

# Unboxing men: Community-centered and Culturally Relevant Approaches to Healthy Relationships and Violence Prevention



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**Land Acknowledgement:** We acknowledge that we are on Indigenous homelands and express our gratitude and appreciation for the Indigenous people who live here and have shared their land and teachings. We are honoured to live and build community on the traditional homelands of the Niitsitapi: the Siksika, Kainai and Piikani; their Treaty 7 cosignatories: the Tsuut'ina and Îyâxe Nakoda Nations; the Métis Nation (MNA Region 3) and those who call Calgary (Mokhinstsis) home.

## Overview and Research Question

### Organization Overview

**Alberta Network of Immigrant Women (ANIW):** ANIW, in collaboration with Alberta Men's Network and the University of Calgary, is funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada to enhance gender equity and well-being. Our community projects are guided by insights from the Alberta Men's Survey, which emphasized the need for men's support in well-being and healthy relationships.

### Men's Well-Being Groups

**Foundational Insights and Community Empowerment:** The Alberta Men's Survey, conducted by AMN and the University of Calgary, indicated that 96% of the men surveyed see a need for men's well-being support, with 66% favoring peer support groups<sup>3</sup>. Today, these groups – now with ANIW – serve diverse communities, including Latino, Bhutanese, Ethiopian, Iranian, Nepalese, and Filipino men, facilitating transformative dialogue on emotional regulation, improved family relationships, and a deeper understanding of the impacts of violence and violence prevention.

**Research Question: What are the men's experiences and stated transformative impacts from the men's well-being groups?**

## Literature Review

Violence against women (VAW) is a pervasive social issue in Canada that transcends socio-cultural, faith, and economic groups.

Men are the primary perpetrators of domestic and gender-based violence (GBV); the **participation and engagement of men** in preventing and ending VAW and all forms of violence is critical.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

In addition to women, girls, and everyone on the gender spectrum, hetero-patriarchal gender norms and expectations have negative impacts on men and boys.<sup>1,6</sup>

Attending to intersectional oppression, childhood/intergenerational trauma, and systemic barriers are part of an overall primary prevention strategy.<sup>8,9</sup>

There is an **absence of services** focused on the prevention of GBV within immigrant and ethnocultural communities in Canada. Meaningful and impactful change approaches must include training and capacity-building efforts to equip ethnocultural communities to implement **culturally relevant** peer-based groups within their own communities and **assist men in accessing services**.<sup>10</sup>

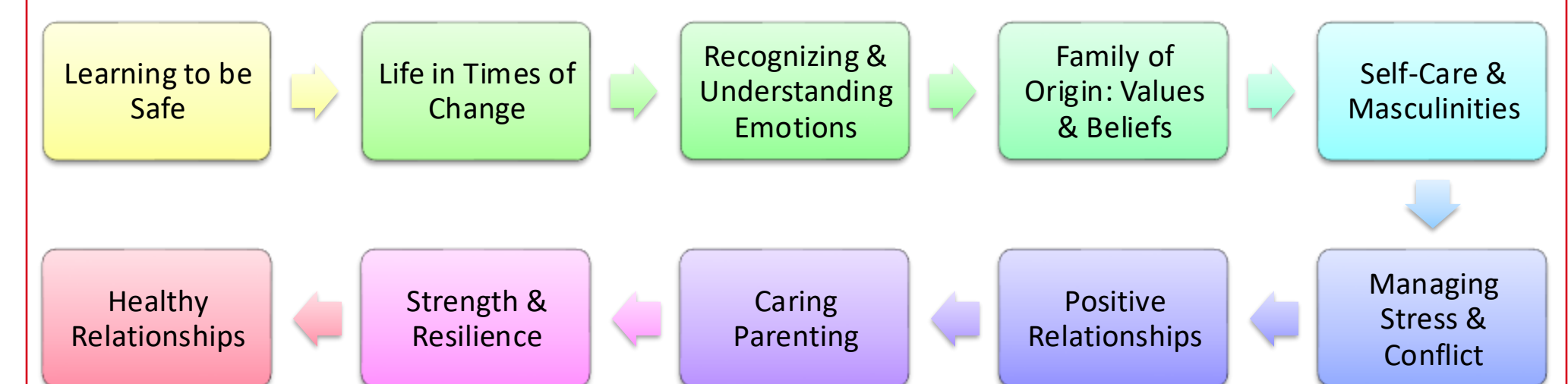
## Project Implementation

**Objective:** To train community-based men leaders from diverse ethnocultural communities in Alberta (Latino, Bhutanese, Ethiopian, Iranian, Nepalese, and Filipino men) to work with other men as trained peer supports and facilitators.

**Theoretical Framework:** Post-Colonial theory and Intersectionality. Postcolonial theory focuses on challenging how common knowledges, social norms, and power relations are prescribed by colonialism,<sup>11,12</sup> while intersectionality centers on the intersecting structural oppressions which construct day-to-day life.<sup>13,14</sup> This theoretical framework allows us to examine ethnoculturally diverse men's well-being within the context of a colonial and globalized world.<sup>15</sup>

**Process:** 10 sessions, 2-3 hours each.

### Session Topics:



## Methodology

Upon completion of the 10<sup>th</sup> session, one focus group was held on Zoom. Men who participated in the well-being group were recruited to participate in the follow-up focus group.

**Thematic Analysis:** thematic analysis delves into qualitative data to identify and interpret patterns or themes, highlighting the complexity of human experiences and the subtle distinctions in situational factors. This method allows researchers to extract deep insights and understand the nuances of participant perspectives effectively.

The preliminary **data analysis** was completed by three members of the research team and was analyzed both thematically. The complete analysis is still in progress.

## Preliminary Findings

All participants across all ethnocultural groups were male-identified, with some in fathering roles, representing diverse professional backgrounds and age ranges. Each community was represented as follows: 8 men from the Nepali group, 7 from the Bhutanese group, 6 from the Ethiopian group, 8 from the Latino group, and 9 from the Filipino group. During the sessions, the men shared various learnings on healthy relationship skills and discussed the personal benefits they gained from participating in the groups. Additionally, they provided recommendations on how future groups should be conducted. From these discussions, five key themes emerged, highlighting the impact and potential improvements for these community-focused well-being groups.

### Theme 1: Mental Health Awareness and Stigma Reduction

Participants highlighted the sessions' role in breaking down the stigma surrounding men's mental health, fostering an environment where open conversations about mental health are normalized and encouraged.

#### Quotes:

- "The content discussed was really good about the men's mental health."
- "It encourages us to discuss the well-being of man; most of the time, we think about well-being when we face health issues."
- "About men's mental health and the importance of opening up, especially in a society that seemingly stigmatizes it."

### Theme 2: Violence and Conflict Management

The sessions were pivotal in educating participants about managing anger, understanding the cycle of violence, and employing conflict resolution strategies, which are key in preventing violence.

#### Quotes:

- "Anger management, controlling ego, very practical lesson for everyday work."
- "Male norms, self-esteem, what stress does to the body, cycle of violence and conflict solution."
- "I have started to not immediately react to any situation."

### Theme 3: Emotional Regulation and Coping Mechanisms

Participants learned and practiced emotional regulation and coping mechanisms, which are essential for mental well-being and preventing negative outcomes like violence or mental health crises.

#### Quotes:

- "Recognizing emotion, body awareness, recognizing self-talk."
- "Proper breathing techniques."
- "I learned some different things which I didn't know before."

### Theme 4: Support Systems and Peer Influence

The well-being groups fostered a supportive community environment where men could learn from and influence each other positively, which is vital in violence prevention and mental health improvement.

#### Quotes:

- "I liked the platform where men could discuss their common issues."
- "Group Discussion."
- "We met and discuss about men roles and responsibility in the family."

### Theme 5: Behavioral Changes Toward Healthier Relationships

Reflecting changes in personal behavior and interactions with others, participants noted improvements in their family and community relationships, critical in violence prevention and promoting mental health.

#### Quotes:

- "Be mindful of the intentions, live every moment as an opportunity to learn, create, be flexible and joyful sharing."
- "It impacted my mood, feeling of safety, and lower stress level after changing my behaviours."
- "I spent my time self-reflecting and replaced my screen times with physical work."

## Implications and Next Steps

This research supports that transformative learning with men is an effective primary approach to addressing violence and promoting well-being.<sup>4</sup>

Men need supports and services that foster their well-being to develop greater self-awareness of how they are enacting their relationships with themselves and others.

A key component of violence prevention is healing work; hence men require these spaces and opportunities to both address and heal from traumatic experiences including migration, racism, and gender oppression. Establishing an environment of healing, support, and the sharing of experiences with other men, are important qualities for the group.

Further, these environments foster spaces for men to discuss and question alternative views and embodiments of masculinity, which the men participants viewed as both beneficial and needed.

Highlighted in the findings was how accountability relates to both self-work (growth, healing) and being responsible in relationships with others. Further discussion and research is needed on how men's programming can prioritize these areas of skill building.

Underscored in these findings is the need for further training to equip diverse ethnocultural community leaders to implement primary prevention peer-based groups for men within their own communities.

### Next Steps for this Project:

- Disseminate the findings through a community brief, digital infographic, two digital stories, and a research paper.
- Collaborate with community partners to support the trained leaders to facilitate the MWBG within their own communities.