# Preventing domestic violence within collectivist cultures: A community-based well-being group for men.

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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 (Mohkinstsis) home.

## Overview and Research Question

Alberta Men's Network (AMN) is a community committed to non-violence, supporting healthy masculinities and gender equity by identifying and working within human rights, feminist, anti-colonial, and anti-racist frameworks.

In 2016, AMN and the University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work designed and implemented the Alberta Men's Survey (AMS) as a violence primary prevention assessment.[1,2]

**Key findings** from over 2000 Alberta men included:

o 96% reported that men "need support for well-being and healthy relationships."[3]

o 66% indicated that peer support groups would be beneficial supports.[3]

These findings served as a guide for the implementation of AMN's projects, including the project of focus, to provide opportunities for peer support and learning through culturally relevant community engagement.

### Research Question:
***What are men's experiences and stated transformative impacts from the Men's Wellbeing Group?***

## 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.[5,6,7]

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

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

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.**[10]
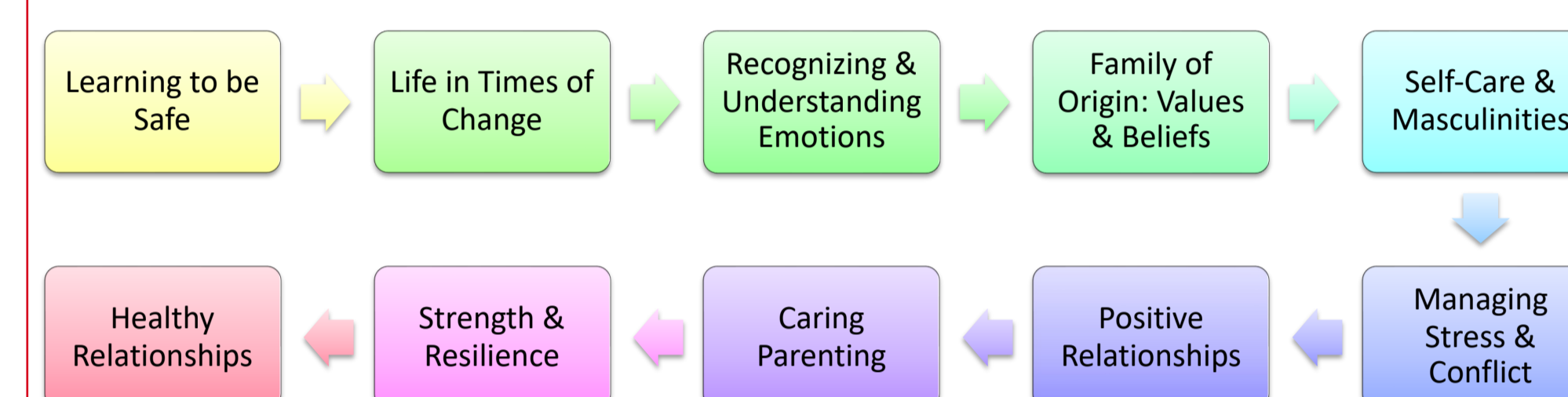
## Project Implementation

**Objective:** To train community-based men leaders from diverse ethnocultural communities in Alberta (Bhutanese, Ethiopian, Filipino, Iranian, Mexican, Peruvian, Mixed-European, Nepalese, Venezuelan) 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,[11,12] while intersectionality centers on the intersecting structural oppressions which construct day-to-day life.[13,14] This theoretical framework allows us to examine ethnoculturally diverse men's well-being within the context of a colonial and globalized world.[15]

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

**Session Topics:**

Learning to be Safe → Life in Times of Change → Recognizing & Understanding Emotions → Family of Origin: Values & Beliefs → Self-Care & Masculinities

Healthy Relationships ← Strength & Resilience ← Caring Parenting ← Positive Relationships ← Managing Stress & Conflict

## Methodology

Upon completion of the 10th session, one focus group was held on Zoom. Men who participated in the well-being group were recruited to participate in the post-training focus group.

Critical narrative inquiry (CNI) was used as the methodology for this study. CNI focuses on storytelling and accounts for complex human situations and fine distinctions that can be made between situational factors within research.[16]

The preliminary **data analysis** was completed by three members of the research team and was analyzed both thematically and through the construction of stories among participants. The complete analysis and member checking with participants is still in process.

## Preliminary Findings

A total of 7 Albertan men from Bhutanese, Ethiopian, Iranian, Peruvian, Mixed-European, Nepalese, and Venezuelan backgrounds attended the final focus group, which was also recorded as a digital story. All participants were male-identified, some in fathering roles, occupying various professional roles, and representing a diverse age range. The men identified and shared several learnings on healthy relationship skills as well as multiple personal benefits that they gained from participating in the group. Included in the evaluation, the men shared their recommendations on how these groups should be hosted in the future. From their insights, **six key themes** emerged.

### Relational Accountability
One of the key learnings articulated by the men was taking accountability for themselves in their relationships with others. This greater sense of responsibility was noted as participants expressed a newer sense of management over their communication with others.

*"Acknowledge my own feelings and respond to them accordingly."*
*"The main learning from this training …how do I produce the words to make (you know) like relationships to others."*
*"I learned that we cannot control the environment, but we can control how we respond to it."*

### Self Care and Well-Being
Men identified the need for self-care and well-being practices in their lives. They commented that self-awareness is important when it comes to inner work including taking responsibility for their emotions.

*"The biggest lesson for me was to be mindful of my thoughts and emotions."*
*"The biggest learning was self-awareness."*
*"I think my biggest learning was to take responsibility for my own well-being."*

### Personal Growth
Men shared that personal growth or the idea of working towards and/or becoming the person that they would like to be through self-work as a key learning and experience. This included the realization of how they viewed masculinity and what drives those views.

*"Recognizing that I have the agency to choose to be honest and vulnerable with myself."*
*"Realize who I am, and it helped recognize my biases."*
*"[The group] helped to like recognize my values, recognize my strength, recognizing my weaknesses."*

### Safe and Supportive Spaces
Men shared that the group provided the necessary nurturing connections to support healthy masculinity. Because safety was established and experienced within a shared space, men felt heard and supported when expressing their feelings.

*"[The group] become a very good network… where we felt supportive to each other by sharing our own experience."*
*"[The group] is a safe space for men to get connected."*
*"Groups like this could really help people learn build empathic connection to develop healthy relationships."*

### Dedicated Time for Healing
The men noted the importance of having access to dedicated spaces for healing where they are supported and can share experiences with other men.

*"This group would be very valuable in my community because… this type of group session will help them understand their past traumas and how to heal them."*
*"A lot of the relationships… are so messed up for immigrants that came here, and they had to really work hard on it… [the group] is very helpful… for managing their stress and …being more aware of their reactions."*
*"Some of the men in my life… could really benefit from… the supports for communication and healthy relationships… to really bring care and kindness and peace into our homes and our community."*

### New Understandings of Masculinity
Men shared that the group allowed them to explore new and alternative understandings of what it means to be a man. The collaborative learning style of the group strengthened the knowledge synthesis and transformative learning of the men through discussions, exchange of experiences, and understandings of masculinities.

*"A safe space for men to get connected to each other to understand what masculinity means to different male-identifying humans."*
*"Young people… receive so many different kind of varying messages… about what it means to be a man… they are not challenged enough… to challenge those ideals."*
*"[The group] is a safe space for men to speak about similar experience, past values, and beliefs of what it means to be a man."*

## Implications and Next Steps

This research supports that transformative learning with men is an effective primary approach to addressing violence and promoting well-being.[4]

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

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