

Increased violence and suicidal thoughts characterized in study of men

October 16 2018



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An Australian first study involving 1000 men aged 18 to 30 has found those who conform to traditional definitions of manhood – dubbed 'the man box' – are twice as likely to consider suicide and seven times more likely to be violent towards others.

The Man Box: A study on being a young man in Australia was undertaken by The Men's Project with the support of QUT's Associate Professor Michael Flood.

Professor Flood, who co-authored the study report, is an internationally recognised researcher on men, masculinities, and violence prevention. He is an ARC Future Fellow with QUT's School of Justice.

He said the study revealed the dangers of "toxic masculinity" for men and those around them.

The study defines "The Man Box" as a set of societal beliefs that place pressure on men to be a certain way – like being tough, not showing emotions, being the breadwinner, using violence to solve problems, and having many sexual partners.

Some men are boxed into the stereotypes of being "a real man" (about 30 percent of those surveyed endorsed most of the Man Box 'rules'), and others are outside the box.

And there are remarkable health differences between the two groups.

"This is the first major Australian survey to map ideals of masculinity among [young men](#), commissioned as part of the Jesuit Social Services' Men's Project, which is dedicated to helping boys and men live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives," Professor Flood said.

"According to our survey, young men in the "Man Box" were more likely than other men to have poor mental health (including feeling depressed, hopeless or suicidal), to seek help from only a narrow range of sources, and to be involved in binge drinking and traffic accidents.

"This accords with a large number of other studies that have found men

who endorse dominant ideals of masculinity are more likely than other men to have greater health risks and engage in poor behaviours. They are more likely to consider [suicide](#), drink excessively, take risks at work and drive dangerously."

Some of the key findings are below.

Actions and Thoughts	Inside the Man Box	Outside the Man Box
Had thoughts about suicide in past 2 weeks	44 percent	22 percent
Been drunk once a month or more	31 percent	22 percent
Perpetrated physical bullying & violence in past month	47 percent	7 percent
Made sexual comments to a female they didn't know, in public or online, in past month	46 percent	7 percent
Experienced physical bullying & violence in past month	52 percent	15 percent
Been involved in a car accident in the past year	38 percent	11 percent

Professor Flood said the survey showed young men were still greatly influenced by traditional messages of what it meant to be a man.

"For example, young men were particularly likely to agree with statements that society expects men to act strong (69 percent), fight back when pushed (60 percent) and never say no to sex (56 percent)," he said.

"However, some traditional ideals seem to be dropping away. Few young men agreed that society tells them they should use violence to get respect (35 percent), straight men should shun gay men as friends (36 percent), boys shouldn't learn how to cook and clean (38 percent), and men shouldn't do household chores (39 percent)."

The report [recommends](#) the promotion of positive alternatives to the Man Box by organisations that work with men and boys, by the government, and by families and communities.

In particular, it urges government bodies to include these positive alternatives in their messages relating to mental health, road safety, alcohol harm reduction, crime and [violence prevention](#), and family [violence prevention](#).

The Men's Project has also urged all members of the community to help boys and men break free of the Man Box by thinking about the expectations, attitudes and behaviours they communicate to their sons, brothers, mates and partners.

More information: The Man Box: A study on being a young man in Australia. jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/...man-in-Australia.pdf

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

Citation: Increased violence and suicidal thoughts characterized in study of men (2018, October 16) retrieved 13 July 2023 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-10-violence-suicidal-thoughts-characterized-men.html>

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