inside the scientific community and among institutions with an international reach, that investments in the earliest years yield significant returns, making early childhood development central to the peace and prosperity of society. This recognition has amplified the need to bring high-quality, effective interventions to scale in communities around the world. As more global partnerships have emerged, the opportunity to share knowledge, resources, and innovative strategies reveals how much we all benefit when we learn from one another.

The enthusiasm and momentum behind the recent efforts to strengthen the programs and services for early childhood education inspired us to bring together the voices presented in this issue to share the most recent innovations and milestones that have brought a focus on child development to the foreground. The feature articles in this issue provide global perspectives on mental health, inclusive services for children with disabilities, maternal and child nutrition, parenting support, father involvement, and home visitation. In addition to the feature articles, we include a supplemental section that provides a snapshot of the variety of ways that members of the ZERO TO THREE Board of Directors, Academy Fellows, and staff are reaching outside of the United States to make connections that strengthen families and improve the lives of infants and toddlers.

We are also excited to acknowledge the more 200 international members of ZERO TO THREE, who represent 32 countries. We would love to hear from you and invite you to share your experiences and interests! We hope this is just the beginning of an ongoing dialogue among those who care about and support young children and their families around the world.

Stefanie Powers, Editor
ZERO TO THREE Journal

Joan Lombardi, Guest Editor
Washington, DC

Jane West, Guest Editor
ZERO TO THREE Academy Fellow, Heart of the West Counseling, LLC,
and the Two Lillies Fund

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Changing the Global Mindset on Fathers

Lessons From the MenCare Campaign

Gary Barker
Ruti Levtov
Brian Heilman
Promundo-US
Washington, DC

Abstract

Fathers matter enormously for children and for early childhood development. Yet women around the world still do 3 times as much child care and unpaid domestic work as men do. Research, programs, and advocacy undertaken by Promundo and the MenCare Campaign, including the *State of the World's Fathers* reports, have demonstrated the promise and effectiveness of well-designed policies, laws, trainings, and other approaches to achieve true equality in care work around the world, and in so doing to help all children and societies achieve their fullest potential. This article presents an overview of this evidence, including recommendations for achieving the goal of equality in care work.

Fathers matter enormously for children and for early childhood development, as do men in multiple other caregiving roles. And yet the global statistics speak loudly on who mostly cares for children in their first years of life. Even with all the advances toward equality for women in the past 20 years, women around the world still spend, on average, 3 times as much time caring for children (and caring for their homes) as men and fathers do (Heilman, Levtov, van der Gaag, Hassink, & Barker, 2017). Of course, many individual men and fathers are—or strive to be—equal caregivers in their homes. And globally, some men and fathers are doing more of the hands-on care of young children. But we have a long way to go before we achieve true equality of unpaid care work between men and women.

Why Fathers and Why MenCare?

The historical legacy of who predominately cares for young children (mothers and other women) means that fathers, and men in other caregiving roles, are still seen as the secondary caregiver, the “helper,” if they are seen at all in their caregiving roles. At the same time, a growing, global body of research confirms that when men are involved in the lives of children in nurturing ways, there are multiple benefits for children, for women, for men themselves, and for societies as a whole.

It is from this premise that Promundo, an international nongovernmental organization (NGO) working toward gender equality and the promotion of healthy masculinities, co-founded the MenCare global fatherhood campaign in 2011. The MenCare campaign has the objective of creating a global platform of research exchange, evidence-based program development, and policy-focused advocacy to promote men’s involvement as equitable, nonviolent, supportive caregivers.

Promundo staff knew from the start that the topic of promoting father involvement was fraught with tensions. In some countries and settings, too many discussions about “where are the fathers” were being driven by fathers’ rights groups, sometimes led by men holding anti-feminist stances, often motivated by contentious custody issues. For some organizations working in children’s rights and child development, men have been seen as either absent or as bringers of harm, and given the high prevalence of men’s use of violence against women and children, this perspective should be taken seriously. Other colleagues have worried that fathers would become the “flavor of the month”, and that mothers—who have been doing the lion’s share of the care work and yet still lack the services and policies they need—would become the “taken for granted” parent or made invisible by turning attention to fathers. Thus,

from the start, Promundo, and the partner organizations who created MenCare and continue to lead it, affirmed core principles rooted in women's rights, children's rights, violence prevention, and the early childhood development field. The campaign emphasizes the diversity of women's and men's caregiving, and also recognizes the important contributions of caregivers of all gender identities and sexual orientations. There are now NGO partners from more than 40 countries participating in the campaign, all motivated by a belief that fathers' increased involvement in care work can and should be promoted in a framework of gender equality, children's rights, with full acknowledgement of and support for the diversity of families, caregivers, and children.

Why Fathers Matter for Child Development

One of the biggest challenges to achieving full equality in the care of young children—at home or in child care settings—is the widespread belief that women are more “natural” caregivers, at least in part because women give birth to and breastfeed babies. But new research is demonstrating that men are biologically wired to care for infants as well; fathers who are physically close to their babies and who are actively and directly involved in caring for them (even if they are not biological fathers) change biologically in ways that are nearly identical to mothers. One study found that levels of “nurturing hormones” are similar in men and women exposed to “infant stimuli” before their babies are born (e.g., watching a video of a baby, listening to an audiotape of babies' cries, holding a doll wrapped in a blanket recently worn by a newborn) and when interacting with their children afterward (Storey, Walsh, Quinton, & Wynne-Edwards, 2000). Within 15 minutes of holding a baby, according to this study, men experience increases in the hormones that facilitate responsiveness to infants (vasopressin), closeness and care (prolactin), and affection and social bonds (oxytocin).

In short, men's bodies react to close connection with children in many similar ways to women's bodies. Both men's and women's biochemistry changes to facilitate their bonding with young children. These physiological changes are likely part of our evolutionary legacy, according to scholarship; hominid children with more—and more attuned—caregivers were more likely to survive and thrive than those with fewer (Hrdy, 2011). Human evolutionary history suggests, according to many authors, that all humans, regardless of sex or gender, survive and thrive if they are loved and cared for. As a corollary, then, humans' very evolutionary history suggests that all humans, regardless of sex and gender, are born to love and to care. In evolutionary terms, all evidence shows that men and women alike possess the epigenetic traits (referring to those biological traits that are activated by a person's environment) that foster an innate human capacity to be connected, nurturing caregivers.

It is now widely accepted that fathers matter for children in terms of developmental outcomes. There is ample evidence that fathers' increased engagement in caregiving activities



Photo: Beto Pêgo for Instituto Promundo

A growing, global body of research confirms that when men are involved in the lives of children in nurturing ways, there are multiple benefits for children, for women, for men themselves, and for societies as a whole.

boosts a variety of social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes for children. For example, multiple studies have reported that fathers' taking 40% or more of the caregiving responsibility in the family is associated with positive outcomes in children's test scores and cognitive achievement (Halle, 2002; Jones & Mosher, 2013). A review of 18 research studies on father involvement and child outcomes found that in 17 of those studies, fathers' greater involvement was associated with positive social, behavioral, psychological, and cognitive outcomes for children. Specifically, father involvement is associated with decreased behavioral problems in boys and decreased psychological problems in girls (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklais, & Bremberg, 2008).

Furthermore, evidence shows that when men are engaged from the start of children's lives—whether by participating in prenatal care and education, being present during childbirth, or taking leave from work when a child is born—they establish a pattern of greater lifelong participation. In essence, they flex their nascent caregiving abilities and learn to use them. Fathers' ongoing positive involvement in the lives of their sons and daughters—listening to them and involving them in decision-making—enhances children's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development and can contribute to their emotional well-being and happiness (Burgess, 2006; Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007; Davis, Luchters, & Holmes, 2012; Panter-Brick et al., 2014).

Father involvement matters for creating cycles of gender equality as well. When fathers engage in housework and child care and spend time with their sons and daughters, these contribute to boys' acceptance of gender equality and to girls' sense of autonomy (DeGeer, Carolo, & Minerson, 2014). Engaged fatherhood can also help protect children from violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect, and it can help ensure their access to health and education. When daughters and sons see their fathers in respectful, nonviolent, equitable



Evidence shows that when men are engaged from the start of children's lives, they establish a pattern of greater lifelong participation.

relationships with their mothers and other women, and/or in the context of equitable gay or queer relationships, they internalize the idea that men and women are equal and that intimate partners treat each other with respect and care. These children often grow up to pass these notions of respect and equality on to their own children (Barker, Contreras, Heilman, Singh, & Nascimento, 2011; Burgess, 2006; DeGeer et al., 2014).

The overwhelming conclusion is that fathers matter for children, and they matter for helping to raise sons and daughters who are more likely to become involved, equitable, attuned caregivers themselves. In addition to the traditional child development outcomes measured, equitable involvement by men as caregivers *pays forward*. It contributes to the next generation of women and men who are more likely to interact in relationships based on equality and mutual support.

Moving Beyond the Question of Fathers' Unique Contributions to Child Development

Much of the discussion about the role of fathers in child development has focused on the question: What are fathers' unique contributions to child development? This question has sought to affirm that fathers matter not only as co-parents in the context of heterosexual families but that fathers contribute something inherently different than mothers do. Most of the time this "different" or unique contribution focuses on helping children to acquire some trait that is considered traditionally male, such as being athletic or "tough," or merely on playing or other more recreational aspects of parenting.

To be sure, some studies find that fathers—at least in North America and northern Europe, where most of the research has been carried out—contribute to children's development in ways that are different than mothers. But even if these differences

are real, it is important to affirm that they are not biologically or genetically driven. They are a result of socially constructed, gendered patterns by which women do a greater share of the hands-on caregiving and men do more of the breadwinning and activities outside the home. These discrepancies also result from each generation copying the gendered patterns of care they saw and learned from their own parents. If one's own mother was more likely to soothe and nurture, and one's own father was more likely to focus on play, and if all social messages reinforced the assertion that this was the "normal" or "best" way of dividing parenting roles, then it's not surprising for one's own caregiving to follow a similar pattern. But it is crucial to recognize that these patterns are not driven by biology; instead, they come from social norms and stereotypes which shape the world in inequitable ways.

All of these functions—soothing, nurturing, playing, disciplining, and many more—are necessary components of caring for children, to be sure. The issue is that they too often follow and reinforce inequitable patterns that reduce women and girls to only or mostly being caregivers, while men and boys are encouraged to see caregiving as secondary activities. In sum, then, the notion that fathers contribute in unique ways to child development, or that mothers do, reinforces the very system of inequality that keeps men from doing an equitable share of the daily care of children. All caregivers can and should be encouraged to participate in *all* care work, and recognized for their effort and contributions when they do so.

It is increasingly common for the literature on fathers' contributions to child development to affirm that fathers and other male caregivers matter for child development in the sense that more nurturing caregivers are better than one in terms of a child's development. The body of child development literature attests to the need for one caregiver (or more than one) who is centrally devoted to the child, in the sense that they put the child's needs above their own and are consistent, attentive caregivers, regardless of their sex. Seeking to affirm or identify a unique role for fathers or men—a role different from that of mothers and other caregivers—may at a practical level help professionals to engage some fathers by making fathers feel special. Certainly all fathers (or mothers, or any caregivers) want to feel their contribution to their child is unique, and it is. But the reality is that fathers matter to children the same way that mothers and other caregivers do—meaning they matter to the extent that they nurture, support, connect, and provide consistent and developmentally appropriate care.

The Barriers to Men Doing More Caregiving

If men and fathers can care for young children as well as women and mothers can, and if fathers are as biologically wired for care, and if their care matters for children as much as mothers and other female caregivers' does, then what is keeping fathers from doing an equitable share?

This question is at the heart of the MenCare campaign's goals and activities. One central action of the MenCare campaign globally has been the production of the first-ever global report

on fatherhood, *State of the World's Fathers*, first launched in 2015 (Levtov, van der Gaag, Greene, Kaufman, & Barker, 2015), with a follow-up report in 2017, *State of the World's Fathers: Time for Action* (Heilman et al., 2017). In those reports (and in more than 10 country reports that drew from the global reports), Promundo and co-authors synthesized global research on father involvement in order to draw conclusions and recommendations for ongoing advocacy. To date, these recommendations have been shared with national governments around the world, at the United Nations, and with international organizations working in children's rights, child development, and women's rights. All of these efforts share the goals of identifying and overcoming barriers to achieving equality of care work.

For the foundational *State of the World's Fathers* report in 2015 (Levtov et al.), the authors reviewed the global evidence, working from existing data (and from data from the Promundo-led International Men and Gender Equality Survey, see Barker et al., 2011). The report confirmed that men's equitable caregiving matters for child development, for better maternal and child health outcomes, for women's empowerment, for men's health and well-being, and for societies. The authors also observed that data on fatherhood and fathers' involvement in care work are rare, even as the U.N. and other international bodies have generated new, global, comparative datasets on women, women's health, women's time use, and children's well-being. What we don't count doesn't count. If national governments and the U.N. do not measure and assess men's participation in the care of children (which, admittedly, is not a straightforward or easy task), then not only does this show that societies don't value this participation, but it also makes it impossible to understand how far off the goal of equal care work remains.

The authors of the second *State of the World's Fathers* report in 2017 (Heilman et al.) called the report "Time for Action" to emphasize the importance and urgency of action to achieve equal care work. In this report, the authors presented analyses of existing time-use studies (including more than 100 country-level datasets), showing that, on average, women spend 3 times as much daily time on caring for the home and caring for children as men do. This difference ranges regionally from about 2.7 times in East Asia and the Pacific to 4.5 times in the Middle East and North Africa, and 6.5 times in South Asia; to an average of about 2 times for the wealthier countries of North American and Europe (among available country datasets). The authors also confirmed that women consistently do more daily hours of work than men do, when their unpaid work and paid work is combined. That is, even when taking into account men's greater average number of hours working outside the home than women's, women still carry out more hours of total work every day, on average, than men. The report also emphasizes the need to build on the gender equality and children's rights elements of the Sustainable Development Goals, which mention the need to achieve equality for women in terms of unpaid care but do not explicitly call for men and boys to do half of that unpaid care work.

At the same time, the 2017 report (Heilman et al.) affirmed that many men do want to be more involved in the lives of their children, and indeed that many men are more involved than men from prior generations. Even in countries where men's involvement in care work is limited, such as those in the Middle East and North Africa, half or more of men surveyed said that they spent too little time with their children because of their job. In the United States, 46% of fathers said they were not spending enough time with their children, compared with 23% of mothers (Heilman et al., 2017).

The report also identified three important barriers to men's fuller involvement as caregivers: social norms, economic and workplace realities, and laws and policies. Across 59 countries, 45% of men and 35% of women, on average, agreed with the statement, "When jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to a job than women," demonstrating persistently inequitable social norms around gender and work. Among other workplace realities, the gender wage gap and norms that discriminate against flexibility or taking leave further drive an inequitable division of labor at home and at work. And laws and policies around parental leave, equal pay, public provision of child care, and social protection often reinforce the unequal distribution of care as well.

The Policies and Programs Needed to Achieve Full Father Involvement

In this current setting of inequitable caregiving, what is needed? In the broadest sense, of course, the poorest families around the world need access to income support—including poverty alleviation and affordable, high-quality child care. These kinds of supports are still uneven around the world.

More precisely, one of the most important policy recommendations is the need for paid parental leave (ideally enshrined in national legislation), equally shared between mothers and fathers (or between other co-caregiver arrangements). As of 2016, paternity leave—usually a short leave period specifically allocated for fathers after the birth of a child—is still offered in only about half of the countries of the world (86 countries), while parental leave—leave that is typically longer and can be taken by either parent—is offered in even fewer (53 countries). This lack of leave availability continues despite evidence that effective leave policies can help to transform gender relations at work and at home, as well as support women's economic participation.

Accordingly, MenCare partner NGOs have been advocating and lobbying for equal paid leave for fathers and mothers in diverse settings, and at least with some success. For example, in Brazil, in part because of MenCare advocacy efforts, national legislation increased paid leave for fathers from 5 days to 20 days fully paid (by comparison, mothers in Brazil receive 4 months paid leave). In other countries and at the U.N., MenCare partners have promoted equitable paid, parental leave.

In addition, evidence is also increasingly showing that well-designed parent training and parent support programs that

make specific efforts to recruit fathers, and also support mothers, need to be scaled up or made more universally available. As such, MenCare partners have worked to build the evidence base around father-inclusive, or father-focused, parent training in global South settings. A rich evidence base from the global North has affirmed that well-designed programs with mothers and fathers, particularly those that focus on parental cooperation in child care (regardless of whether parents are married, unmarried, or separated), can achieve multiple positive outcomes for children (Cowan, Cowan, Kline Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009). Following such approaches, MenCare partners in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Indonesia, Lebanon, Nicaragua, Rwanda, South Africa, and the U.S. and elsewhere have developed, adapted, or implemented a father training module called Program P (P for the word for father in many languages, *padre, pai, pere*; Promundo, CulturaSalud, & REDMAS, 2013).

The module includes activities for expectant fathers and their partners (some activities carried out only with fathers, others with the couple together) focusing on couple communication and joint decision-making, men's support and participation during pregnancy and early childhood, gender equality, and nonviolent relationships with partners and children. In participatory, consciousness-raising activities, trained facilitators

(young fathers from the same communities) guide parents through the activities over a 3–4-month process, in partnership with health services and other social services. A recent randomized control trial of the process in Rwanda (in partnership with the Rwandan Ministry of Health) with nearly 2,400 women and men found that:

- (a) women in the intervention group reported higher support from male partners during their pregnancy and went to more prenatal visits compared to the control group,
- (b) women in the intervention group reported much lower rates of violence from male partners in the previous 12 months compared to the control group, and
- (c) both men and women in the intervention group reported lower rates of violence against their children.

All of these changes were sustained at statistically significant levels 16 months after the intervention ended (Doyle et al., in press). On the basis of these positive results, the evaluation will be replicated in Bolivia, and efforts are already underway to make the Program P training module a part of the maternal and child care system in Rwanda and elsewhere. (See box, "Lessons Learned and Future Directions of MenCare").

Lessons Learned and Future Directions of MenCare

The breadth of MenCare activities has included (a) policy advocacy; (b) creative use of media and awareness-raising events to change ideas about fatherhood; (c) training and outreach to diverse social service, health, and education sectors; and (d) scaling up of evidence-based father training. Some highlights of these activities include:

- In **Brazil, the Netherlands, and South Africa**, MenCare partners used results from the *State of the World's Fathers* reports (Heilman et al., 2017; Levto et al., 2015) to advocate for increased paid leave for fathers, going from 5 days to 20 in the case of Brazil, and up to 5 weeks nontransferable leave for fathers paid at 70% of salary in the Netherlands. In South Africa, the new law promoted by MenCare partners provides for 10 days paid leave for fathers. The MenCare parental leave platform has been widely disseminated at various high-level United Nations meetings and at discussions of parental leave at the European Union.
- In **Georgia**, MenCare partners organized a "football/soccer" cup for fathers and children, while in **Mexico** MenCare partners organized a "hands-on fathers' day" to promote father involvement among staff at one of the country's largest universities. MenCare partners have also produced children's books to promote gender equality and hands-on involvement by fathers, organized photo exhibitions of involved fatherhood, and developed cartoon videos. In **Bulgaria**, MenCare awareness-raising has targeted kindergartens and social work professionals to identify ways to engage fathers.
- MenCare partners in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Indonesia, Nicaragua, Russia, Rwanda, South Africa, the U.S. and elsewhere have offered evidence-based father and co-parent training building on a common curriculum, Program P, which has been subject to a randomized control trial in Rwanda and rigorous evaluation in Central America and Bolivia. MenCare

partners have used diverse strategies for recruitment. **Brazil, Rwanda,** and other country partners have found that prenatal visits offer one of the most promising places to recruit fathers. In **Brazil** and **Chile**, the ministries of health sponsored online training courses for health professionals in ways to recruit fathers, father training strategies, and ways to use the health sector to engage fathers as co-parents and allies in maternal and child health.

Now with more than 45 countries participating, MenCare plans for the future include:

1. deepening country-level advocacy to push for equitable parental leave and to include fathers in national advocacy around ending corporate punishment;
2. identifying ways to build evidence-based parent training (building on Program P) into the public health sector and early child development sectors;
3. partnering with key women's rights partners to continue working to achieve a global goal of men carrying out half of the daily care work, and partnering with key research partners to gather international time-use data to assess progress; and
4. partnering with large media outlets and private sector partners to change the presentations of fathers in the media, emphasizing men's caregiving.

The MenCare partners will continue producing new *State of the World's Fathers* reports every 2 years as a key advocacy strategy, with launch and outreach events at United Nations and international gatherings as well as at the country level.

It Takes a Village to Support Caregivers to Raise a Child

Clearly, paid parental leave and evidence-based parent training are not sufficient to provide the support necessary for all caregivers, particularly the lowest income ones, to do all they can for their young children. Paid child care, income support, abolishment of physical punishment, preventing and responding to men's violence against women, access to high-quality primary health care, and much more, are necessary for achieving the support that mothers and fathers need to care for their children. Advocates also need to promote gender equality in the caregiving professions. While efforts have expanded to promote girls' and women's participation in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) professions, much more needs to be done to promote men's involvement in caring professions, including as early child care workers, primary school teachers, and other caring professions such as nurses. Achieving gender equality in caregiving—meaning men and women sharing, on aggregate, the daily care of young children—will not by itself achieve the positive outcomes and full nurturing that young children need. But without the full and equitable involvement of men and fathers in the daily care of their youngest children, it will not be possible to achieve the promise that all children deserve.

Authors' Note: Much of the data and conclusions presented here were previously published as part of *State of America's Fathers* (Heilman et al., 2016), *State of the World's Fathers: A MenCare Advocacy Publication* (Levtov et al., 2015), and *State of the World's Fathers 2017: Time for Action* (Heilman et al., 2017). The authors thank the various contributors and co-authors of those reports.

Gary Barker, PhD, is president and CEO of Promundo. He has conducted extensive global research and program development around engaging men and boys in gender equality and violence prevention, and he is a leading voice for the worldwide effort to establish positive, healthy dynamics between men and women. Gary is the co-founder of MenCare, a global campaign to promote men's involvement as equitable, nonviolent caregivers, and co-founder of MenEngage, a global alliance of more than 600 nongovernmental organizations and United Nations agencies working toward gender equality. He coordinates IMAGES (the International Men and Gender Equality Survey), a pioneering multicountry survey of men's attitudes and behaviors related to violence, fatherhood, and gender equality, among other themes. He is a member of the United Nations Secretary General's Men's Leaders Network and has been honored with an Ashoka Fellowship, a fellowship from the Open Society Institute, and the Vital Voices Solidarity Award. Gary earned a doctorate in child and adolescent development from Loyola University in Chicago and a master's degree in public policy from Duke University.



Photo: Beto Pêgo for Instituto Promundo

Even in countries where men's involvement in care work is limited, half or more of men surveyed said that they spent too little time with their children because of their job.

Ruti Levtov, PhD, is the director of research, evaluation, and learning at Promundo. She plays a key role in Promundo's research initiatives, including the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), and she co-coordinated the MenCare Global Fatherhood Campaign from 2013 to 2017. Ruti previously worked with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and the Maternal and Child Health Policy Research Center, and was a research fellow at the Tata Institute for Social Sciences in Mumbai. She received her master's degree in international comparative education from Stanford University and her doctorate in public health from the University of Michigan, where her research focused primarily on gender, violence, and schooling.

Brian Heilman, MA, is a senior research officer at Promundo, where his work focuses on eliminating harmful masculine norms, preventing all forms of gender-based violence, and achieving broader gender equality and social justice in the United States and around the world. Brian is a co-author of the 2017 *State of the World's Fathers* and 2016 *State of America's Fathers* reports, the lead author of *The Man Box* study on harmful effects of rigid masculine norms in the U.S., U.K., and Mexico, and a co-author of multiple reports using International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) data. Brian has extensive program and research experience in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East, and is deeply engaged as a sexual violence prevention educator in Minnesota. He holds a bachelor's degree in English from Saint John's University and a master's degree in law and diplomacy from the Fletcher School at Tufts University.

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