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Rigid ideals related to masculinity drive violence, hostility towards women, sexual harassment, and men’s own poor mental health, new research reveals

Australian men who most strongly endorse rigid attitudes related to masculinity are more likely to have used violence, sexually abused their partner, sexually harassed women, experienced poor mental health, and displayed problematic gambling behaviours, according to new research released today by Jesuit Social Services.

The largest Australian study into men’s perceptions of and belief in rigid masculine norms, *The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia* surveyed a nationally representative sample of over 3,500 participants aged 18 to 45. The study reveals that a significant number of Australian men feel pressure to conform to a rigid, limiting and often harmful template of masculinity, which the report calls the “Man Box”.

The Man Box is a set of norms that place pressure on men to be a certain way – to be tough, not to show emotion, to be the breadwinner, be in control, and use violence to get respect, and to have many sexual partners. On average, a quarter of the 18- to 45-year-old men surveyed personally agreed with these rules – which lead to a greater likelihood of perpetrating violence and experiencing poorer outcomes for their mental health and wellbeing.

This is the third study featuring Jesuit Social Services’ The Men’s Project’s research into the consequences of Man Box pressures, first published in 2018 and modelled on Equimundo’s *The Man Box* study. The new study was made possible by the support of Respect Victoria.

“Our Man Box research sheds new light on what Australian men believe about what a “real man” thinks, feels and does, and the negative impacts of believing in outdated ideas of masculinity,” says Matt Tyler, Executive Director – Community and Systems Impact at Jesuit Social Services.

“These Man Box pressures tell men to be tough, fight back, never say no to sex and avoid household chores. They box men in and limit their potential. Our research finds that when men *believe* these rules, the results can be devastating for people in their lives, particularly women, as well as for men themselves.”

Respect Victoria, the state agency focusing on preventing violence against women and family violence, supported Jesuit Social Services in the development of the report.

“To prevent violence against women and family violence we need to understand the harmful forms of masculinity that can drive it. This research is critical to understanding how we prevent men’s violence, and how men can be supported to challenge dangerous ideas about what it means to be a man,” says Respect Victoria Chair Kate Fitz-Gibbon.

“While some of the findings are concerning, the research does reflect that a majority of men in Australia don't personally believe in the damaging ideas contained within the Man Box. A strong focus on primary prevention efforts will continue to shift the dial on men's attitudes towards themselves and others.”

The study found:

- 37 per cent of men aged 18-45 felt social pressure to follow the Man Box rules
- 25 per cent of men aged 18-45 personally believed in the Man Box rules
- The men who most strongly agreed with the Man Box rules, compared with the men who least strongly agreed with them, were:
 - 31 times more likely to believe domestic violence should be handled privately
 - 17 times more likely to have hit their partner
 - 9 times more likely to blame a woman for making a man hit her
 - 8 times more likely have thoughts of suicide nearly every day
 - 6 times more likely to have forced a partner to do something sexual that is degrading or humiliating
 - 6 times more likely to exhibit signs of problem gambling (in fact, more than half of the men who most strongly agreed with Man Box rules met the criteria for problem gambling); and
 - Twice as likely to binge drink.

“The findings from this research are in line with existing research and we want to acknowledge organisations and individuals that have worked for decades to support victims of men’s violence,” says Mr Tyler.

“We know that these findings are concerning, but they help develop the solutions. Specifically, we need integrated policy reform, support for workforces, increased population-level awareness and further research to help weaken the Man Box’s cultural grip and improve the wellbeing of all genders.”

While researchers, including Man Box report contributor Professor Michael Flood, acknowledge more must be done to support men to challenge Man Box rules, they note progress over time: the new study finds that men’s personal agreement with Man Box rules has fallen slightly since the first Man Box report in 2018.

“There is reason for hope as well: most Australian men *don't* believe these harmful Man Box rules,” says Professor Flood.

“The pressure men feel to conform to Man Box rules has lessened over the past five years, and there is diversity within boys’ and men’s views. We now need to build on this momentum, and support men to express positive forms of masculinity, reduce risky behaviours, and build lives free from violence.”

The study's recommendations span four areas and in summary include:

- Policy change
 - Developing then implementing violence-prevention and early intervention strategies that embed healthy masculinities in every Australian jurisdiction, integrating this work with other approaches seeking to prevent violence.
 - Independently reviewing policy frameworks to identify opportunities for greater focus on promoting healthy masculinities to achieve desired outcomes across a range of sectors including mental health, gambling, alcohol and other drugs, healthy eating and criminal justice.
- Workforce capacity-building
 - Supporting workers to promote healthy masculinities in sectors where there are significant opportunities to reduce the harms of the Man Box including health, child and family services, justice, sport and local government
 - Including healthy masculinities content in higher education curricula for workforces including teachers, social workers and psychologists.
- Community awareness-raising
 - Funding and implementing community-led place-based approaches to program delivery as well as population-level healthy masculinities public campaigns.
- Future research
 - Building the evidence base by conducting future research on how best to reduce the impact of harmful gender norms among the men who most strongly endorse them.

[Read the Man Box report, executive summary, and accompanying fact sheets.](#)

The Men's Project at Jesuit Social Services supports men and boys to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives free from violence and other harmful behaviours. [Learn more about The Men's Project.](#)

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