

Men's strategies for dealing with masculine insufficiency more varied than expected

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Previous research has claimed that poor marginalized men tend to gravitate towards compensatory and violent masculinities to deal with their sense of masculine insufficiency. A recent PhD thesis from the University of Gothenburg shows, though, that this is not always the case.

"I find very little evidence that compensatory masculinity is a route that

all men follow to deal with a sense of masculine insufficiency. In fact, compensatory masculine acts are not a resource freely available to all masculinity-challenged men", Chimaraoke Izugbara, author of the thesis, says.

"Several men that I interviewed instead dealt with it by redefining the meaning of being a man and even taking on non-traditional roles."

His study draws on ethnographic data and fieldwork in two slums in Kenyan capital Nairobi. Chimaraoke Izugbara found that, as in many parts of the world, breadwinnerhood is a central feature of masculinity in the slums of Nairobi.

"And it is tenaciously pursued even in the face of its unfeasibility", he says.

Men in the slums of Nairobi are thus clearly operating within the framework of larger patriarchal definition of a 'man'. But Chimaraoke Izugbara also found that men in the slums pursued breadwinner hood in a variety of ways; by socially sanctioned means as well as strategies that, in their contexts, were considered absolutely 'unmasculine'. These strategies allowed some flexibility in the way the men pursued breadwinnerhood, and consequently such 'un-masculine' practices as selling sex to fellow men, pimping one's wife, and accepting to be openly violated by other men, assume new meanings as men seek to assert themselves as men.

Another issue from the study relates to masculinity and community development. The men Chimaraoke Izugbara studied emphasized their own criticality and centrality in the progress of their community. Within this context, prejudiced social conceptions and prejudices, such as homophobia, become important expressions of masculinity among men seeking to show that they need to assert themselves in more masculine

ways to play their roles as community leaders and protectors.

This becomes an obstacle for efforts to develop the poor communities. But work to change their behaviour must seek to comprehend and build on the ways men themselves articulate and understand the issues that they face in their everyday life, Chimaraoke Izugbara concludes.

"The process of making men allies in the global struggle for gender equality and an inclusive social system must start with supporting them to enjoy improved livelihoods and comprehend the beliefs and social forces that motivate their everyday behaviour."

"There is an urgent need for a clearly defined and workable national framework and agenda in Kenya for improving the livelihoods of its poorest and most needy citizens and for the public education of [men](#) and women on issues of gender and equality and to guide work and interventions to foster gender equitable social institutions."

More information: gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/40829?locale=en

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