

MEDIA RELEASE – JULY 22, 2020

Trapped in the ‘man box’ – belief in outdated gender stereotypes biggest predictor of men using violence

New research released today has found young Australian men’s belief in rigid masculine stereotypes has a stronger impact on whether they will use violence, sexually harass women, or experience mental ill-health themselves, than other factors including their education levels, where they live or their cultural heritage.

Unpacking the Man Box, produced by Jesuit Social Services’ The Men’s Project and Dr Michael Flood, Associate Professor at Queensland University of Technology, with funding from VicHealth, is based on a survey of 1,000 young Australian men aged 18 to 30. The report builds on the findings of The Men’s Project’s 2018 report *The Man Box*.

The study compared men’s belief in outdated gender stereotypes – such as men having to be the breadwinner – with other factors such as their age, where they live, their employment status, cultural background, education level and sexuality.

The initial *Man Box* report found that young Australian men who believe in outdated masculine stereotypes were themselves at higher risk of using violence, online bullying and sexual harassment, engaging in risky drinking and reporting poorer levels of mental health.

Unpacking the Man Box finds men’s adherence to outdated attitudes to gender is over:

- 25 times more accurate than a range of demographic variables in predicting the use of physical violence, sexual harassment, verbal bullying and cyber bullying
- 22 times more accurate in predicting the experience of physical violence, verbal bullying and cyber bullying
- 11 times more accurate than demographics at predicting very risky drinking; and
- 10 times more accurate than demographics at predicting negative feelings and emotions.

Matt Tyler, Executive Director of Jesuit Social Services’ The Men’s Project, says the report shows masculine stereotypes stop young men from living healthy lives and being their best selves.

“This report demonstrates the significant costs to young men and others of being ‘in the man box’ – meaning they personally endorse a range of behaviours related to rigid gender roles, aggression, control and acting tough. These stereotypes have unique, powerful influences on a number of harmful attitudes and behaviours.

“Breaking free of these stereotypes will improve the health and wellbeing of both women and men.”

In response to the survey findings health promotion foundation VicHealth is announcing around \$280,000 in new funding for [two local council projects](#) to help young men and boys to break free from harmful gender stereotypes.

VicHealth CEO Dr Sandro Demaio says it is important young men believe they can be themselves.



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“If we want boys and young men to live happy, healthy lives and be caring and respectful in their relationships with women they need role models that show them being a good man is the same as being a good person,” Dr Demaio said

Report researcher Dr Michael Flood says holding rigid beliefs around masculinity is strongly harmful to young men and those around them, particularly women.

“While there are many factors involved in young men perpetrating or experiencing harmful behaviours, none are stronger than their own adherence to rigid gender stereotypes about what men can and can’t do,” he said.

The Hon. Gabrielle Williams, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and Minister for Women, said:

“I commend Jesuit Social Services and VicHealth for their commitment to engaging men and boys to be agents of change. The Unpacking the Man Box report emphasises that breaking down harmful gender stereotypes benefits the health and safety of both women and men and reinforces the importance of including men in the prevention violence against women.”

Mr Tyler says the report shows the need for Governments to fund public awareness campaigns about the negative impact and associated costs of conforming to masculine stereotypes.

“We also call for greater capacity building among people who work with men and boys – like teachers, sports coaches and social workers – to help them recognise and challenge harmful attitudes and behaviours. Supporting our next generation of men to lead healthy, fulfilling and positive lives ultimately improves outcomes for the entire community.”

VicHealth is working to support people who work with men and boys through a range of new ‘Masculinities and Health’ resources and information available at <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/breakingstereotypes>

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