

AWARE Chief Proposes Reviewing NS to Eliminate Toxic Masculinity & Lessen Gender Inequality

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Aiya, man up, lah!

*Why are you scared? Are you a p*ssy?*

Where's the Febreze?

Walk by a basic military training centre on any given day and you're bound to hear some form of the above three phrases around 23 times an hour.

There's no denying that there's a certain culture in national service (NS) which encourages toxic masculinity.

Now, one woman thinks it's finally time to change things.

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Reviewing NS may help put an end to the toxic practices which warps men's understanding of what it means to be a man, the executive director of the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) Corinna Lim [said](#).

Ms Lim was speaking at the third lecture of this year's Institute of Policy Studies-Nathan Lecture Series yesterday (24 May).

In her speech, Ms Lim talked about the preconceived notions many of us have about masculinity, and how some prevalent beliefs among young people have affected gender equality.

As for reviewing NS, Ms Lim proposed the following amendments to not only eliminate practices which promote toxic masculinity, but also to attain gender equality:

1. Start conscripting women for national service
2. Address the culture of "hyper-masculinity" in basic military training

If you're a man and sneering at the term "hyper-masculinity" right now, you should know that it was actually the men who Ms Lim spoke to who described NS as a "hyper-masculine experience."

She gave the example of blanket parties, in which a soldier who is deemed the weakest link or disliked by other soldiers is covered with a blanket and beaten up.

I don't know of any sane human being who thinks this is a completely fine thing to do.

Ms Lim said that while NS is designed to toughen up our boys and build bonds across ethnic and class divides, there are some aspects which bring out the more negative aspects of masculinity. This includes a homophobic and misogynistic culture that play a part in creating a toxic environment.

“Ultimately, we should make national service totally gender-neutral so that everyone, regardless of gender, can opt for two years military, police, civil defence, community or healthcare, and whatever other total defence areas that need people,” she said.

“The equal participation of women in national service will automatically make national service less masculine.”

Move Away From Abstinence-Only Sex Education

Ms Lim also suggested that moving away from abstinence-only sex education in schools could help us in our quest for gender equality.

This new sex education can focus on consent, respect, and healthy relationships. She also suggested establishing men’s support centres that offer coaching and support groups.

Unbeknownst to some, feelings of toxic masculinity can often be expressed in violent ways. Boys who were pressured to conform to masculine norms were four times more likely to commit violence against others, Ms Lim said.

And while more women suffer depression than men, the rate of suicide for men is double that of women—a statistic that has been reported in other countries as well.

What’s more, 83% of drug abusers and 90% of prison inmates were men, according to official data last year.

“If we are to prevent or reduce gender violence, we must engage men and boys and also work to promote positive masculinity norms,” she said.