

What is the impact of the Man Box attitudes on young Australian men's behaviours and well-being?

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Encourage greater public discussion to challenge societal pressures of the Man Box rules.

We must look at societal pressure to act a certain way as a man, paying attention to the characteristics of specific contexts, communities and cultures. As part of this work, we must highlight that men's personal endorsement of traditional masculine norms is lower than the pressure they perceive from society to conform to these norms. The reality is that approximately two-thirds of young men do not personally endorse most Man Box rules.

Sharing this knowledge could give other men permission to step out of the Man Box. Efforts could also focus on targeting groups that appear to be more likely to endorse masculine norms.

Recommendation #2: Build workforce capacity to engage on issues related to the Man Box with a focus on influencers working with men and boys in sectors related to violence, bullying, sexual harassment prevention, mental health and substance use.

Work that uses an 'influence the influencer' approach presents an opportunity to improve the capacity of people working with boys and men in settings where attitudes and behaviour can be influenced. In contrast to one-off sessions delivered directly to boys or men, this capacity building approach provides an opportunity for role models to build a deeper understanding of key issues, develop greater self-awareness, learn how to model positive change, and recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours. Engagement with these influencers should be tailored to their specific contexts and could form part of current place-based approaches being adopted by federal and state governments. This work should support influencers and role models such as teachers, community sector workers (e.g. social workers, youth workers, psychologists), faith leaders, sports coaches and parents. These people, with the right scaffolding and supports over an extended period, have an opportunity to positively influence the behaviour and attitudes of men and boys.

Recommendation #3: Secondary and tertiary prevention programs that are responding to and seeking a reduction in different forms of violence, sexual harassment, bullying, mental illness and substance use should:

- 3a: consider using the Man Box survey as a screening tool to assess risk and target program participation; and
- 3b: include program components that seek to positively influence masculine norms.

This study found that rigid adherence to stereotypical masculine norms has a substantial impact on the use and experience of violence as well as online bullying, sexual harassment, binge drinking and negative mood. These findings have significant implications for the design of programs to address these life outcomes.

Specifically, measurement of adherence to masculine norms could be used as part of initial assessment potentially to inform program targeting. There may be merit to including assessment of Man Box attitudes as part of system-wide risk assessments in sectors such as family violence. These assessments could also inform tailoring of the design of program components that raise awareness of and decrease adherence to masculine norms. Given their impact, seeking to decrease adherence to masculine norms as part of programs to address violence, sexual harassment or bullying should be akin to public health efforts to reduce the consumption of sugar when tackling obesity.

Recommendation #4: Future research should focus on understanding the most effective ways to positively influence adherence to masculine norms so that boys and men are free to choose who they want to be.

There are gaps in our understanding and the associated research evidence about the interventions that are most effective to decrease adherence to stereotypical masculine norms. There may be merit in focussing on the individual pillars of masculinity that appear to be particularly damaging such as hypersexuality and the combination of rigid gender roles and aggression/ control. This work should also examine the extent to which shifting adherence to masculine norms results in a subsequent shift in life outcomes such as use of violence and mental health. To facilitate improved understanding, pilot programs focussing on decreasing adherence to masculine norms should be subject to evaluation, ideally working with university partners with expertise in masculinities research, with lessons from these evaluations shared widely.

Recommendation #5: Future research should focus on understanding the impact of adhering to masculine norms across different situational contexts, including the potential for positive impacts and the influence on men's relationships with others in their lives.

In specific contexts, some stereotypical masculine norms may play a protective role or have a positive impact. As part of research to better understand the moderating role of specific contexts, there could be a focus on the protective, positive and healthy aspects of masculinities. There are also specific contexts that warrant further exploration given there are periods where the risk of violence is higher such as post breakdown of an intimate relationship, pregnancy and post the birth of a child. Context specific work to understand the influence of masculine norms will allow men to positively influence key people in their lives including partners, children, peers, and workmates.

Recommendation #6: Governments and other funders should adequately fund co-design and partnerships between organisations that provide service delivery that prevents aggression among men as well as violence towards women and families.

It is important that governments continue to fund partnership work between organisations to implement programs that prevent aggression among men and violence towards women and families. This work should particularly seek involvement from the Women's Health sector. Programs need to be co-designed and co-delivered across organisations with expertise in the use of violence to ensure they address the specific needs of the men in each program. Funding of programs should be mindful of the time required to complete genuine co-design when programs are seeking to address complex behavioural and attitudinal challenges.