

What does men's agreement with Man Box rules mean for men's well-being?

The “Man Box” describes a set of beliefs within and across society that place pressure on men to act in a certain way. The Man Box consists of 19 “rules” that represent a rigid, outdated and often harmful template for how a “real man” should think, feel, and behave. These “rules” include statements such as “A man who talks a lot about his worries, fears, and problems shouldn't really get respect” and “Guys should act strong even if they feel scared or nervous inside”.

The metaphor of the “Man Box” evokes the idea that this set of rules or norms is rigid and restrictive – it “boxes men in”, and creates limitations and pressures.

We surveyed men aged 18-30 years, and men aged 31-45 years about the Man Box rules, as well as their experiences of poor mental health, self-harm, suicidal ideation, gambling and alcohol use. Our study explored the relationship between men's personal agreement with Man Box rules and their self-reported mental health and well-being. The survey questions were not intended to find out how many men have depression or are at risk of suicide or self-harm. They were included to give us a general understanding of how endorsing traditional masculine norms affects men's mental health.

Our 2024 Man Box study has found that men's personal endorsement (agreement) with Man Box rules is linked to negative impacts on their health and wellbeing. This includes their mental health, gambling and alcohol use.

There is a diversity of experiences and views among men when it comes to Man Box rules. Our study divided men into five groups (Quintiles) based upon their Man Box composite score. We compare the men who least strongly agree with the Man Box rules (Quintile 1), to the men who most strongly agree (Quintile 5).

Key findings

Our study found that as men reported increased agreement with the Man Box rules (moving from Quintile 1 to Quintile 5), there is a consistent increase in their experiences of poor mental health and well-being. The table and graphs below illustrate this trend. Looking only at men aged 18-30, compared to men who least strongly endorse Man Box rules, men who most strongly endorse them are:

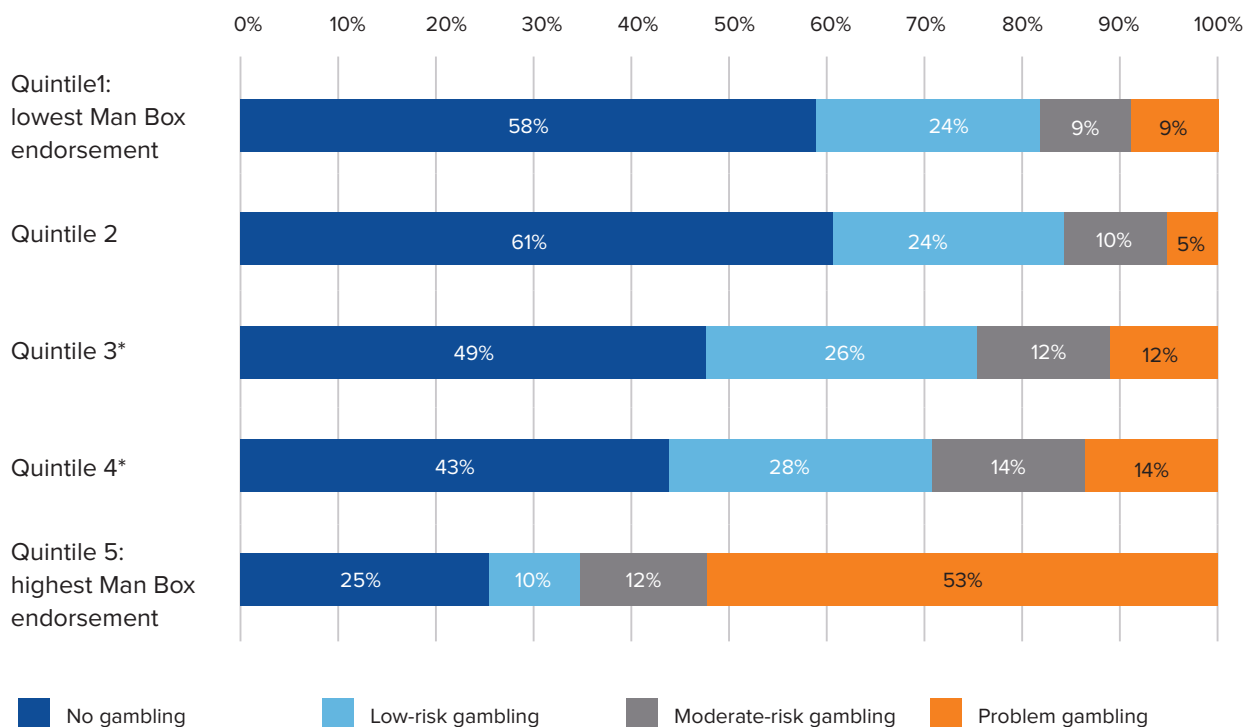
- **Over 7 times more likely** to frequently experience thoughts of suicide.
- **6 times more likely** to frequently experience thoughts of self-harm.
- **Almost 6 times more likely** to be problem gamblers.
- **3 times more likely** to frequently experience little interest or pleasure in doing things.
- **Almost twice as likely** to drink frequently.
- **1.5 times more likely** to frequently experience feeling down, depressed, or hopeless.

These findings highlight the importance of considering men's personal agreement with the Man Box ideas in mental health and wellbeing responses. The stark difference in the responses on suicide and self-harm between those who least strongly agree (Quintile 1) and most strongly (Quintile 5) agree, highlights the importance of having a gender informed response when designing responses to prevent suicide.

Proportion of men experiencing frequent symptoms of poor mental health, by Man Box quintile and age group

	Quintile 1: 18-30 year-olds	Quintile 5: 18-30 year-olds	Quintile 1: 31-45 year-olds	Quintile 5: 31-45 year-olds
Percentage of men experiencing little interest or pleasure in doing things (“flat mood”)	9%	27%	14%	15%
Percentage of men feeling down, depressed or hopeless	10%	15%	9%	14%
Percentage of men having thoughts about suicide nearly every day	3%	22%	3%	10%
Percentage of men having thoughts about self-harm nearly every day	3%	18%	1%	10%

Proportion of survey respondents who meet the criteria for problem gambling, by Man Box quintiles, 18-30 year old men



*Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding



For more information about The Man Box 2024, and to download the full report, visit www.themanbox.com.au.

