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Men's self-reliance linked to risk of self-harm

For the first time large-scale empirical research has linked notions of what it is to be a man with suicidal thoughts, which the researchers argue puts a spotlight on the societal attitudes that may be putting men at greater risk of taking their own lives.

The study of almost 14,000 Australian men found that those who strongly identified with being self-reliant, a trait traditionally associated with maleness, were significantly more likely to report thoughts of suicide or self harm.

Lead researcher Professor Jane Pirkis, director of the University of Melbourne's Centre for Mental Health, says the results reinforce the need for health services to better engage men who, as a group, are less likely to seek help. But she says the bigger message is that we need to question the expectations society is putting on men, such as expecting men to be tough.

"The challenge goes beyond mental health policy and suicide prevention policy. The issue is more to do with our society," says Professor Pirkis, who was one of the drivers behind the ABC's [Man Up](#) documentary last year that explored the links between masculinity and suicide. *Man Up* was funded by men's health charity The Movember Foundation. Jane Pirkis was heavily involved in the 2016 ABC documentary *Man Up*. "Notions of masculinity aren't just dreamed up by individuals, they are imposed by society from childhood in quite subtle ways," says Professor Pirkis. "So if a sense of needing to be self-reliant is an issue for some men, and some women also, we as a society need to think about how we are bringing up our boys and girls. Even today boys are told not to cry and young men are told to toughen up."

While women have higher rates of attempted suicide, men are three times more likely to actually die from suicide. While six out of every 100,000 women take their own lives each year, the rate for men is 18.5 in every 100,000. Men's propensity to use more lethal methods of suicide, combined with higher levels of alcohol abuse, may partly explain the discrepancy, says Pirkis. While it has long been thought that men's sense of what it is to be a man may also be putting men at risk, until now she says there had only been limited empirical evidence supporting such a correlation.

"The large size of the cohort puts this study at the forefront of research linking a particular element of traditional masculinity – self-reliance – to suicide risk," she says. The study, published in [Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology](#), uses Australia's [Ten to Men](#) longitudinal study of 16,000 men and boys aged 10-55 that started in 2013-14. Funded by the Australian Government's Department of Health and conducted by the University's Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, it is the largest longitudinal study of the health of men and boys in the world.

The researchers analysed data from 13,884 members of the *Ten to Men* cohort aged between 18 and 55 and their responses to the **Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory** questionnaire, to assess how closely these men aligned along 11 "norms" that have traditionally been associated with maleness.

These "norms" included measuring men's attitudes to work, dominance, risk-taking, heterosexual presentation, power over women, emotional control, playboy-like attitudes, attitudes to violence, the importance of pursuing status and winning, and finally the importance of self-reliance. The researchers then compared these results with how the men had responded to a separate health survey that included a measure of suicidal thinking.

While researchers found no significant correlation between suicidal thinking and ten of the male norms, they found a strong correlation between such thoughts and men who believed strongly in the importance of being self-reliant. Such men had 34 per cent greater odds of reporting thoughts of suicide or self-harm. The association remained strong even after controlling for other significant suicide risk factors such as depression, stress, alcohol use and not having a partner.

"We were immediately struck by the strength of the relationship between self-reliance and suicidal thinking, even after controlling for the classic risk factors," Professor Pirkis says. "Obviously there are plenty of self-reliant men doing just fine and self-reliance as a quality is a positive thing in many ways. But our research suggests that there is also this risk associated with it." She says her confidence in the finding was reinforced by the results confirming that the already established risk factors for suicide were also highly correlated with suicidal thinking among participants. For example, men who had sought treatment for depression in the last 12 months were four times more likely to report suicidal thoughts, while men reporting harmful alcohol use or not being partnered had 41 per cent greater odds of reporting suicidal thoughts.

Professor Pirkis says it is easy to understand how a strong sense of self-reliance could make someone more vulnerable to self-harm if it means they aren't seeking help or are blaming themselves. The self-reliance questions in the survey specifically asked the men how strongly they agreed with statements such as "I never ask for help" and "it bothers me when I have to ask for help."

Men's self-reliance linked to risk of self-harm



Co-researcher and independent men's health consultant Tass Mousaferiadis says a strong sense of self-reliance could potentially undermine someone's ability to cope mentally when things go wrong and beyond their control. "If you think about self-reliance and what it means to men in providing for themselves and their families, and then you overlay that with things going off the rails, such as when people lose their jobs, then you can easily see how a strong sense of self-reliance could make it difficult to cope," he says.

Mr Mousaferiadis, a former Men's Program Leader at *beyondblue*, a not-for-profit that provides support and advocacy in tackling depression and anxiety, says a strong sense of self-reliance among many men may help explain why men are less likely than women to seek medical help. He suggests one way of tackling that reluctance could be to acknowledge the psychological importance of self-reliance in people by allowing patients a greater sense of control when they interact with health services.

"A lot of the traditional health service approaches can be quite emasculating," Mr Mousaferiadis says. "At *beyondblue* we learned that if we simply encouraged men to seek help, they just ran away. But when we reframed the language to make it more active and empowering, then it would make a difference. So we stopped talking about help and therapy, and instead talked about taking action and taking control of your health."

Professor Pirkis says *Ten to Men* provides the researchers with the opportunity to continue to track over time the association between notions of masculinity and suicidal thoughts. It also provides an opportunity to track how men's own views on masculinity are changing and whether perhaps such changes can be linked to improvements in men's health. "If we can continue to track suicidal thinking in *Ten to Men* we will be able to see whether there is any change in attitudes to stoicism and self-reliance, and whether those changes reduce the levels of suicidal thinking. It is why such longitudinal studies are so important."

By Andrew Trounson, University of Melbourne

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3 Things Men Are Discouraged From Doing



Jordan Gray says that the absence of these three important things in the lives of men is exhausting, damaging, and potentially fatal. Men are limited in many ways in terms of what is culturally encouraged for them to do. Of the myriad of things that are ‘off-limits’ in guy world, the following three are by far the biggest culprits. Do any one of these too often and people will make jokes about how you have to hand in your ‘man-card.’ In truth, these three things are necessary for a well-rounded, fulfilling life. Without further ado, here are the three most important things that men are discouraged from doing.

1. Feeling emotions

Let’s get the most obvious one out of the way... Men are discouraged from feeling emotions.

And not just the societally reinforced ‘negative’ emotions (like sadness, grief, jealousy, frustration, etc.) but also the most positive ones (i.e. being overly joyful, ecstatic, or expressively happy is also looked down upon in man world). The more we suppress our emotions, the more we suffer. Out of any of the three factors on this list, I believe that this one is by far the biggest reason that suicide rates among men are drastically higher than women world wide. Women are encouraged to feel a wide range of emotions, and men simply are not. Whether you do it alone, with close friends, or with your significant other, regularly releasing your stored negative emotions and being more emotionally authentic moment to moment will save you a lot of stress, tension, and misery in the long run.

2. Being physically affectionate with their male friends

Men are also discouraged from engaging in any form of touch with their male friends outside of very specific activities (mainly team sports). We are not robots. Humans are a social species and we are hardwired for connection and physical affection. And your body doesn’t only respond to the opposite sex... it also releases happy brain chemicals (oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin, etc.) when you engage in touch with men who you feel close to. Hug your guy friends hello and goodbye. Put your arms around each other for your photo ops. Heck, you can sit side by side or put your heads on each others shoulder while you’re watching Netflix. The sky’s the limit (well, your comfort zone is, but you get my point). More touch, more often. You’ll be physically, mentally, and emotionally healthier for it, and you will improve your relationships with men. Really sit with this point. If you find yourself strongly resisting what you’re reading right now, that’s usually a sign that a part of you really craves more physical affection in your life with the people around you.

3. Engaging in regular self-care

“Spa visits? Regular massages? EXFOLIATING!? The only exfoliation my grandpa did was when he once accidentally dropped a power sander on his foot. Just kidding, my grandpa never made mistakes.” Yes, it’s true. Men are allowed to engage in regular self-care. We live in stressful times. Cities with millions of people packed into them... incessant dinging, buzzing, and beeping from our tech devices... being increasingly on-call around the clock for our jobs. If men don’t take the time to slow down and take care of themselves every now and then, then they’re going to burn out. Maybe you get a massage every now and then. Whatever your self-care routine looks like, make it a priority. You’re allowed to.

Which Of These Three Resonates The Most With You?

Which of these three points makes you the most uncomfortable? Well, congrats, you’ve just signed up to start chipping away at it. Pick the most challenging task and start small. Haven’t felt any big emotions lately? Try feeling joyful. Not prone to being physically affectionate with your guy friends? Give one of your closest guy friends a hug within the next week.

Not used to prioritizing self-care in your schedule? Time to bust out that calendar and do something purely selfish... just for yourself. You’ll be better off for it.

Source: JordanGrayConsulting.com

NATIONAL MALE SUICIDE PREVENTION CONFERENCE

NEW MALE, the National Male Health Conference held in Sydney on March 2 and 3 was a great success with over 80 participants from most states of Australia and presenters from New Zealand and Canada. The **NEW MALE REPORT** on the Conference is available [here](#). It was announced at the Conference that the Stop Male Suicide Project will be conducting the First National Male Suicide Prevention Conference in Sydney in partnership with Men's Health Services.

The Stop Male Suicide project, founded by Glen Poole, helps individuals and organisations to take action to prevent male suicide. Glen facilitated two sessions at the **NEW MALE** Conference featuring leading experts and academics in the male suicide prevention field including Pete Shmigel, the CEO of Lifeline; Gus Worland, the host of ABC's three-part series on male suicide, Man Up; and the suicide prevention ambassador and former professional sportsman, Joe Williams.

The Stop Male Suicide project has been hosting forums in every State and Territory since May 2016. These events bring together people who are committed to taking action to stop male suicide and help us to identify and highlight examples of innovation, good practice and expertise in male suicide prevention.

Glen is keen to build on the momentum of these regional conversations by creating an annual gathering of people committed to preventing male suicide in Australia. The aim of this gathering will be to connect people who are focused on male suicide prevention; to highlight the good work that's already happening at a national level and to invite international academics, practitioners and advocates to share their experience and expertise.

NATIONAL MALE SUICIDE PREVENTION CONFERENCE 2017

“TOGETHER WE CAN STOP MALE SUICIDE”

Wednesday 9th & Thursday 10th November 2017
Holiday Inn, 18-40 Anderson St, Parramatta NSW

SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

Julian Leaser MP
Matthew Tukaki, Director, Suicide Prevention Australia
and Chairman of the National Coalition for Suicide Prevention
Jorgen Gullestrup, CEO, MATES in Construction
Brendan Maher, CEO, R U OK?
Lifeline Speaker
The Australian Men's Health Forum Speaker
Pete Nicholls, Board Member, Parents Beyond Break Up
Julian Krieg, Chair, Rural Financial Counselling Service WA
Glen Poole, Stop Male Suicide Project

BOOK TICKETS TODAY

Tickets to the conference are available via conference co-ordinator, Greg Millan of [Men's Health Services](#). Email Greg to book at greg@menshealthservices.com.au [Link to Registration Form](#)

Ridiculously Early Bird (Before 31st July): \$397 for both days or \$199 per day
Early Bird (Before 30th September): \$447 for both days or \$224 per day
Full Price (from 1st October onwards): \$497 for both days or \$250 per day

FOR FURTHER INFO CONTACT:

[CONFERENCE WEBSITE](#)

MYTH

Talking about suicide will only encourage it.

REALITY

When framed in terms of recovery, treatment, and hope, discussing suicide is one of the most helpful things you can do.

Why Men Have More Body Image Issues Than Ever

How Hollywood ideals are messing with men's heads, leading real-world guys to take dangerous drugs.

Superheroes today are a lot more shredded than they used to be. The original Superman and Batman look almost willowy compared to our muscle-bursting modern-day versions.

That's no coincidence. America is in the midst of a cultural shift in terms of the ideal male body image, and as the ideal man grows more muscular, men stuck in the real world with real bodies are growing less satisfied with theirs - with potentially dangerous medical consequences. If you think about the changes over the last 30 to 45 years in how men are depicted in Hollywood, cartoons, magazines and action toys, you'll see that men's bodies [today] appear much more muscular," says Dr. Harrison Pope, director of the Biological Psychiatry Laboratory at McLean Hospital in Massachusetts. These unrealistic media images have contributed to low body image satisfaction among men—usually just considered a problem for women. A study last year found that American men are just as likely as women to feel unsatisfied with their physiques, while another study found adolescent boys who are dissatisfied with their body shape may be more likely than girls to self-criticize and feel distress. Studies have even shown that men feel worse about their bodies after playing video games with ripped characters.

"There's this drumbeat that muscularity equals masculinity, and so we're seeing more and more young men with muscle dysmorphia," says Pope. The consequences of this kind of thinking can be dangerous. As more and more men hit the gym in the hopes of transforming themselves into the Rock, many are also turning to anabolic steroids to achieve the muscle mass they associate with masculinity. Up to 4 million Americans—nearly all of them male—have tried steroids at some point, according to Pope's recent [research](#).

"There's a widespread misperception that anabolic steroid use is an issue of cheating in sports, but the vast majority of anabolic steroid users in this country are not athletes," says Shalender Bhasin, a men's health researcher at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Pope's co-author on a new [article](#) in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. "Most young men using these drugs are doing it to improve their appearance."

The potential side effects of anabolic steroids include premature death and neurobehavioral disturbances, like problems with thinking and attention. But Pope says the links to heart problems are the most worrying. "There's a growing body of literature that suggests long-term steroid use can cause cardio myopathy, where the heart doesn't pump or fill with blood efficiently." That could lead to heart attack or stroke, he says.

It's not yet clear just how significant these heart risks are, because steroid use is a relatively new phenomenon. Pope says few men used them before the 1980s, and those early adopters are just now hitting their 50s and 60s—ages when heart problems take their toll.

Few doctors or psychologists realize how common steroid use and abuse has become, say Pope and Bhasin, and almost none are trained to treat steroid addiction or dependence. Men taking steroids who want to quit therefore have few professional resources, which may lead many to go back on steroids or try other substances—like cocaine or opioids—in order to feel better, Bhasin says.

"Until we see greater awareness of this problem and more attention paid to treating it," Pope says, "most of these men are on their own."

Source: Markham Heid @markhamh



TRAINING PROGRAMS & RESOURCES

WORKING WITH MALE VICTIMS OF DV Friday April 7, 9.00 am - 4.00 pm Holiday Inn, 18 - 40 Anderson Street, PARRAMATTA

In Australia up to one in three victims of intimate partner violence are male. The issue of men affected by violence in intimate relationships has been reported for many years and now workers in the domestic violence, community and family relationship sectors are acknowledging this problem and seeking out training for their workers. This training program is for men and women who work in the health, welfare and community sectors in government or the non government sector. It provides information and strategies for working with men who are affected by violence in their [relationships and presents a model and strategies for this work](#).

AREAS COVERED IN THE TRAINING PROGRAM:

- Background to the problem and the context violence and abuse occurs in
- The affect of domestic violence on a person - what's different for men
- Strategies for working with men from a strengths based perspective
- Assessment strategies - what to be aware of
- A model for working with men affected by violence

COST \$200 for one day training program, training resources including a copy of the "Men Say YES to Family Peace" Community Event Kit, all refreshments and lunch plus 3 month follow up support with your program, project or resource development.

To register complete [RegistrationForm](#) or email greg@menshealthservices.com.au phone/txt 0417 772 390

Stop Male Suicide 2017 Seminars and Trainings



Suicide kills six Australian men a day and costs the economy an estimated [\\$13.75B](#).

We know suicide is preventable; we know that men are three times more likely to take their own lives and we know that most approaches to suicide prevention are more effective at helping women. The Stop Male Suicide project is dedicated to developing and championing male-friendly approaches to suicide prevention that are designed to help men at risk of suicide. We're on a mission to share the knowledge, the wisdom and the skills you need to take action to stop male suicide, by providing:

[Stop Male Suicide Seminars](#), [Male Suicide Prevention Training](#) and a range of other resources including our book: [You Can Stop Male Suicide](#)

For information on male suicide prevention training click [here](#)

Glen Poole Stop Male Suicide Project m: +61 (0) 432 488 943

NEW BOOK: ENGAGING MEN'S RESPONSES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE by ANDREW KING

A book of tools... Cost: \$30.00 (includes postage in Australia) - includes GST [Click here to purchase...](#)

Effective early intervention is critical in stopping low and moderate-risk cases of family violence escalating into high-risk situations. This book focuses on how community, health and welfare counsellors and other workers, and practicing psychologists, can better engage with men to increase their motivation to access further support to address family violence issues. The first section explores a practice framework that unites the use of feminist, strengths-based and psychological tools. The second section provides ten tools that have proved effective in involving men in deep, structured discussions that can overcome their resistance to confronting attitudes and behaviours that stand in the way of them achieving positive, sustainable change. At all times, safety is a core focus: the safety of the person experiencing the violence, children who may also be exposed to violence, the intervening worker or practitioner (you), and the person who uses the violence. In short, this book aims to promote safer relationships through insight.

Andrew King (BA Wel Stu; MAEd) is the Practice Specialist, Groupwork, and Community Education Manager at Relationships Australia, NSW. He is a specialist trainer who has worked with professionals in Australia, Asia and Canada, and published a range of professional articles. He has also coordinated a large fathers' centre, worked in parenting education, and dealt directly with many cases spanning family violence issues, young people with drug, alcohol and mental health problems, and families with special-needs children.

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SHORT TAKES

The Suppression of Boy's Emotional Expression

Author and researcher Judy Chu and Good Men Project Senior Editor Mark Greene talk about challenges created by our culture of male emotional toughness. How has the culture of male emotional toughness effected your life or the lives of your kids? Watch the video [here](#)

Canada Considering Raising Cigarette Buying Age to 21

If you're under 21 and live in Canada, you soon may not be able to buy cigarettes, the National Post reports. Currently, the legal age to buy cigarettes is 18 or 19 (it varies from province to province), but in a policy paper "quietly" making the rounds at the federal level, the Canadian federal government is reportedly considering raising it to 21 in an attempt to dramatically decrease the smoking rates. Right now, according to the Post, around 13 percent of Canadians smoke, but the government would like to see that number go down to less than 5 percent by 2035. To that end, the government is also considering outlawing smoking in condos or apartment buildings and on college campuses as well as banning it in public parks. The paper also tentatively considers whether to encourage smokers to switch to vaping or e-cigarettes.

Why Men Have Such a Hard Time With Aging

Researchers are focusing on a factor that makes aging harder for men: having to let go of their sense of masculinity. That sense includes things like the need to be strong and stoic, or that it's weak to ask for help. The trouble is, such ideas are a bad fit with the realities of old age, leaving many senior men poorly equipped to handle the challenges that come with growing frailer, retiring, losing a spouse or even needing to disclose their ailments.

"I hate to say it, but the way the traditional model of masculinity was written was for boys up to the age of adulthood," says Edward Thompson, 71, professor emeritus of sociology at the College of the Holy Cross and a leading researcher on elderly men and masculinity. "Clear models of dignified masculinity are nonexistent for later life."

Women, of course, carry the burden of their own cultural issues that can make aging hard, such as society's emphasis on youthful beauty. But in contrast to men, many of the gender norms for women are sources of strength in later years, experts say, such as greater experience taking care of themselves and others, and the ability to form deep relationships and accept vulnerability as natural. Read more [here](#)

A New Prostate Test

The new test for prostate cancer is a mp (multi-parametric) MRI scan, dubbed by some the 'manogram'. And now, a major study published in The Lancet has found that the technique radically improves the accuracy of prostate cancer diagnosis. The charity Prostate Cancer UK has described it as a game-changer for men's health. The study has shown that the mpMRI scan can achieve for prostate cancer what mammograms have long offered in chest cancer: the ability to accurately locate potential tumours.

It means doctors can be more sure about which patients need to have a biopsy — an invasive test that can result in infection — and who can safely avoid one. It can also help differentiate between cancers that require treatment and slow-growing 'p*ssycat' tumours that can be safely left where they are, sparing men side-effects such as impotence and incontinence from treatments they don't need.

The mpMRI scan is an enhanced version of standard MRI, with two new functions.

The first, known as fusion-weighted imaging, identifies dense spots of water molecules that are known to collect around cancerous tissue.

A second function enables radiologists to pick up 'chaotic' networks of tiny blood vessels, also known to form around tumours.

