Original Article

Exploration of Metaperceptions Held by Men Enrolled in Rwanda Men's Resource Centre Programme, Correlates Behaviours and Coping Strategies

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Abstract

Background
Men participating in the Rwanda Men's Resource Centre (RWAMREC) programme, designed to challenge negative masculinity, have exhibited positive shifts in household responsibilities and collaborative decision-making with their wives. However, little was known about how these men believe non-enrolled men perceive them.

Aim
The study aimed to explore the metaperceptions of enrolled men regarding how they are perceived by other men in their community and it investigated strategies employed to overcome these metaperceptions.

Method
Using a qualitative approach, 15 men involved in the RWAMREC programme, selected based on their completion of a couples' curriculum on domestic violence using a gender transformation approach, were interviewed.

Results
The findings indicated that men engaging in traditionally feminine tasks faced societal stigma, being viewed as bewitched or not real men. Despite these challenges, many expressed gratitude for the positive impact on family dynamics. The majority of enrolled males were criticized and regarded as not embodying true masculinity; nonetheless, some concealed their involvement in certain tasks, and a few discontinued providing care after the being aggressed by the men who tried to protect their threatened masculinity.

Conclusion
The study concludes that the metaperceptions and defensive reactions of men protecting their threatened manhood may hinder the programme's goal of fostering positive masculinity adoption. To sustain the intervention across diverse organizations, positive masculinity promotion has to be included in the package provided to friends of family volunteers.

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Introduction

Women are often perceived as emotionally and psychologically immature, relegated to roles of emotional support and child-rearing within a patriarchal culture. In contrast, men are bestowed with attributes of intelligence, power, and superiority.[1] This patriarchal manifestation varies across cultures, dominating both public and private spheres, with men holding power while women are predominantly powerless, especially in public domains.[2]

Notably, for men, fulfilling the role of a successful breadwinner is a key resource in establishing their manhood [3]. Deviation from gender norms puts men at risk of societal stigma and marginalization.[4] The status of a man in both family and society is intricately tied to his employment, with his dominance potentially compromised in the absence of it.[5]

The emotional impact of income disparities within marital relationships is evident, with men experiencing feelings of unworthiness when their earnings fall below those of their spouses.[6] Traditionally masculine individuals face heightened marital conflicts and lower marital quality when confronted with increasing financial disparities.[6] Despite evolving perceptions of masculinity, the role of the breadwinner and provider remains central to hegemonic masculinity. [5,7]

As we delve into the dynamics of gender roles, an expanding body of research highlights the significance of masculinity in understanding tensions between genders and reshaping patriarchal structures. While feminist studies historically focused on women's challenges and strategies for conflict resolution and activities that increase awareness of womanhood, it is argued that there is a gap in exploring how gender activities, such as masculinity, contribute to women's submission.[5]

In psychological research, masculinity is often framed as supportive of the prevailing masculine ideology,[8] encompassing "ideas and beliefs that defend gender scripts and relations" within specific cultures.[9] Thus, societal norms, intimately linked with patriarchal systems, delineate the criteria for being a recognized and authentic man within a community. This establishes the context for understanding the intricate relationship between masculinity and patriarchal structures in societies.

Men exhibit a heightened sensitivity to societal perceptions of their "maleness" or "manhood," often responding vehemently to threats and insults challenging their adherence to established gender norms. [10,11] The concept that obtaining social status is actively pursued rather than passively assigned is intrinsic to the vigilance associated with masculinity, supported by extensive research.[10,11] Despite the evolution of cultural performances of masculinity over time and across various spaces, the underlying anxious structure of manhood remains a constant. This anxiety stems from the evidence-based social framework that necessitates continual proof to maintain one's identity as a man, even at the risk of losing it.[11,12]

The enduring nature of the anxious and insecure social structure of manhood across time and contexts has been highlighted. The perpetual discomfort prompts a continuous pursuit of achievement as a coping mechanism.[12] This led to the conceptualization of "precarious manhood" (PM) – a state of uncertainty, nervousness, and vulnerability associated with masculinity. Vandello and colleagues are particularly interested in understanding how individuals define masculinity and adjust their behaviour based on this definition.[12] Due to the precarious nature of manhood status, men are hyper-aware of potential threats and, as a result, engage in specific remedial or compensatory actions. [13,14]

A body of research indicates that men resort to various behaviours when their masculine identity is challenged. These include the use of violence and aggression;[15] negative attitudes toward gay men;[16] a greater propensity for financial risk-taking;[17] manifestation of sexual prejudice;[18] elevated stress levels measured by cortisol levels;[19] a decrease in behaviours seeking assistance;[17] and reduced support for gender equality.[20]

When faced with the prospect of performing stereotypically feminine chores in public, men often experience heightened thoughts of aggression.[12,15] This inclination to aggression is further evident when their roles as protectors, decision-makers, or breadwinners are perceived to be in jeopardy or under threat.[6,21,22] An experimental study revealed that men commonly associate job loss with a diminished perception of their their manhood (22). Additionally, men experience increased anxiety and a heightened sense of threat due to metaperceptions, or concerns about how others might perceive their unemployment. [17,19]

The term "metaperception" encapsulates an individual's perception of how others perceive them.[23] Accurate metaperceptions, or views and insights into how others perceived them, play a pivotal role in knowing their place in society, navigating societal dynamics, shaping attitudes, and influencing behaviour.[24–27]

Individuals respond diversely to "metastereotypes". Some opt for ingratiating behaviour, downplaying actions reinforcing these stereotypes. Others choose self-promotion, continuing behaviours to highlight achievements and counteract negative stereotypes. Yet, some resort to intimidation, employing forceful or aggressive actions to be perceived as powerful by others.[28]

In Rwanda, numerous gender transformation programmes involving men have been implemented, notably by RWAMREC.

Initiatives like Men Care Bandebereho and Indashyikirwa aim to foster positive masculinity and challenge internalized gender norms hindering the progress toward gender equality. This study focuses on the Indashyikirwa Programme, comprising a 16-session couples' curriculum and the creation of women's "safe spaces". The programme has evolved to include community outreach, involving trained activists, and the cultivation of an enabling environment through the engagement of key opinion leaders.[29,30]

A longitudinal evaluation of the couples' programme at the 12- and 24-months follow-up revealed positive outcomes. Participating couples reported reduced economic, sexual, emotional, and physical intimate partner violence (IPV), improved communication, enhanced better conflict management, fewer depressive symptoms, better overall health, and diminished attitudes supportive of wife beating compared to the control group.[30] Notably, males exhibited transformative behaviour, actively supporting their wives with domestic chores, participating in prenatal visits, and even carrying infants on their backs.[31] Despite these encouraging results, an important facet that remains unexplored is the men's metaperceptions held by the men involved in RWAMREC Programme about how other non-enrolled men in their community saw them or how they felt about men who performed stereotypically feminine duties. Equally, the strategies employed by these men to overcome any negative metaperceptions were still unexplored.

General Objectives

Explore the meta-perceptions held by the men involved in RWAMREC Programme about how they thought other men in their neighbourhood perceive them and the strategies they use to overcome those metaperceptions.

Specific Objectives

- Explore metaperceptions, the views of men involved in RWAMREC Programme on how other men in their neighbourhood perceive them.

-Explore the behaviour reponses of non-enrolled men in their   neighbourhood towards masculinity identity threat.
- Document the strategies used by men involved in RWAMREC Programme for dealing with these metaperceptions

Research questions
1. Is it possible that the men who adopt feminine tendencies to often face repercussions for violating prescriptive gender norms as it is the case for women who adopt masculine tendencies?.[32–34]
2. Can the backlash effect occur when men engage in feminine behaviours and can they be accused of not fulfilling gender prescriptions/judged as less likeable or less hirable in comparison to their female counterparts, as it is the case for women?
3. What are the meta-stereotypes attributed to the men who accomplish household task?
4. What are the reactions of non-enrolled men towards masculinity identity threat?
5. How these metastereotpes can affect men's advancement in promoting positive masculinity?
6. What are the strategies to deal with metaperceptions?

Method

Study setting

The study was carried out in Kamonyi District in the Southern Province, Rwanda. Kamonyi district is one of the sites where RWAMREC implemented the programme with couples on preventing domestic violence.

Study design and population
This study employed qualitative research methods with 15 men involved in RWAMREC couple training to explore their views on the perceptions on how other men in their neighbourhood perceive them and the strategies used for dealing with these metaperception.

Sampling and recruitment of participants
The purposive sampling was used to select men in Kamonyi were over the age of 21

years (at the time of data collection), the legally accepted age for marriage in Rwanda. These men had to have been involved in the gender-transformative couples' intervention of RWAMREC programme. Participants were recruited with the help of the coordinators of RWAMREC in the district. Each participant was given a code and the researcher collected the data until no new information emerged.

Data collection
The researcher approached the couples who were involved in the in the gender-transformative couples' intervention on ending domestic violence and informed them about the study and the inclusion criteria. The men who accepted to participate in the research were invited to the first meeting facilitated by the staff of RWAMREC. Potential participants were contacted and they came for a meeting and interview which took place at the RWAMREC office in Kamonyi. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. A semi-structured interview guide that included open ended questions was conducted with men involved in gender transformative programme to elicit views from the interviewees about four aspects: 1) metapercetions on how other men in their neighbourhood perceive them after joining the RWAMREC programe. 2) behaviour responses of non-enrolled men towards men who carried out stereotypically feminine tasks 3) The strategies used for dealing with these metaperception

Data management and analysis
Classic thematic analysis was used for data analysis. All of the interviews were held in Kinyarwanda and were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. The audio recordings were translated from Kinyarwanda to English and transcribed verbatim before being analyzed. Because three of the research team's members are bilingual in both English and Kinyarwanda, this helped to ensure that translations were accurate. Each team member individually reviewed the transcripts that were chosen and matched to the research objective.

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At the first analysis team meeting, the discussion of categorizing the transcripts according to the emergent themes was covered. Before a second meeting to examine additional potential themes, team members individually reviewed the transcripts. The themes that arose from the interviews were categorized and compared to the body of literature on gender metaperception, behaviour response to masculinity identity threat and impression management strategies to deal with metaperception. We created various concepts and categories from the data using thematic analysis: 1) metapercetions on how other men in their neighbourhood perceived them regarding the aspects like the manhood, decision-maker status, breadwinner status, household chore and care activities; 2) behaviour responses of non-enrolled men towards masculinity identity threat examining responses such as aggressiveness, distancing oneself, restricting access to male privileges, seeking appreciation, and searching for guidance; 3) the strategies used for dealing with these metaperception as ingratiating themselves, downplaying the behaviours that support these metastereotypes, self-promoting, continuing to act in the same ways to draw attention to their accomplishments and counteract negative stereotypes, intimidating for being perceived as powerful. Throughout our analysis, we have incorporated direct quotes where applicable to preserve the authenticity and richness of the participants' experiences.

Ethical considerations

Permission and approval letter to conduct the research was obtained from officials at the University of VanHall Larenstein University, and the executive Director of RWAMREC. Each participant gave his consent. They received guarantees of privacy, anonymity, and the right to resign from the study at any time without adverse consequences. The researcher, met with men and explained the purpose of the study and those who were interested were invited to participate in the study after answering the questions that arose concerning implications to participants on taking part in the research, those who accepted to participate signed a consent form and together with the researcher arranged for interview date and location.

Results

Characteristics of the study participants

Fifteen (15) married men aged 23 to 49 took part in the RWAMREC programme's gender-transformative couples' intervention. The participants' child count ranged from two to five. Ten participants reported to have completed six years of primary education level, and five secondary education. The primary economic activity of ten participants was farming, but five had a paid job or were skilled craftspeople.

Themes that emerged from the analysis of the data

1. Metapercetions of men engaged in Rwamrec Programme

The metaperceptions held by men engaged in RWAMREC Programme on how other men in their neighbourhood perceived them were summarized in two metaperceptions. The negative metaperceptions regarding manhood, decision-maker status, breadwinner status, household chore and care activities, and the positive metaperceptions.

Negative metaperceptions

Household chores, care activities accomplishment and manhood

Participants expressed a prevalent belief that men who were not actively engaged in the RWAMREC programme perceived them as bewitched individuals, questioning their authenticity as genuine men. Notably, those enrolled in RWAMREC's male involvement programme faced a unique challenge in being regarded as "real" Rwandan men. This perception stemmed from their altered roles within the household, specifically concerning maternal and newborn care. One participant candidly shared that, following their training with RWAMREC, a shift occurred in their responsibilities,

encompassing active participation in household duties. However, this transformation was met with skepticism from their peers who had not undergone similar training. The participant revealed a prevailing sentiment among non-participants that such involvement in domestic responsibilities ran counter traditional norms, causing them to be viewed as unconventional or not conforming to the conventional Rwandan masculine identity. *"I think my peer colleagues who join the RWAMREC Programme didn't perceive me as real man because they see me carrying the baby on my back. I believe that they perceive me as as someone who has been influenced or 'brainwashed' by the training I underwent, which they think has somehow eroded my traditional masculinity".(P15)*

Participants conveyed that following their training with RWAMREC, they began accompanying their wives to antenatal care visits. However, they perceived that this newly found involvement was not positively received by some men within their communities. Those who had not enrolled in the RWAMREC programme seemed to lack an understanding of the significance of attending antenatal care and other maternal-child health-related programmes, such as immunization. *"I think, our peer males who were not enrolled in the RWAMREC programme perceive me as useless man (imburamukoro) simply because I accompany my wife to antenatal care. It seems they view my involvement as a sign of having nothing else to do". (P12)*

Another participant revealed that he thought that other men consider me as men under women's vassalage. *"I think that the man who are not enrolled in the programme perceive me as a men under women vassalage because I accompany my wife everywhere, give her the money for transport. I think they perceived me as a man who spends his time behind his wife wirirwa mu ngutiya z'abagore". (P1)* For other participants, some duties performed by men enrolled in gender-transformative couples' intervention of RWAMREC were not appreciated

by males not enrolled in the programme. For instance, one participant recounted an experience of a colleague involved in the Rwamrec programme shortly after his wife had given birth, washed both her clothes and the baby's. This act wasn't well-received by men outside the programme.. *"I heard that men who weren't part of the programme mocked him and labeled him as bewitched because he was washing a baby's clothes (ibyahi)". (P13)*

Power and decision maker status

Some participants reflected on the transformations they underwent after receiving training on domestic violence prevention, specifically designed for couples in local communities within Kamonyi District. As a result of this training, these men began consulting and involving their partners in decision-making processes. However, this positive shift in behaviour led to the creation of different perception among other men who were not enrolled in the RWAMREC programme. They were viewed as men dominated in household decision-making, seemingly commanded by their wives. However, the change, intended to foster healthier relationships, inadvertently became a point of scrutiny and potential misunderstanding among their peers. *"I think other peer neighbour males perceive me as "**inganzwa**", one commanded by his wife whom they consider as **igishegabo** (women who behave like men and command their husbands in everything), a shameful man because I consult my wife before deciding on anything". (P 7)*

Another participant pointed out that, according to men not engaged in the RWAMREC programme, there are situations where a man is expected to make decisions independently, while in other cases, women may be involved. The participant expressed the perception that others view him as someone who has compromised his masculinity because of discussions he engages in with his wife regarding decisions such as purchasing baby clothes, meal planning, and vaccinations, which are matters often considered as women's affairs.

This divergence from traditional gender roles seems to lead to a perceived loss of masculinity by those outside the RWAMREC programme. *"I think they perceive me as someone who lost his masculinity due to discussion I had with my wife about baby clothes to buy, the food, vaccination while this is considered as women affairs".* (P14)

Bread winner status

Financial support holds a crucial role in maintaining men's roles as family providers. One participant shared a challenging period when he, employed as a construction worker (umufundi), faced unemployment. During this difficult time, his wife, working as a tailor, became the main breadwinner. She financially supported the family, purchasing the baby's clothes, covering health insurance costs, and ensuring their needs were met. Despite the unconventional shift in financial responsibilities, the participant credits the training provided by RWAMREC on sharing responsibilities and mutual support. This training played a pivotal role in helping the couple navigate these challenges without succumbing to family conflicts, fostering a collaborative approach in overcoming difficulties together. However he felt that the non-enrolled men perceived him as irresponsible man due to unconventional shift in financial responsibilities, *"He thinks that the male neighbours who were not enrolled in the RWAMREC programme perceive me as an irresponsible man, a person who can't gain the bread for his family, **a useless** 'man who is fed by and lives depends on the sweat of a woman"*(P1)

In such a case, a man is no longer a breadwinner, an income earners and a financial provider. He depends financially on his wife. *"I believe that I am perceived as someone who doesn't fulfill the masculine attributes of a real man and traditionally, a man who did not financially earn lost his manhood in the Rwandan culture".* (P10)

Positive metaperceptions

The majority of participants emphasized that there is a notable group of men who appreciate those involved in the RWAMREC programme, observing firsthand how men enrolled in the initiative successfully navigated and overcame domestic violence. Some curious individuals approached those enrolled, seeking insights into the positive changes witnessed within their families.

An interviewee shared that once he was told by a neighbour the following: *"I think some male neighbour perceive me as role model and even some asked me how they could join the programme".* (P 5)

Furthermore, another participant conveyed that community members acknowledged the positive transformations within his household. A friend remarked: *"I think also that most male in surrounding area appreciate me and perceive me as a graduated person from lower to superior level of economic category".* (P1, 3, 5, 6, 12, 8, 9,14)

This recognition reflects the broader impact of the RWAMREC programme in not only fostering positive change within individual families but also inspiring and garnering respect from the community at large.

2. Behaviour responses of the non-enrolled to the manhood threat

Men are vigilant to threats to their masculinity because they threaten to undermine their hard-won societal status, which is made precarious by manhood status.[22] As a result, they take certain corrective or compensatory measures.[12,14]

2.1. Agressivity

Aggressiveness, blame, and a warning manifestation often emerge when men feel their masculine identity is under threat, particularly in situations where they are confronted with tasks stereotypically associated with femininity, especially when observed by an audience, as put by one participant: *"We came to ask you as your friends to never carry your baby on your back because, according to societal norms, this is considered a woman's duty. We are not happy to hear peer males saying that you are no longer a real man, you have been bewitched by your wife".* (P15)

Blame and warning were also evident from other males not enrolled in the RWAMREC Programme. One participant recounted a conversation with a former friend who explicitly told him that he was no longer a real man, using these words: *"I don't understand what happened to you. You are no longer the real man I used to know, my former friend. You have been brainwashed through the training you received that took away your real masculinity".* *(P12)*

The respondents emphasized that, according to some men not involved in the RWAMREC programme, there are situations where a man is expected to make decisions alone, while in other cases, women may be involved. For instance, one participant recalled a conversation with two males, where one expressed *"I don't understand why you have to consult your wife before selling a caw. You are a chief of your family you have to decide for your wife. Otherwise you are not a real man. (P 7)*

And another man who was part of the conversation added, *"It's not bad to consult your wife before taking a decision but it is deplorable having a discussion with your wife about the women's business. Discussing with your wife about baby clothes to buy, the food, vaccination. How come a man discusses these women business with a wife before taking a decision? If it was about selling a land, I could understand".* *(P13)*

2.2. Distancing and privating him from "the male privileges"
Distancing, in this context, appears to refer to the act of creating distance or separation from individuals who deviate from traditional gender norms, particularly in terms of male privilege. The quoted statement suggests that when a man engages in activities traditionally associated with women, such as washing clothes, he may be perceived as not conforming to traditional masculine norms. This non-conformity can lead to social consequences, such as being denied the privilege of speaking or participating in certain male-dominated spaces as expressed by one participant, *"A man like you who washes the wife's clothes and the baby's clothes (ibyahi) is not a real man.*

I can't invite someone like you in my party or when I made traditional alcohol drink. You shamed us, you really shouldn't sit where other men are". *(P12)*
The example of not inviting someone to a party or excluding them from traditional activities like making alcohol suggests a form of social punishment or exclusion. The example of not inviting someone to a party or excluding them from traditional activities like making alcohol suggests a form of social punishment or exclusion. This exclusion seems to be a response to the perceived threat to traditional gender roles.
One of the participants said *"A man like you who washes the wife and the baby's clothes (ibyahi) is not a real man and can't be given the floor among other men".* *(P 6)*
These societal expectations can have a significant impact on individuals who do not conform to traditional gender roles, leading to feelings of isolation and exclusion.

Appreciation and seeking for guidance
A large number of our neighbours who didn't participate in the RWAMREC's training appreciate the transformation we made, some of them approached us and started by apologizing, *"There is no longer conflict and intimate partner violence in your family. You are now a family model. I apologize for treating you as inganzwa [a man who has no say in his own household] and I would like to ask you how I can join your programme".* *(P7)*

Another participant mentioned that community members appreciated the development in his household. A friend told him, *"I was surprised by your journey. The way you are graduating from bottom to superior level of economic category. I really appreciate your family and I am also planning to join the next intake of your programme with my wife".* *(P9)*
In the same context, another participant was told the following by someone from his village, *"I regret why I refused to join the programme when I realize that your family has improved and become a role model in our village. I appreciate your family and I'd like you to come give testimony to my family and share with us your secret".* *(P11)*

This feedback suggests that the couples training programme is making a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals and the community as a whole. It highlights the potential for such programmes to not only address immediate issues within relationships but also contribute to broader societal change by challenging harmful norms and promoting healthier, more equitable relationships.

3.The strategies used by men enrolled in RWAMREC programme for dealing with the metaperception

Some studies showthat men who feminine tendencies and caring behaviour face repercussions for violating prescriptive gender norms and held some metaperceptions. This party shows how the men who were enrolled in the RWAMREC Programme dealt with the metaperceptions.

3.1.Ingratiating themselves

One man has been excessively being criticized and treated as a no real man by his peer who did not benefit from the programme and tried to downplay the behaviours that support these metastereotypes,
"I find a solution for those who laughed at me while I continue to please my wife and help her I have changed a little. Now I wash the clothes of the baby in the house. When I put my baby on my back I remain in the house". (P13)

Another participant testified also changing some behaviour in the same way,
"I decided to let my wife go first to vaccination or antenatal care and then I join her later for escaping the people who can see my accompanying her wife".
Others stopped to perform the care duties,
"I stopped to perform the feminists' duties reserved to the women. As a wife, I told her that she has to organize herself and finish the household duties because these are the responsabilities of women. I'm not going to be a fairy tale class (iciro ry'Imigani)". (P10)

3.2. Self-promoting

Some participant dealth with the metaperceptions by continuing to act in the same ways to draw attention to their accomplishments and counteract negative stereotypes,*"I am are not discouraged to continue to show them that I am better than them, how since I joined the programme I stopped drinking and now I consult with my wife and we are economical improving and graduate to a superior level".(P7)*

Another one said,
"I keep showing them the changes and transformation in my family. Now my family is peaceful and I don't fight with my wife. It's all safe and now I have time to talk with my children and they don't see me and hiding themeselves anymore. Now my wife is a member of the women cooperative and I allow her and the family benefit from this participation". (P10, 9, 6)

3.3 Intimidation

Some participants behave forcefully or aggressively to be viewed by others as powerful; *"I know the benefits I get from being involved in the RWAMREC Programme. I've made progress and I'm nowhere near you at all. I am economically very far from you. I am not in your cheap category. I am warning you, don't come to my house again to insult me, I won't ask for anything from you. Respect each other". (P12)*

3.3.Distanciation with some people

It's unfortunate to hear about individuals facing judgment and ridicule from their male peers. The decision of some people to distance themselves from those who mock or belittle them, as expressed by one individual, reflects a commitment to maintaining support to gender equality. Here's a rephrased version, *"I've chosen not to engage and get along with those who mock me and belittle my choices. I've severed ties with individuals who came to my house and labeled me as no longer a real man, calling me 'inganzwa'. I prioritize relationships with people who recognize my capabilities and view me as a role model. It's with these individuals that I choose to maintainconnections and share mutual support".(P14, 15)*

Discussion

The current study delves into an exploration of metaperceptions among men engaged in the RWAMREC Programme. Specifically, the research examines the metaperceptions that men participating in the RWAMREC Programme held about how non-enrolled men perceived them. Additionally, the study investigates the impact of these metaperceptions on the progress of men in fostering positive masculinity, as well as the coping mechanisms employed to navigate these perceptions.

As expected, the results from the study reveal a spectrum of metaperceptions held by participants in the RWAMREC Programme concerning how non-enrolled men perceive them. On the positive end, a majority of participants view themselves as role models who can introduce their peers to the programme and offer valuable advice. Notably, these participants have observed positive outcomes within their families, such as a reduction in conflicts and economic progress, attributed to their involvement in the RWAMREC Programme.

However, a subset of participants conveyed less favorable metaperceptions, highlighting the persistence of deeply ingrained gender stereotypes. These stereotypes, as established in previous research, encompass socially shared beliefs about the expected qualities of males and females.[35] For men, societal expectations often center around agentic qualities such as dominance, competitiveness, and achievement orientation;[36–38] Conversely, women are often expected to exhibit communal attributes like kindness, nurturing, and understanding.[39–42]

The study findings revealed that men participating in the RWAMREC programme faced social stigma, being perceived as "not real men" (inganzwa). This perception arose from their engagement in household chores, caregiving activities, washing baby clothes,and accompanying their wives to antenatal care and vaccination sessions.

Moreover, their involvement in decision-making processes with their wives contributed to this perception. Another participant he had no job was labelled as useless man who relies on a woman's hard work and dedication for his sustenance and livelihood because. This exemplifies how societal norms and expectations around gender roles can impact men's perceived masculinity. This aligns with existing research that suggests men may feel a heightened awareness of potential gender role transgressions, particularly concerning their employment status.[18]

The study also touched upon the phenomenon of metaperceptions, emphasizing how men, more may hold biased opinions about societal expectations related to masculinity. Men, but not women, exaggerated the disapproval of their peers when they did not react strongly enough to a personal affront. [12] Interestingly, these metaperceptions were found to support the actions t of a few unenrolled men against the men who enrolled in the RWAMREC Programme because of the stereotypically feminine chores they performed in public, which endangered their masculine identity. This threatened the enrolled men's masculine identity and societal status, which was already precarious due to traditional notions of manhood.[22] In response to the perceived threat to their masculinity, some non-enrolled men reacted aggressively towards those benefiting from the RWAMREC programme.[14,15]

The aggression manifested in attempts to force them to abandon feminine tasks. Others distanced themselves from these men, and some even willingly subjected themselves to the deprivation of male privileges, such as speaking in public. These behaviours illustrate the complex dynamics and challenges faced by men seeking to redefine traditional gender roles within the context of the RWAMREC programme.

As a result, it is theorized that males experiencing elevated levels of masculine gender role stress may display heightened

anger or aggression in situations that challenge traditional male gender norms, such as interacting with gay individuals. Moreover, witnessing deviations from these norms may lead individuals to target gay men as a means of upholding and enforcing gender expectations.[43]

This aligns with previous research demonstrating that men resort to violence and aggression to reaffirm their threatened status, harbor negative attitudes toward gay men;[16] perceive a loss in their gender status;[17] a), exhibit a greater willingness to take financial risks;[44] engage in discrimination against sexual minorities;[18] experience elevated cortisol levels (stress);[19] reduce behaviours involving seeking assistance;[17] and and diminish support for gender equality.[20] Additionally, some non-enrolled men expressed appreciation for families participating in the RWAMREC Programme, actively seeking guidance, and requesting introduction in the programme. This positive response is attributed to reported family harmony and economic progress among those involved in the RWAMREC Programme.

Individuals tend to heighten their self-consciousness regarding their appearance to others or how they think they are perceived by an outgroup when metastereotypes are triggered.[45–47] In the current study, participants who held negative metastereotypes concerted efforts to manage their impressions and address these metaperceptions.

The results revealed that some participants employed ingratiation as a tactic, striving to downplay actions reinforcing metastereotypes. Others opted for self-promotion, maintaining consistent behaviours to dispel unfavorable perceptions and underscore their achievements. This supports the notion that women who are in the educational fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM),

who were more aware of how other people perceived them, were inclined to counteract low warmth metastereotypes through actions like ingratiating and self-promotion. In contrast, women less aware of metastereotypes tended to align with their own metastereotypes. Notably, ingratiation correlated positively with warmer metastereotypes only among STEM women lacking awareness of their metastereotypes. [28]

Alternatively, some participants resorted to intimidation, displaying forceful or aggressive behaviour to programme an image of power. This reaction is in line with earlier research findings demonstrating that men often resort to violence and aggression to assert their threatened status. [16] Others choose to distancing themselves from male peers they thought treated them as inganzwa. Surprisingly, the phenomenon of distanciation was not anticipated and does not fall within the described impression management strategies outlined by two authors[28]. Nevertheless, distanciation proves beneficial for criticized individuals in upholding their sense of masculinity while maintaining their dedication to supporting gender equality. Moreover, distanciation emerges as a coping mechanism employed by Rwandese men to navigate negative metaperceptions that challenge their status of manhood.

It's worth noting that men, despite engaging in feminine duties, continued performing masculine tasks. However, unlike STEM women, this did not serve as a solution to the backlash effect. For STEM women, the backlash effect could be mitigated when they demonstrated behaviours that simultaneously showcased competence and warmth.[32]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study revealed a predominantly positive metaperception among participants regarding how they thought they were perceived by non-enrolled men. However, a subset of enrolled

men who held negative metaperceptions, experiencing aggression, insults, and discouragement for deviating from traditional gender roles, specifically in terms of household duties and wife involvement in decision-making.

In response to these negative metaperceptions, some participants attempted to conceal themselves while performing household duties, while one individual reverted to adopting negative masculinity traits. Such reactions could potentially impede the sustainability of gender transformation initiatives, hindering the positive adoption of masculinity and discouraging individuals from engaging in the transformative process.

To enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of gender transformation programmes, it is imperative to address and counteract negative metaperceptions. This may involve incorporating positive masculinity promotion into the broader framework of family and community initiatives. The positive masculinity promotion has to be added to the package of friends of family' 'inshuti z'umuryango' volunteers. By doing so, interventions can foster a supportive environment for positive masculinity adoption and contribute to the overall success of gender transformation efforts across diverse organizations and community settings.

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