MEN'S
ATTITUDES
NOW
SURVEY

Men's Development Network

25 years

FINAL REPORT

Men's Development Network

Better Lives for Men, Better Lives for All

An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Statement from CEO Seán Cooke

In our 25th year it is fitting that the Men's Development Network takes the opportunity to dip our toes into the attitudinal waters of Men's lives in Ireland. Over this time there has been many changes in Irish society that have shown that we as a nation are progressive in our thinking and fair and just in our application. This study will hopefully be the first of many that will allow us to chart the state of men's attitudes towards their understanding of masculinity over the next ten years. We have purposely allowed the data to be available to all researchers, as we feel there is an enormous amount of information that can be used effectively in developing appropriate ways to engaging men and boys.

This survey also has an international context. Our partners Equimundo (Centre for Masculinities and Social Justice) based in the US has conducted this survey in the UK, USA, and Australia amongst others. The opportunity to compare the findings of these surveys against the Irish findings will give a global understanding on the issues of healthy/unhealthy masculinities that will be invaluable. Some of the most notable findings relate to the number of attitudes that place men in the "Man Box". In the Irish results a key number of statements are not reflected in Irish Men's attitudes. Attitudes such as house work is women's work is rejected. This bodes well for Irish Men but there is much more to do to counteract inequality and allow men and women to be their most authentic selves.

On behalf of the board I would like to thank the authors of the report Dr Kenny Doyle and Conor Hammersley and the support from Equimundo's Gary Barker and Brian Heilman. To our funding partners Department of Justice, Department of Health, Health Service Executive and Tusla I offer our deepest gratitude for your continued support.

Final Report

The Men's Attitudes Now (MAN) survey which ran from May to October 2022 aimed to better understand men's concepts of masculinity and gender. It sought to gather insights into how men feel about themselves and their role in society in relation to topics which included their wellbeing, their health, their attitudes about relationships and their reflections on social topics. The survey was started by 1103 men, there was however a very high sample attrition rate of 47.69% dropping out of the survey without completing it. As well as this the survey was designed so as to allow participants to skip past any questions they did not want to answer. This means that while there are 577 fully completed surveys there are some questions which have far higher rates of response than others. Similar surveys have recently been carried out in the United States, the United Kingdom, Mexico, Jamaica and the Caribbean, and Jordan.

The initial interim report which was launched in July compared men's personal opinions and beliefs against those that they believed were expected of them by others and by wider society in general. Broadly speaking it found that there are large disparities between what men themselves think and what men think society expects of them and this was uniform across all of the topics examined by the survey. These disparities generally tended towards men's personal opinions and beliefs being more progressive, thoughtful and caring than those of what they felt were expected of them by others. This disparity between personal opinions and perceived social expectations begs obvious questions around the social expectations placed on men. Where do they come from? How are they enforced and maintained, and to what extent do men adhere to them in their everyday behaviour? Further questions relate to the extent to which adherence or non-adherence to these expectations influence men's lives in the real world with regard to their relationships, their work, their levels of life satisfaction and their health.

The Man Box

In order to assess these questions, we used the concept of the Man Box. This refers to a set of normative cultural ideals and beliefs which act to pressure men into behaving in particular ways. They include ideas such as self-sufficiency, stoicism, acting tough, limiting emotional expression, and persevering in tough times without seeking help from others. It also includes pressures to look good, to be aggressive, dominant, in control in relationships with others and even violent in situations where it is deemed to be necessary. These beliefs are learned during processes of socialisation which happen from interactions with parents, friends, teachers, peers, the media, and wider society in general. People who internalise these beliefs and live their lives according to them are classified as being 'in' the Man Box. Those who do not accept these beliefs or live according to them are classified as being 'out' of the Man Box.

The analogy of the box is used as it demonstrates how certain forms of masculinity can be constraining, that they can trap people within and restrict them by limiting their capacity to act in any other way. The Man Box is a structure to which men and boys are taught they must fit in if they are to earn the status of being a real man. Behaviour which strays too far from the rules set by the man box is frequently punished with mocking, social exclusion or even violence. The Man Box scale was developed by Equimundo and is comprised of 17 messages which are used to assess inclusion or exclusion from the Man Box. These messages include statements such as 'guys should act strong even if they feel scared or nervous inside' 'men should figure out their personal problems on their own' or 'men should use violence to get respect if necessary'. The extent to which men agree with these types of statements determines whether or not they are classified as being in the Man Box.

What We Found

Overall, we found that those who adhered to Man Box values were more likely to express lower levels of satisfaction that they could be themselves, and that they were more likely to exhibit risky behaviours around drinking and drug taking. They were also more likely to report feeling social pressure to use violence to defend their reputation if required, although reported instances of physical violence were very low. Those in the Man Box were significantly more likely to be involved in bullying behaviour with this behaviour mostly manifesting itself in terms of teasing or 'slagging' others. Those inside the Man Box were also significantly less likely to seek help when they were feeling sad or depressed although they were also more likely to report having a close friend that they felt they could confide in if necessary.

It is also important to note that there were a number of behaviours and beliefs that did not differ significantly according to whether people were in or out of the Man Box. For example, the prevalence of pornography usage tracked almost equally among those in and out of the Man Box. Those out of the box were slightly more likely to report usage of pornography but those in the box were more likely to state that it had influenced their expectations of sex. There was also little difference between people in or out of the box with regard to reported desire to change their physical appearance. 91% of those in the Man Box reported some degree of desire to change their physical appearance with the figure for those out of the Box being 88%.

Perhaps the most significant finding of our survey is that which relates to how the Man Box scale was calculated. When similar analysis was carried out elsewhere there were 17 statements which acted as factors which could be used to determine acceptance or rejection of the Man Box principles. We found however that not all 17 messages were statistically significant in the Irish context. Instead, what we found is that there were 8 Man Box messages which were determinative in constructing the Irish version of the Man Box. The statements which were not included in the Irish context related to the importance of physical appearance and looking good which were entirely rejected. Similarly, statements which declared housework and caring as being predominantly women's work were rejected and so were not included in the Irish Man Box scale. Other key messages that were statistically insignificant from our sample related to controlling behaviour in relationships with 2 statements rejected namely 'A man should have final say in decisions about his relationship or marriage' and 'If a guy has a girlfriend or wife he deserves to know where she is at all times'.

Life Satisfaction and Self Confidence

People in the box are more likely to report a lower life satisfaction overall and lower satisfaction that they could be themselves with partners (In 66% Out 75%), and in work (In 59%, Out 71%). There are nuances at play however as people in the Man Box are slightly more likely to report being satisfied that they could be themselves around their family (In 74% Out 70%).

Risky Behaviour

Those in the Man Box were far more likely to report instances of drinking so much that they got drunk (In 92%, Out 74%). They were also slightly more likely to report using recreational drugs in the last year (In 23%, Out 18%).

Friendship and Support Seeking

Those in the Box were over 3 times more likely to not seek help from anyone if they feel sad or depressed (In 20%, Out 6%). People in the Box were less likely to report giving emotional support to a friend (In 44%, Out 54%) and were similarly less likely to report receiving support from a friend (In 33%, Out 44%).

There were close similarities with reported rates of satisfaction with close friends (In 62%, Out 65%), and there were also similar scores for participants describing the extent to which they could be themselves around close friends (In 77%, Out 79%).

Homophobia

People in the box were more likely to say that friends would give them a hard time for hanging out with a gay person (In 13%, Out 6%). In a similar vein those in the box reported that they would get a hard time from friends if they hung out with someone who is transgender (In 33%, Out 17%).

Bullying and Violence

Reported use of violence was very low overall, in fact the vast majority of behaviour marked as bullying which was captured in the research was that of mocking or calling people names. This would likely be influenced by the widespread cultural norm in Ireland of 'slagging'. People in the box were much more likely to engage in this behaviour than people out of it (In 52%, Out 32%). Men in the man box were over 3 times more likely than those outside to report feeling social pressure to use violence if necessary (In 17%, Out, 5%) Similarly those in the box were more likely to report that their parents taught them to act strong (In 49% v Out 30%).

2. Why this study?

It is important from the outset to be clear on what is meant by "*masculinity*" and how it is shaped and framed within society. Simply put, masculinity refers to the roles, behaviours and attributes seen as appropriate for boys and men in a given society. The slightly complex side of masculinity is that the expectations on boys and men vary based on their socio-cultural environment – in that, there are many different experiences of being a man in society with some being subordinated compared to others based on class, sexuality, and ethnic orientation amongst other reasons. Ultimately, what boys and men are taught as acceptable masculine behaviour in one context can be emasculating in another. However, while there is diversity in how men operate, each era - and culture - has a dominant (or hegemonic) form of masculinity that often privileges men over women, and stronger men over less-masculine men.

Social scientists globally contend that men who ascribe to inequitable gender norms (e.g. believe women are solely responsible for household chores and child-rearing) and endorse dominant masculine norms of behaviour (e.g. believe violence is acceptable and women are sexual conquests) have higher rates of engaging in psychological, physical and sexual violence against women and other men. In 2021 men had a much higher likelihood of being victims of assault than women and were over three times more likely to be victims of homicide. Conversely, just over 90% of reported sexual assaults in 2021 had female victims and just under 70% of reported historic sexual assaults were women. Men were recorded as the suspected offenders for the vast majority of serious crimes in this period accounting for almost 90% of suspects for homicides and almost 98% of suspects for sexual assaults. Violence and sexual assault against women has been recognised as a global health epidemic in which one in three women are impacted during their lifetime – resulting in higher rates of depression, sexually transmitted infections, and a rise in chronic health conditions. There is also strong evidence linking "*harmful masculinities*" and perpetrating aggression and hostility towards gay, lesbian, and transgender people – or indeed, those who do not conform to heteronormative modes of behaviour. Furthermore, studies have explored the impact of "*harmful masculinities*" on the health of the individual who endorses them - with Courtenay, (2011)[1] stating that men may deliberately engage in health-damaging behaviours to actively perform masculinities and reinforce their masculine identity. Against this sociological backdrop, it is not surprising that men on average die younger than their female counterparts, while much work has been done in this space which has reduced this disparity there is still on average a difference of 3.6 years of life expectancy with women living to 84.4

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[1] Courtenay W. H. (2011). *Dying to be men: Psychosocial, environmental, and biobehavioral directions in promoting the health of men and boys*. (1st ed.). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. https://www.routledge.com/Dying-to-be-Men-Psychosocial-Environmental-and-Biobehavioral-Directions/Courtenay/p/book/9780415878760

years and men living to 80.8 on average. Men are also far more likely than women to be die by suicide, in fact since the turn of the century men have accounted for on average just under 80% of all occurrences of suicide in Ireland.

It is important to note that there are not just negative aspects to masculinity, but positive ones too include being reliable, analytical, having leadership qualities and being willing to take a stand. The point being that despite modern day stereotypes, masculinity - in and of itself - is not inherently negative or harmful, but the culture that dictates how men and boys should act, in certain contexts, is often harmful. Hence, moving away from masculine shaming, and towards a strengths-based and gender transformative approach may lead to a higher combination of both positive masculine and feminine traits (i.e. helpful, sensitive to the needs of others, affectionate, sympathetic etc.).

As noted already, masculinity is influenced at a wider societal level, and does not exist in a vacuum. For decades in Ireland, traditional masculinity has been orientated towards men being strong, active, aggressive, tough, daring, heterosexual, emotionally inexpressive and dominant. The Catholic Church exercised a monopoly on Irish morality during the mid-late twentieth century and was significant in shaping the backdrop of Irish masculinities as we know it today; predicated on distinct gender roles between the sexes – typically, positioning the '*woman*' as domestically orientated and the '*man*' as the '*hard*' worker and '*breadwinner*'. Allied to this was (is) indigenous forms of Irish patriarchy that still, in many ways, hold high order for many men in Ireland today; sport, drink culture, agriculture, land ownership and the exposition of the Clergy – thus, traditionally giving rise to men (and the masculine) in late-modern Ireland. However, in a remarkably short time period Irish society has changed fundamentally as reflected in the large number of referendums aimed at bringing the country's 1937 Constitution into the present day. Most recently, two referendums on marriage equality and abortion revealed a clear rupture with past values and behaviours: in 2015 and 2018 large majorities of Irish citizens voted in favour of the liberalisation agenda, on marriage equality in 2015 and abortion in 2018. This, in many ways, signified a watershed period for the Irish populace that is in sharp contrast with their long-standing conservative Catholic reputation that has been eclipsed by more pluralistic ways of expressing societal norms in Ireland today. Nonetheless, the decline in church authority in Ireland has also been by a rise in fast capitalism, individualism, and social media; dovetailed closely by decline in community engagement, the valorisation of idealised body images, pornography, and indeed loneliness for men to name but a few factors.

This requires us to examine the shifting nature of masculinity in Irish society across time and through the processes and relationships in which men live their lives.

Invariably, masculine forms of expression interact with every level of society – thus, the analytical backdrop of any study of masculinities needs to be conscious of not just contemporary norms, but historical ones too – and alert to social relations with respect to age, class, ethnicity, (social) media and globalisation. Typically, in Ireland, scholarship has been slow to study men as gendered subjects and the cultural influences that shape masculine behaviour. To address this knowledge gap, researchers with the Men's Development Network (Ireland), in conjunction with Equimundo (Global Center for Masculinities and Social Justice) – conducted quantitative research via questionnaires. This explored theoretically derived aspects of masculine norms, including self-sufficiency, sense of self and physical attractiveness, rigid masculine gender roles, heterosexuality and homophobia, and aggression/control.

2. The Man Box

The Man Box refers to a set of normative cultural ideals and beliefs which act to pressure men into behaving in particular ways. They include ideas such as self-sufficiency, stoicism, acting tough, limiting emotional expression, and persevering in tough times without seeking help from others. It also includes pressures to look good, to be aggressive, dominant, in control in relationships with others and even violent in situations where it is deemed to be necessary. These beliefs are learned during processes of socialisation which happen from interactions with parents, friends, teachers, peers, the media, and wider society in general. In learning and performing these ideas people internalise a wide set of beliefs about how they should behave according to their gender as well as standards they must meet if they are to successfully perform the roles associated with their gender. Gender is one of the consistent and pervasive means of classifying people with massive consequences for the life chances and experiences of whole categories of people. Gender roles and expectations are so deeply enmeshed in social relations that there is often the belief that they are natural or just the way things are. This is not the case however as most, if not all of the facets of gender are socially produced, enacted, and maintained.

The Man Box concept has its roots in the work of Paul Kivel and the Oakland Mens' Project in the 1980's who described the 'Act Like A Man Box' which outlined the various rules and standards by which men are judged. This concept was further developed by Tony Porter who shortened the title to the Man Box. The analogy of the box is used as it demonstrates how certain forms of masculinity can be constraining, that they can trap people and restrict them by limiting their capacity to act in any other way. The Man Box is a structure to which men and boys are taught they must fit in if they are to earn the status of being a 'real' man. Behaviour which strays too far from the implicit rules set by the Man Box is frequently punished with ridicule, mocking, social exclusion or even violence. The act of policing the behaviour of others in this fashion is by itself a means of asserting a specific form of masculinity and of engaging in a gender performance which serves to further reinforce and strengthen the norms and standards of this particular form of masculinity. Those who are in the box and live by its values are frequently rewarded with status, social esteem, and the feeling that they are adhering to the predominant cultural script and behaving in the way that they should. People who internalise these beliefs and live their lives according to them are classified as being 'in' the Man Box. Those who do not accept these beliefs or live according to them are classified as being 'out' of the Man Box. Gender expectations are thus crucial in patterning behaviour and are an organising principle for social structures and by extension for the people who live among them.

2.1 The Man Box Scale

Drawing on the work of Kivel and Porter Equimundo developed the Man Box scale which is a means of quantitatively assessing the prevalence of these values. So far research has used variations of the Man Box scale in The United States, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Australia, Jamaica, the Caribbean, and Jordan among others. The scale which is set out in the table below is comprised of 17 messages which are used to assess inclusion or exclusion from the Man Box which fall under 1 of 7 pillars.

Pillar	Man Box Messages	
1. Self Sufficiency	1.1	A man who talks a lot about his worries fears and problems shouldn't really get respect
	1.2	Men should figure out their personal problems on their own without asking others for help
2. Acting Tough	2.1	A man who doesn't fight back when others push him around is weak
	2.2	Guys should act strong even if they feel nervous or scared inside
3. Physical Attractiveness	3.1	It is very hard for a man to be successful if he doesn't look good
	3.2	Women don't go for guys who fuss too much about their hair, clothes, and skin
	3.3	A guy who spends a lot of time on his looks isn't very manly
4. Rigid Masculine Gender Roles	4.1	It is not good for a boy to be taught how to cook, sew, clean the house or to take care of younger children
	4.2	A man shouldn't have to do household chores
	4.3	Men should be the ones to bring home money to provide for their families not women
5. Heterosexuality and Homophobia	5.1	A gay guy is not a real man
	5.2	Straight guys being friends with gay guys is completely fine and normal
6. Hypersexuality	6.1	A 'real man' should have as many sexual partners as he can
	6.2	A 'real man' would never say no to sex
7. Aggression and Control	7.1	Men should use violence to get respect if necessary
	7.2	A man should always have the final say about decisions in his relationship or marriage
	7.3	If a guy has a girlfriend or wife he deserves to know where she is at all times

The 7 pillars are based around the ideas which reflect what respondents are likely to think reflects how a 'real man' would think and act.

Pillar 1 Self-Sufficiency relates to the expectation that men be self-reliant and not reach out to others for help. The 2 statements posited under this pillar relate to independence and stoicism, they test the belief that men should solve problems on their own and that reaching out to others for help should be seen as socially undesirable.

Pillar 2 Acting Tough consists of statements which relate to fighting back and to acting strong even if that is not how someone feels.

Pillar 3 Physical Attractiveness is comprised of 3 statements which measure the extent to which looking good is important to achieve masculinity. Conversely and at the same time spending a lot of time grooming, caring for appearance or trying too hard is posited as not manly.

Pillar 4 Rigid Masculine Gender Roles uses 3 statements to measure the gendered division of care, the division of labour in the home and the level of adherence to beliefs about the role of the male breadwinner.

Pillar 5 Heterosexuality and Homophobia measures homophobia by testing the hypothesis that a 'real man' is unambiguously heterosexual and homophobic.

Pillar 6 Hypersexuality measures the degree to which masculinity is related to being promiscuous and always available for sex with as many partners as possible.

Pillar 7 Aggression and Control uses 3 statements to assess the need for a 'real man' to use violence and aggression to get respect, and the extent to which a man should be in control in his relationships.

4. Methodology

The survey was comprised of up to 48 questions which aimed to examine what it means to be a man, the expectations placed on men in their daily lives and in their relationships with others, and the extent to which meeting these expectations matter. The questions covered a range of topics including life satisfaction and self-confidence, friendship and support seeking, self- conceptions of attractiveness, risky behaviours and the acceptability of violence. It was adopted and adapted for use in the Irish context with slight changes made in language and terminology to fit with Hiberno-English. There were also questions added relating to the use of pornography, drinking and drug taking as well as questions on satisfaction with work, hours and pay. Following consultation with research partners, questions which related to instances of self-harm and suicidal ideation were removed.

The early sections of the survey were concerned with capturing participants demographic data including age, education, income, employment status and ethnic background. Following this, participants were presented with the 17 statements on the Man Box scale presented both as 'in my opinion' and 'society tells me statements'. This allowed for in/out calculations with regard to the Man Box. After this, participants were asked a range of questions relating to life satisfaction, physical appearance and behaviours. By doing this it was possible to map a list of behaviours against membership or otherwise of the Man Box.

The survey was posted online on the 11th of May 2022 and was live until the end of October, during this time calls for participation were advertised across social media and the survey was promoted by Men's Development Network members and people in adjacent organisations. Emails inviting participation were sent out to sports clubs, colleges of further education and universities as well as to a range of other organisations such as trade unions, youth work organisations, and political parties. The survey was anonymous and self-administered by participants via computers or mobile phones.

The overall sample is 1,103 yet there was an overall completion rate of 52%. Within this there is also further complexity as the survey design allowed for participants to skip any questions they did not want to answer. This means that the number of people who responded to each question varies, significantly however the full 1,103 participants answered the questions which allow for the construction of the man box. The composition of the sample differs from Man Box studies carried out in other countries as we did not specifically target young people and instead encouraged participation among all men or male identifying people over the age of 18.

4.1 Analysis

To identify how to construct the composite score for the Man Box items, we used a mix of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. The goal was to identify the one-factor model with the best fit. We started from a simple 1-factor model using Exploratory Factor Analysis with all 17 Man Box statements to see if the simplest, saturated model would be sufficient. The goodness of fit statistics were poor and a few problematic items were identified and removed. With the remaining set of items, we iteratively added and removed them from a one-factor confirmatory factor model to maximize several goodness of fit statistics, such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index, root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR). The associated cut-offs for goodness of fit are 0.95, 0.95, 0.05, and 0.08, respectively. The best fitting model retained 8 items. The composite Man Box score was calculated by using the factor loadings as weights and was standardized. The 8-item composite score was used in all remaining analyses. These 8 items can be considered the most relevant Man Box items for the Irish version of the Man Box.

4.2 Limitations

One of the key limitations of self-report assessments that observes attitudes and perspectives concerning social norms, is the topic of social desirability – in that, the tendency for people to present themselves in a generally favourable fashion. The problem of social desirability bias is most likely to occur with questions that relate to what are widely accepted attitudes, or behavioural or social norms (for instance; smoking, violence, drug use, pornography use, lying, cheating etc.). However, this is most likely to occur when data is collected through a survey method where the respondent can be easily identified. The use of self-administered questionnaires, as in this study, reduces the level social desirability bias - in that, it reduces the salience of social cues by isolating the participant to complete the survey in their own time. Indeed self-administration may not fully reduce social desirability bias, but there are indications that anonymous mass self-administration gives rise to less distortion than other methods of in-person administration.

5.The Man Box in Ireland:

similarity and difference

The analysis for this research consisted of carrying out exploratory factor analysis to discover the extent to which Man Box statements were interrelated. Following this it was possible to gauge which of them were interrelated and the extent to which each statement was influential in formulating the Irish version of the Man Box. What is unique about the Irish version in comparison to Man Box studies done elsewhere is that less than half of the man box statements are statistically significant, this in itself is indicative of forms of masculinity among our sample which differ significantly from studies carried out elsewhere. The table below lists the 8 statements which make up the Irish Man Box and displays the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) rating associated with each one.

Pillar	EFA	Statement
Pillar 4	.68	Men should be the ones to bring money home to provide for their families not women
Pillar 2	.66	Guys should act strong even if they feel scared or nervous inside
Pillar 1	.65	Men should figure out their personal problems on their own without asking for help
Pillar 3	.64	A guy who spends a lot of time on his looks isn't very manly
Pillar 5	.63	A gay man is not a 'real man'
Pillar 1.	.58	A man who talks a lot about his worries, fears, and problems shouldn't really get respect
Pillar 7	.50	Men should use violence to get respect if necessary
Pillar 6	.48	A real man would never say no to sex

Within the scale the EFA weighting given to each statement is important as a higher weighting means that the statement was more likely to be linked to the other Man Box statements and so accordingly the higher the EFA weighting figure, the more influential the statement is in constructing the Irish Man Box. The table above which shows the Irish Man Box statements is ordered according to the level of influence of each statement. We can thus see that the statement which was the most influential was that from Pillar 4 which described adherence to the norm of the male breadwinner, the least influential statement in the scale was from Pillar 6 which stated that a real man would never say no to sex.

While it is important to spell out which of the Man Box Scale statements were statistically significant in the Irish context it is similarly important to consider the statements which did not make it into the Irish Man Box. All of these statements are excluded due to their lack of fit in a Cronbach Alpha test which measured the internal consistency of a set of statements to assess the extent to which they can be grouped together. This means that while the statements may have similar overall percentage scores they are not always linked. By way of example under Pillar 2 the statement 'a guy who doesn't fight back when others push him around is weak had similar scores to the other Pillar 2 statement 'guys should act strong even if they feel scared or nervous inside'. Despite the similarity in overall occurrence of agreement with these statements only the second one was included in the Man Box scale for Ireland. This was because the second statement was found to be predictive of being linked to the other Man Box statements which were grouped together in statistical testing while the first statement wasn't.

| Not Included in the Irish Man Box	
Pillar	**Statement**
Pillar 2	A guy who doesn't fight back when others push him around is weak
Pillar 3	It's very hard for a man to be successful if he doesn't look good
Pillar 3	Women don't go for guys who fuss too much about their hair clothes and skin
Pillar 4	It is not good for a boy to be taught how to cook, sew, clean the house or to take care of younger children
Pillar 4	A Man shouldn't have to do household chores
Pillar 5	Straight guys being friends with gay guys is completely fine and normal
Pillar 6	A real man should have as many sexual partners as possible
Pillar 7	A man should have final say in decisions about his relationship or marriage
Pillar 7	If a guy has a girlfriend or wife, he deserves to know where she is at all times

Other statements however were not included for the simple reason that either in or out of the Man Box they were not agreed with overall or seen as acceptable beliefs or behaviours. For example, under pillar 7, the pair of statements which described instances of controlling behaviour 'a man should have the final say about decisions in his relationship or marriage' and 'if a guy has a girlfriend or wife he deserves to know where she is at all times' had very low instances of agreement overall for both

those in and those out of the box and so were not included in the scale. This in itself is significant as it demonstrates a lack of agreement with these views amongst our participants and disassociates them with beliefs and practices around what is acceptable masculine behaviour.

The idea proposed by Pillar 3 that physical attractiveness is important similarly did not track alongside the other Man Box statements. This points towards a rejection amongst our sample of the idea that being physically attractive and taking care of your appearance is an important facet of being a man. A further item of significance which did not track relates to the statements under Pillar 4 Rigid Gender Roles although there is a degree of nuance here which requires some unpacking. The 2 statements which relate to the division of caring and labour in the home were both strongly rejected overall and similarly they were not predictive of adherence or non-adherence to Man Box views. This points to a belief amongst our sample that housework and caring are not gendered activities and that they should be the responsibility of men just as much as they are of women. While this is a positive development that decouples housework and care responsibilities from gender roles the caveat that must be attached is that the third statement under this pillar which relates to adherence to normative beliefs of the male breadwinner was both commonly held and strongly predictive of the Man Box with an exploratory factor analysis weighting of .68 which made it the highest of all factors.

5.1 In and Out of the Box

Overall, given the conditions described above there were roughly speaking two thirds of all participants who were classed as being 'in' the box and one third who were classed as being out of it.

Number of men in and out of the Man Box

357

746

0   200   400   600   800

FREQUENCY

| OUT | IN |
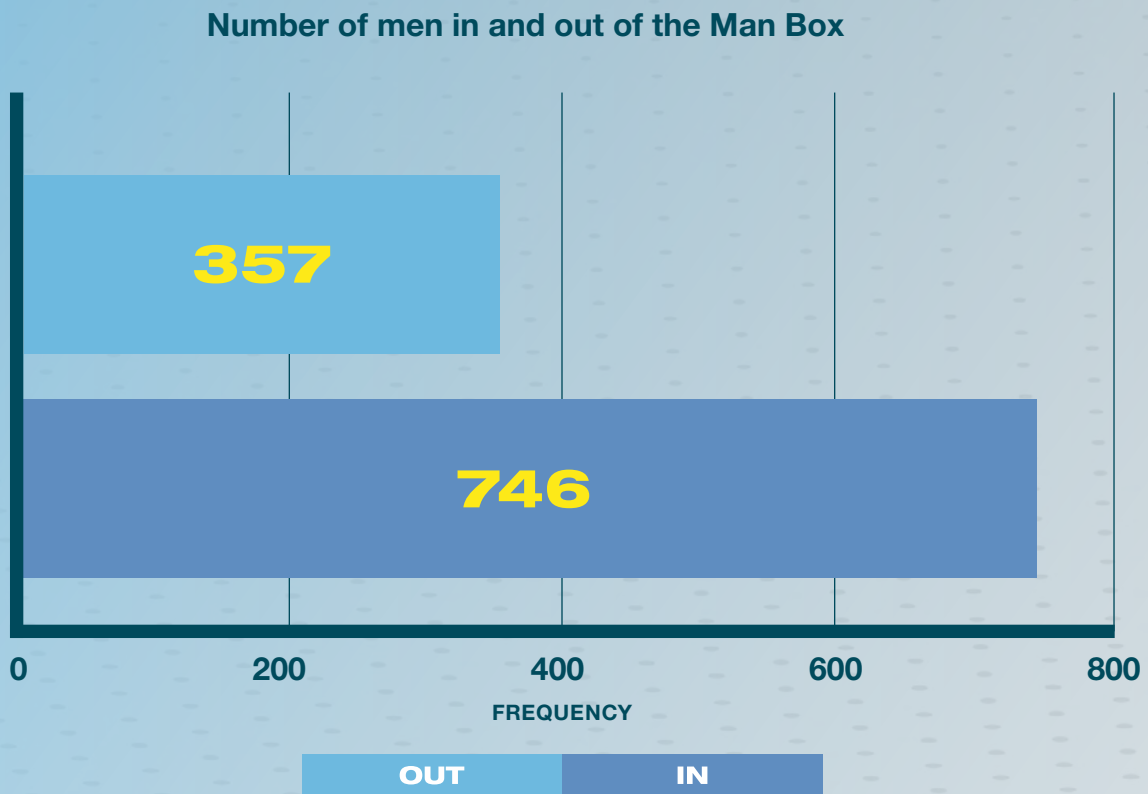
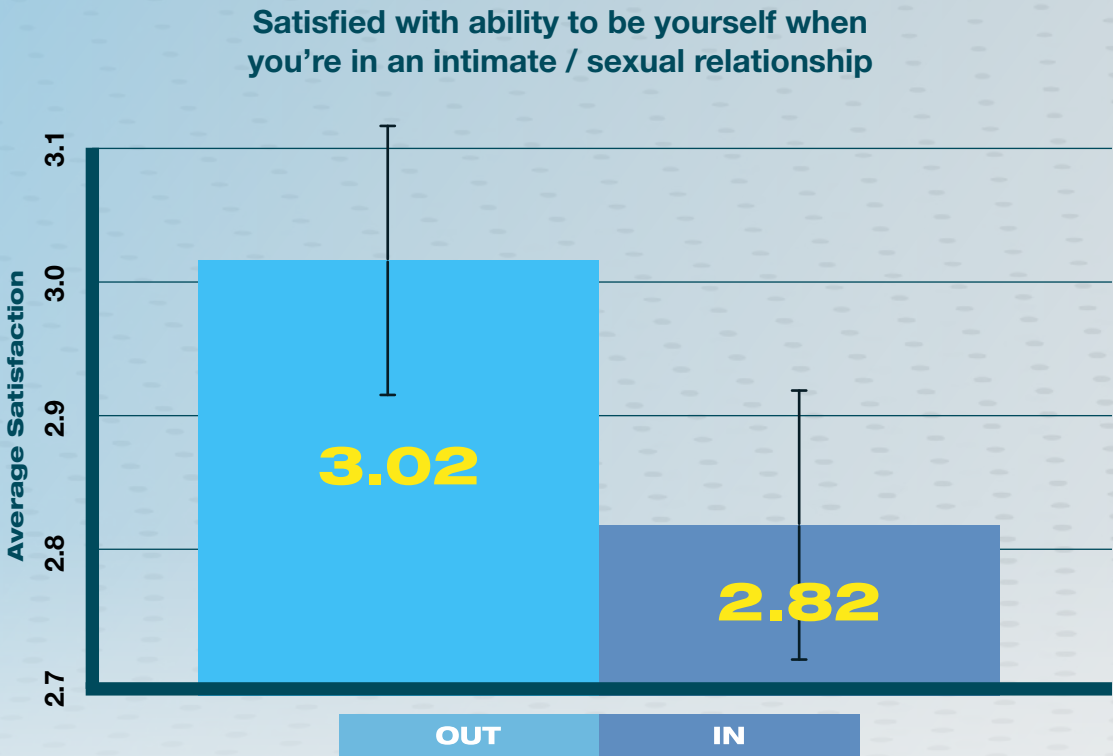# 6. What does this mean?

Life Inside the Man Box

So far, we have examined the parameters for inclusion in the Man Box and enumerated how many people who filled out the survey fell inside or out. We have noted how the Irish version is comprised of fewer factors than those that are typically found elsewhere but that this means two thirds of participants are classified as being in the box. The following sections will examine what life inside the Man Box is like. It will look at behaviours and beliefs captured by the survey that are related to being in or out of the box. At the same time however, there were a number of behaviours and beliefs for which the Man Box construct made very little difference and some of these will also be described.

6.1 Self Confidence and being yourself

A central aspect of Man Box culture is individuals acting in ways that align with dominant patterns of behaviour that promote the self. Notwithstanding the fact that culture is influenced at a multitude of levels – operating within the Man Box can have a debilitating effect on men's self-confidence and their capacity to be themselves in social situations. Man Box culture prescribes a narrowly defined set of (traditional) rules for being a man and often restricts men from expressing self-autonomy and agency in day-to-day life. The central premise of the Man Box is that if you don't fit in, you're not a "real" man, and not being a real man carries a heavy social price – thus, also potentially having immediate effects on men's self-confidence if they are not in the Man Box. Boys learn that they need to prove they fit in the box, and as they grow into men they realise they have to continually prove their worthiness as men throughout their lives. In doing so, the capacity for many men to be themselves can be difficult. Participants in this report were asked a range of questions and statements that aligned with self-confidence and the capacity to be 'one-self' in social settings to enable an understanding of men's self-confidence in Ireland today and also attempt to capture the degree to which

men feel they can be themselves in day-to-day settings. Our analysis revealed little significant difference between respondents' capacity to be themselves in different social settings whether they were in or outside the man box. For instance, when asked if they felt they could be themselves with close friends, 62% of respondents who were in the man box felt they could, while 65% who were out of the man box said they could not, p=0.05 for both. Overall, results that looked at participants' capacity to be themselves and have self-confidence in social settings demonstrated little difference between those in the man box and those outside the man box. This shows that in broad terms the vast majority of respondents displayed good self-confidence, and a strong capacity to be themselves in many social settings.

This differs however when we examine the extent to which participants felt they could be themselves in other specific contexts. In the workplace for example there is a distinct difference, with 59% of those in the box stating that they could be themselves at work and 71% of those out of the box. This is most likely due to the fact the workplace is typically an environment where there are explicit and implicit rules of behaviour and comportment which must be followed. As a rule bound social setting the workplace is one where there is a requirement towards self-regulation and evidently this is more difficult on average for those in the box than those out of it.

Satisfied with ability to be yourself when you're in an intimate / sexual relationship

Average Satisfaction

	OUT	IN
	3.02	2.82

There were similar differences reported with regard to intimate relationships with 66% of those in the box stating that they could be themselves, with this figure rising to 75% for those out of the box. Traditionally, boys and men are commonly socialised to be willing and ready to have sex at any given moment, to control and direct the sexual act and to believe that intercourse is crucial to gaining social acceptance among their peers – thus, it often becomes a very transactional and performative act. Therefore, removed from aspects noted as contributing to enhanced relationship/sexual satisfaction in life; in terms of exploring positive and negative feelings with a partner concerning sexual activity. Indeed, emotional expressiveness and self-disclosure have been noted as critical for healthy (sexual) relationships, but identified as feminine qualities and, consequently, are to be avoided in the Man Box.

Another central aspect in the research on men's relationship with sex is the importance of the female perspective in the affirmation of sexual prowess – particularly, in the context of intercourse. For example, men and (adolescent) boys expressed reservations about having sex with woman, for fear that they would not perform well enough to meet her (their) expectations - and thus, fail to be 'man enough'. These sentiments were particularly evident in questions which related to the use of pornography, and it's influence on expectations of sex. In particular some participants expressed reservations and anxieties that they would not be able to 'live up to' what they were seeing in pornography.

These diverse perceptions of male sexuality have been noted as factors that remove men and (adolescent) boys from sexual engagement and increase their engagement with pornography and paying for sex through prostitution. Therefore, man box culture has also been shown to shape men's intimate/sexual relationships – in that, fulfilling the requirements of the traditional male role may lead to negative outcomes in relationships. For example, many boys and men are socialised to compete, to be "tough" and withhold their emotional feelings. Aspects that are at odds with effective and caring relationships. Studies have found that men with traditional masculine attitudes have more sexual partners, less intimate relationships, and are more likely to view relationships between men and women as burdensome. Furthermore, in several studies both adolescent boys and men exhibited ambivalence about intimate relationships: On one hand, they felt compelled to conform to the norm that a man should be ready to have sex at any given moment; on the other hand, they expressed a yearning for 'meaningful sex' within a romantic intimate relationship. This was evident within our data as the statement 'a real man would never say no to sex' was statistically significant in the construction of the Man Box while the other statement in Pillar 6 'a man should have as many sexual partners as possible' was not.

6.2 Support Seeking

Stoicism is a trait which is frequently associated with many forms of masculinity, it is enacted in practices which place undue value on emotional toughness and restraint. To be stoic is to be in control of one's emotions, to roll with the punches and take the highs and lows of life without being outwardly affected, to be able to keep on an even keel (emotionally speaking) and to be able to handle pain, hardship, and upheaval without complaint or displaying any outward emotions. Tied in with these ideals of masculine stoicism is the idea of avoiding seeking help, of managing by yourself and of never appearing vulnerable in front of others. There are obvious problems with stoicism being an integral part of masculine identity as it serves to cut people off from others and to bottle up their feelings. Such a schema of masculinity sees anger as being the only acceptable expression of emotion and characterises any other displays as being unmanly and so to be avoided. Placing the expectation on people to just get on with things serves to cuts off their ability to recognise problems and to act on them and this in turn can cause them to build-up and be amplified. The consequences of this can be seen in increased rates of self-harm or suicide as some people who are unable to meet the unreasonable demands of stoic masculinity turn their frustrations inward upon themselves.

There were a number of questions and statements within the survey which aimed to measure the extent to which people sought out help and support in times of need as well as attempting to find out who they were most likely to seek help from. One such question asked participants 'if in the past month they had talked to a friend about something deeply emotional they were going through'. Perhaps unsurprisingly those in the Box were less likely to report this with 33% reporting that they had. The figure for those out of the Box was 44% which means that these people were more likely to have spoken to a friend about something emotional they had gone through. Participants were also asked if in the past month they had provided emotional support to someone going through a difficult time. Here, 44% of those in the box answered that they had, whereas the figure for those out of the box was 54%. At the same time however, a further question asked if in the last month you have felt comfortable crying in front of a male friend. There was little difference in answers between in and out of the box, yet it is worth remarking on the high levels of participants who agreed with 87% of those in the box and 91% out. This demonstrates how outward displays of emotion in the company of trusted friends are no longer seen as unmanly. Additionally, those in the box were far more likely to report having a friend they could turn to for help if required (In 28%, Out 17%).

A further question asked participants to rank in order of preference people who they would seek help from first when they felt sad or depressed.

Man Box	Friends	Parents	Partner	Professional	No-one
In	17%	13%	30%	7%	20%
Out	23%	10%	48%	7%	6%

The figures reported in this table are based on 511 respondents who filled out the question and represents the number 1 rank declared. The influence of a partner is apparent as they are by a distance the most common person to whom participants would turn to when feeling sad or depressed. There is also the largest difference (18%) between those in and out of the box who turned to their partners. For participants out of the box the figure of 48% is over double that of any of the other alternatives. This once again demonstrates how participants who were classed as being out of the box were more likely by a number of metrics to report closer relationships. In a similar vein 75% of participants classified as being out of the box declared themselves satisfied or very satisfied that they could be themselves in their relationships with this figure dropping to 66% for those in the box.

The next most frequent answer for those in the box was that they sought help from no-one when they were feeling sad or depressed. 20% of those in the box put this as their highest preference in comparison to a mere 6% of those out of the box. This means that people classified as in the box were over 3 times more likely to report not seeking help at all from anyone if they were feeling sad or depressed.

### When feeling sad or depressed, seek help from no one
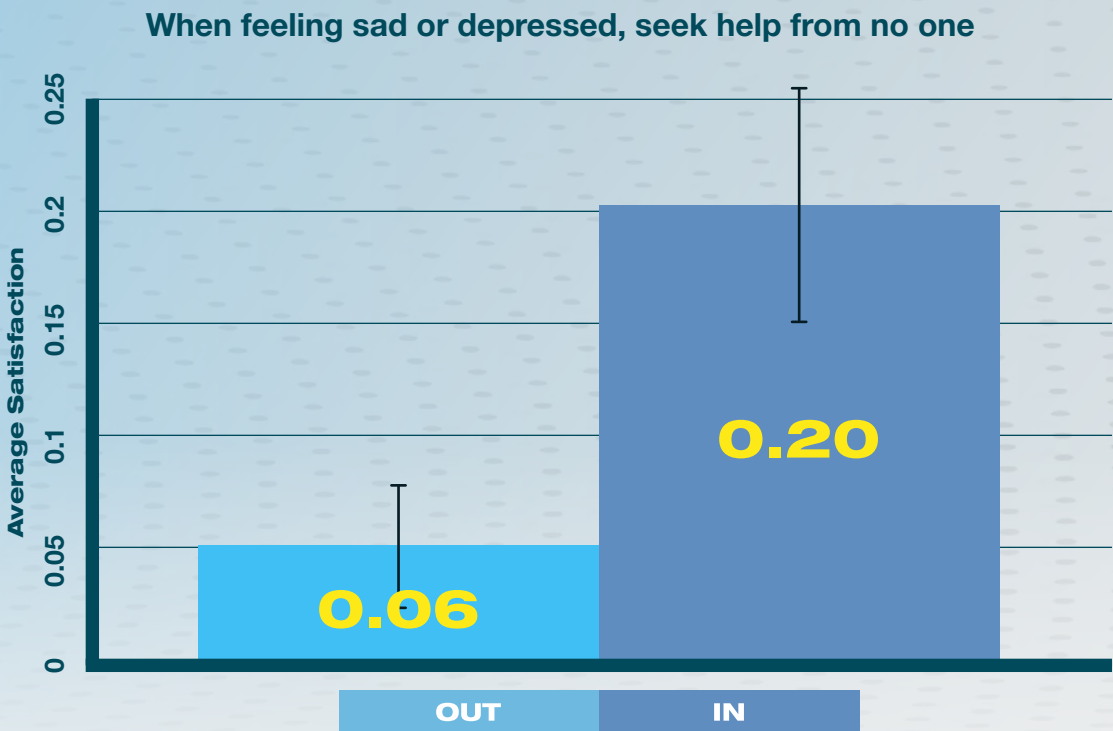
As we have seen in the preceding paragraphs there are noticeable differences in help seeking behaviours between those in and out of the box. People in the box are less likely to give or receive support from others and were far more likely to seek help from nobody if they feel sad or depressed. In this sense, those in the box were more likely to exhibit behaviours associated with stoicism and (or) trying to get through challenging times on their own without support. It has been argued that this emphasis on autonomy, stoicism, and self-reliance associated with the construction of the Man Box fuels male's negative attitude towards emotional expression and help-seeking. Against this backdrop, further investigation is required concerning how people seek solace in the absence of seeking help or assurance from friends, family or relationships. This brings us on to the next section which examines the prevalence of drinking and drug taking
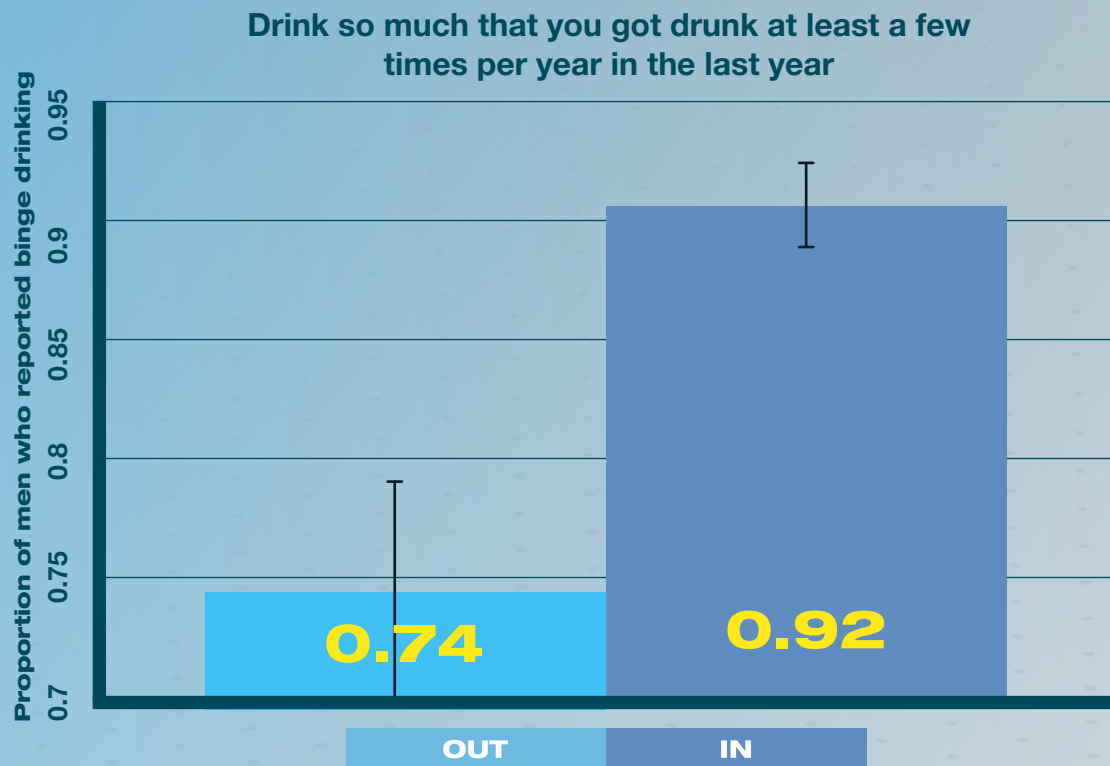
6.3 Risky Behaviours and Pornography Usage

We sought to examine the extent to which being in or out of the Man Box was linked to instances of risky behaviour. In particular we looked at drinking to excess and the use of recreational drugs. Man Box studies carried out elsewhere included a question on driving behaviours but space precluded us from having this question in the survey.

The question on drug use asked participants 'in the last year have you taken drugs other than those required for medical reasons'. There wasn't a wide difference between those in and out of the box for people reporting recreational drug use with 23% of those in the box and 18% of those out. There was also for both in and out of the box confidence intervals that were quite wide which meant that there is some degree of variance within each measure

Used drugs in the last year
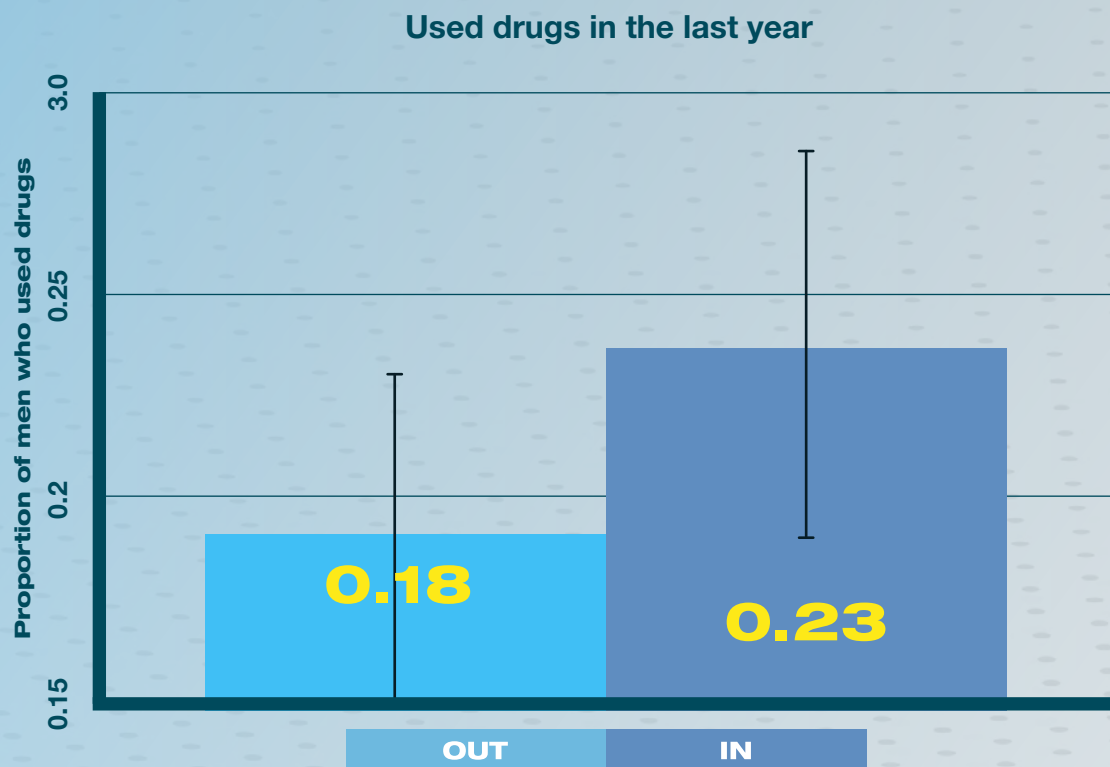
A further question asked participants if they had drank alcohol to excess on a number of occasions in the past year. Perhaps unsurprisingly there was a far higher proportion of respondents who reported drinking to excess than there was reported drug taking. There was also a far wider spread of in/out differences. 92% of those in the box reported drinking so much that they got drunk on a number of occasions in the past year and 74% of those out of the box.

Drink so much that you got drunk at least a few times per year in the last year

Y-axis: Proportion of men who reported binge drinking
Values: 0.7, 0.75, 0.8, 0.85, 0.9, 0.95

OUT: 0.74
IN: 0.92

From this we can definitively state that people in the box are far more likely to drink to excess than those out of the box and those in the box are slightly more likely to take recreational drugs.

A further set of questions in the survey asked participants about their usage of pornography. In all, there were 5 questions on this topic, 'Have you ever used pornography', 'what age were you when you first saw pornographic material', 'how frequently do you use pornography', 'has pornography influenced your expectations of sex, if yes how'. There was little difference in responses according to whether or not participants were in or out of the box. Firstly, the average reported age for first seeing pornographic materials was 15.71 years for those out and 15.86 years for those who were in the man box. The figures for usage of pornography were also similar regardless of whether participants were in or out of the box. Those in the box were slightly less likely to report using pornography than those out of it (In 86%, Out 91%) although people in the box were slightly more likely to report pornography influencing their expectations of sex (In 35%, Out 30%).

6.4 Bullying and Violence

Bullying and violence are serious problems due to a wide range of both short and long term effects. Bullying and violence are often found to be gendered, with different forms of bullying and violence being experienced by women and men and (or) girls and boys. Indeed, it is also gendered in the way that victims are often singled out due to their gender presentation and (or) perceived sexuality. Bullying, in particular, has many forms that also incorporates violence, noted as 'direct bullying' which includes, for instance, hitting, kicking, choking, spitting etc. Indirect bullying, is more subversive – for instance, name calling, starting rumours and other forms of psychological bullying that is most common in school, college and work settings.

Male violence is often a result of a threat to masculine control; when a man experiences stress deriving from a self-perceived threat, or indeed failure, to live up to masculine expectations violence is often used as a means of (re)gaining control. For instance, intimate partner violence, is a prime example of this manifestation and reflects the feelings of distress males experience in situations that threaten their idealised masculine identity as the patriarch in a relationship. Other examples include male on male violence, the most common form of violence – or, more aptly, violence within the Man Box itself. The Man Box is invariably territorial and hierarchical, and if individuals feel threatened in their space – physically or socially – violence is often the most accepted form of reasserting their position of dominance. The man box causes men to act without self-control and to perform macho stereotypes. It is fuelled by presumptions about how men are supposed to act. In essence, both bullying and violence are strongly linked to negative masculine ideals associated with the man box as they are strategic methods to (re)inforce control and superiority in any given setting, that invariably disadvantages females, and also males. The Man Box survey included separate questions relating to the experience and perpetration of bullying and violence among men, and to assess whether bullying acts to reify masculinity.

Overall we found very low instances of direct bullying and physical violence. The question asked was if 'in the last month you physically hurt someone on purpose by pushing them down, kicking them or hitting them with a hand, clenched fist, object or weapon'. 4% of those in the box and 1% of those out described doing this at any level. This shows that amongst our sample there were very few instances reported of physical violence. This is not to say however that violence was entirely absent from the data. A question asked participants if they felt that their partner would

expect them to use violence to defend their reputation if required. 17% of those in the box reported such social pressure to use violence if necessary, for those out of the box this figure dropped to 5%.

Girlfriend/partner/Wife expects me to use violence to defend my reputation if I have to
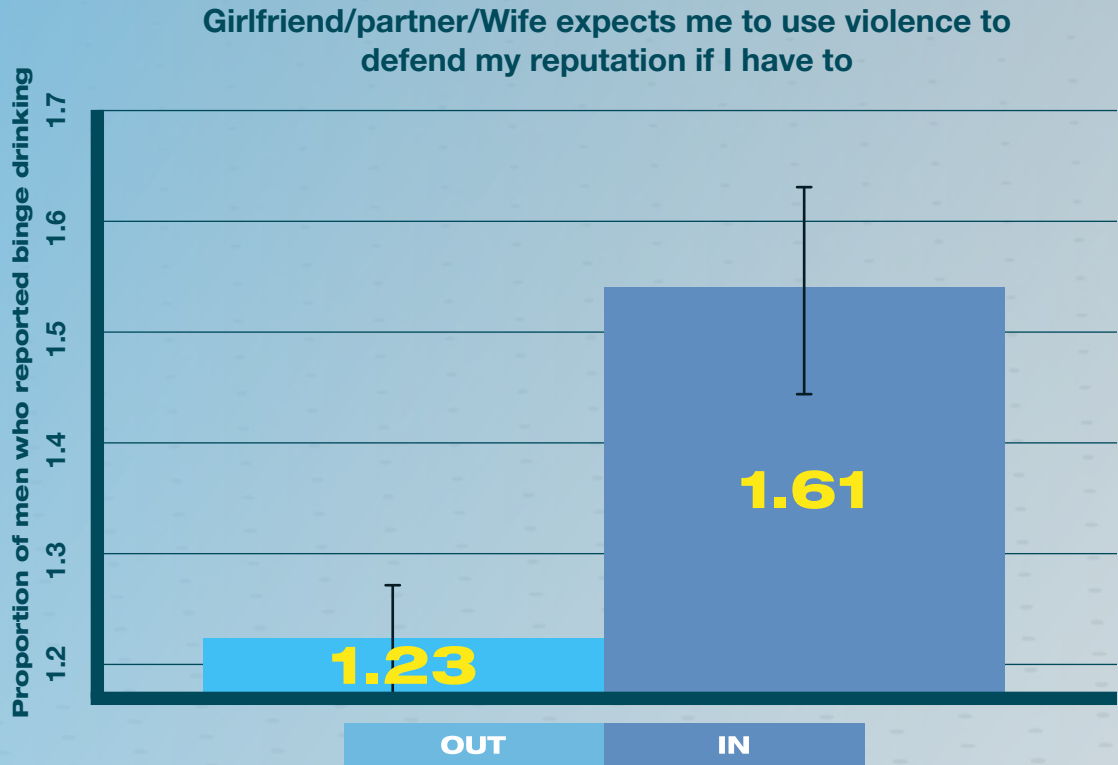
The most common form of bullying highlighted in this data was that of teasing or slagging people which was found to be common. The statement put to participants asked them if in the previous month they had 'made jokes about someone, teased someone, or called someone names they did not like for any reason'. 52% of participants classified as in the box stated that they had engaged in this behaviour over the previous month, and this figure dropped to 32% for those classified as out of the box. It is important to note here the extent to which teasing or making fun of someone would be classified as bullying in the Irish context given the widespread practices of 'slagging' or 'making fun' of people. Such practices, however, are often subjective in their interpretation – for some, they are light-hearted transactional forms of interaction, for other others, they are a means of belittlement and subjugation. Even allowing for this there are large differences in the extent to which this practice is carried out with 52% of those in the box reporting that they had done it and 32% of those out of the box. However, the reality of this needs further investigation, at an ethnographic and empirical level.

Made jokes about someone, or teased someone or called someone names that they did not like, for any reason

Average frequency of teasing

OUT: 1.39

IN: 1.70
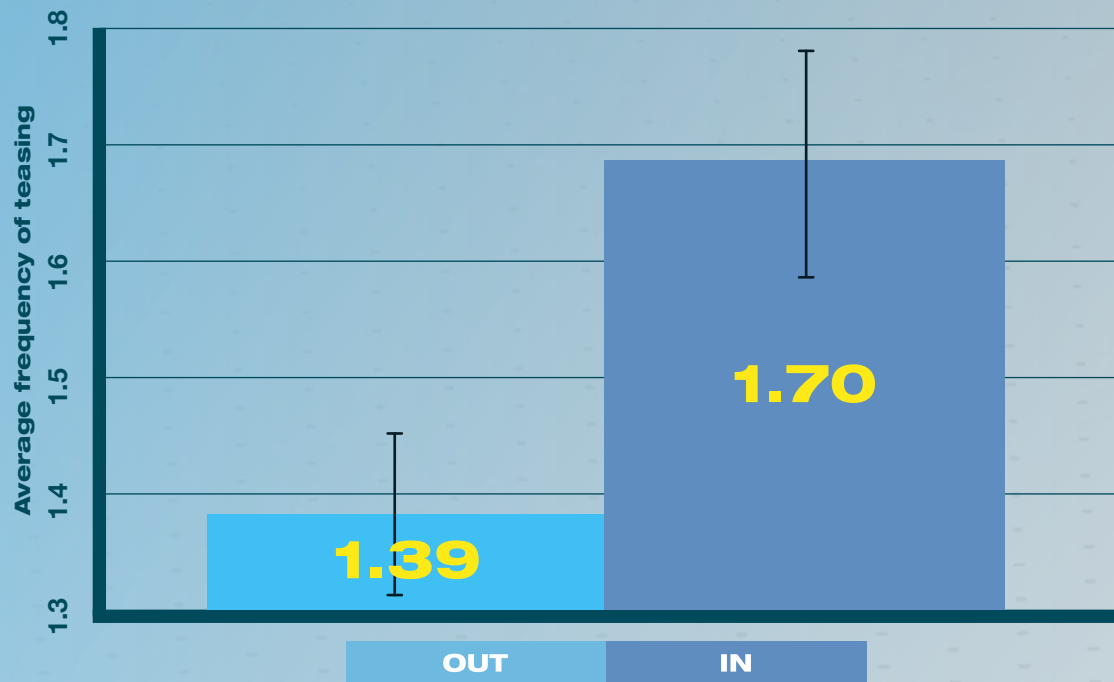
6.6 Homophobia

While overall sentiments towards homophobia were low there were questions which directly looked at peer group acceptability of members of the LGBTQ+ community. One statement asked if participants in the previous month had 'enjoyed hanging out socially with an LGBTI+ person that you considered to be your friend'. For participants classified as being in the box 43% said that this had not happened, while for those classified as out of the box this figure was 31%. The fact that people in the box were less likely to have socialised with a member of the LGBTI+ community in the previous month was also mirrored in answers given to other questions regarding homophobia.

We have seen above how the statement 'straight guys being friends with gay guys is completely fine and normal' was not included in the Irish Man Box scale as it was not statistically linked with the other pertinent statements. There were, however, other questions in the survey which aimed to measure - in applied terms - the extent to which participants hanging out with LGBTI+ people was socially acceptable within their specific peer groups. The first of these two statements to test this was 'my friends would give me a hard time if they saw me hanging out with someone who is gay or who looked gay'.

Friends would give me a hard time if they saw me hanging out with someone who is gay
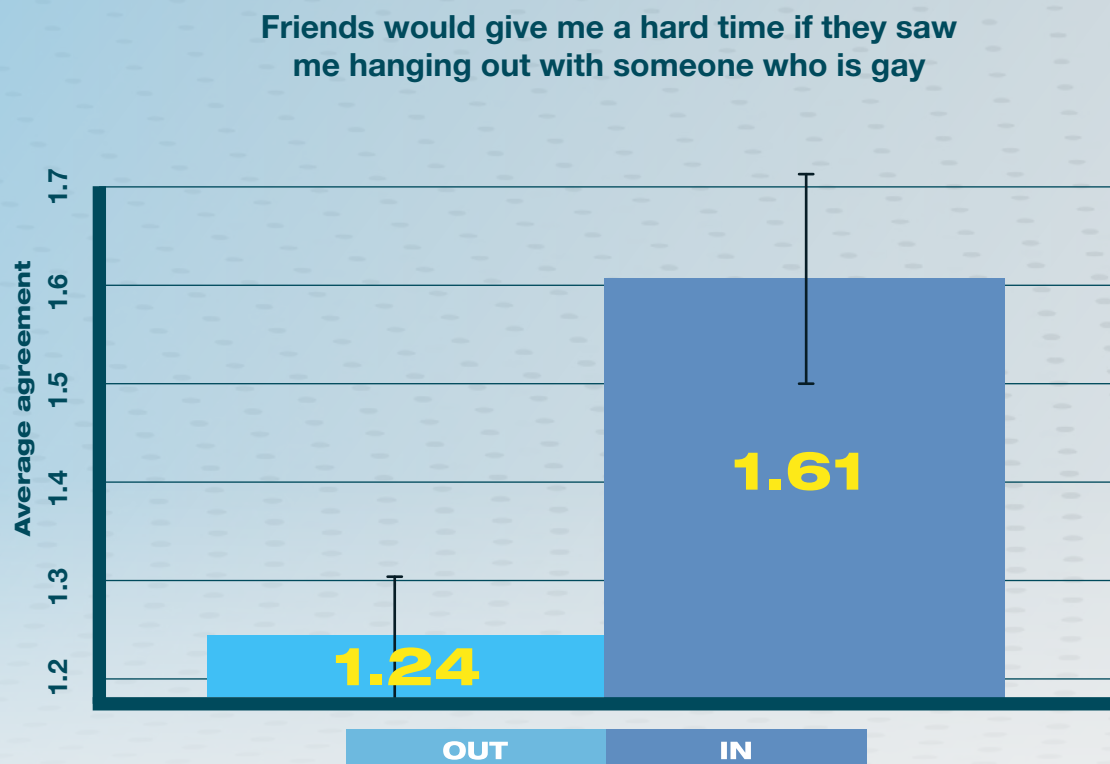
For this statement there is a strong and unambiguous message that those in the box are more likely to feel that they would face opprobrium from their peers if they were seen hanging out with a gay person. Overall, the percentage of participants who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement was 13% for those in the box and 6% for those out of it. This means that people in the box were over twice as likely to express peer group reservations against being seen hanging out with a gay person.

These sentiments were similarly displayed yet further amplified in the results to the question about friends' reaction to them hanging out with a transgender person. 33% of those in the box agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'my friends would give me a hard time if they saw me hanging out with someone who is transgender or who looked transgender'. For those out of the box this figure was 17%.

Friends would give me a hard time if they saw me hanging out with someone who is transgender
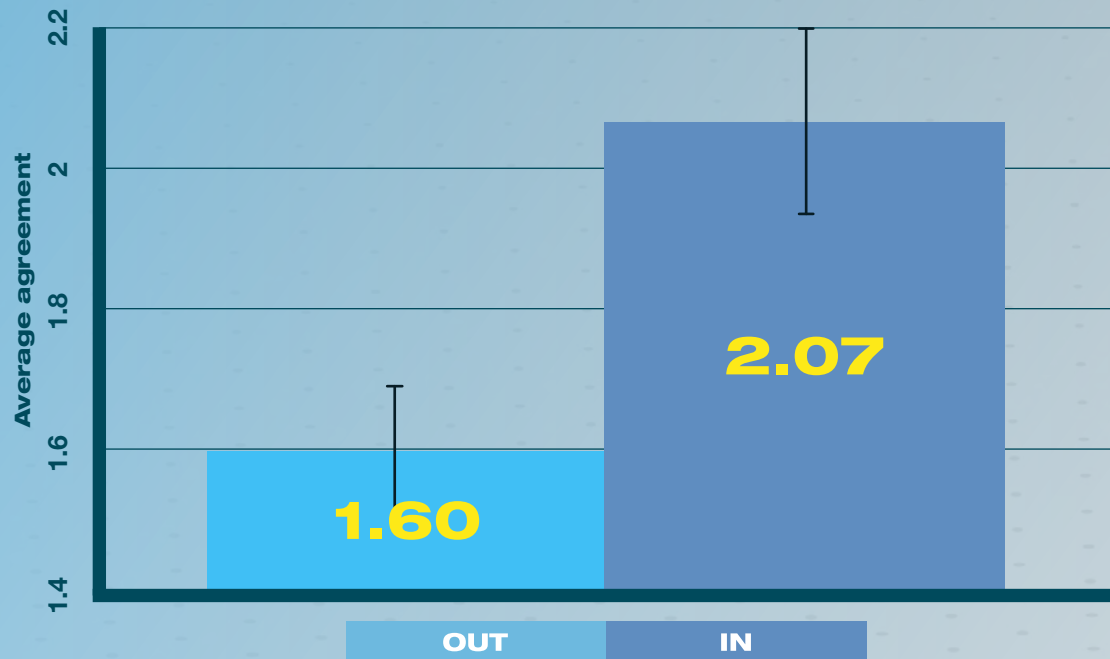
It is worth remarking on the difference of perceived social acceptability between hanging out with a gay person and hanging out with a transgender person. While the ratio between those in and out of the box was similar on both instances there was an almost doubling of people who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement when it was put forward with reference to a transgender person. It is thus apparent that there is significantly less peer group acceptability of transgender people.

7. Analysis

The Man Box is constructed on the basis of participants responses to the 17 Man Box statements each of which are presented as 'in my opinion' and 'society tells me' statements. It is worth noting that there were significant differences between the 2 sets of statements with the 'in my opinion' statements tending towards a more progressive, caring and considerate form of masculinity. These differences were reported in detail in the MAN survey interim report which was released in July 2022.

Overall, we have found that a large cohort comprised of two thirds of the sample fit into the Man Box. Yet, as noted above, there are a number of differences and distinctions regarding what the Man Box is in an Irish context. The fact that only 8 of the 17 Man Box statements are prescient is in and of itself a telling finding as features of the Box found elsewhere did not factor amongst our results. The importance of physical appearance and looking good as a facet of masculinity for example did not track in any significant fashion with our participants. At the same time, however, when asked about whether or not they desired to change their appearance a mere 9% of those in, and 12% of those out of the box, expressed no desire to change their appearance with most responses being that of participants expressing a desire to lose weight.

In a similar vein the statements which related to pillar 7 concerning aggression and control which referred to intimate relationships were firmly rejected. This suggests a welcome absence of the belief that being dominant and in control in intimate relationships is an important masculine trait. There were also some contradictions with regards to views expressed about the division of labour in the home. Our participants firmly rejected the idea that domestic and caring responsibilities were the gendered responsibilities of women. At the same time, however, the statement which posited the normative dimension of the male breadwinner was the most influential in constructing our scale. This means that while participants rejected the idea that housework and caring are solely woman's responsibility there was still significant weight given to the idea that the main provider in the household should be a man.

The survey captured noticeable and important differences between those in and out of the Man Box. Men in the box were more likely to report lower levels of satisfaction that they could be themselves in intimate relationships. They similarly reported lower levels of satisfaction that they could be themselves in work. At the same time, however, those in the box reported similar rates of satisfaction that they could be themselves around friends, and higher rates of satisfaction that they could be themselves around family members.

Men classified as in the box were over 3 times more likely to avoid seeking help from anyone if they were feeling sad or depressed, they were also less likely to report having given emotional support to someone in need or to have talked to a friend about something they were going through. At the same time however those in the box were far more likely to report having a friend to turn to if needed. Those in the box were slightly more likely to use recreational drugs and were far more likely to report drinking to get drunk, they were far more likely to report being involved in bullying behaviour and they were more likely to express reservations about being seen hanging out with gay or transgender people.

Attitudes towards homosexuality in this report would suggest a positive progressive trend – and is in line with a social drift over the past 30 years demonstrating increasingly positive attitudes toward homosexuality internationally[1]. As homophobia is best understood as prejudice against sexual minorities – our findings highlight that this is emphatically rejected, the mean figure for combined disagree and strongly disagree across all age groups was 93.6% with the mean strongly disagree figure being 75.7%. From the interim report in July, the mean figure for strongly disagree/agree with the statement society says a gay man is not a real man is 67.8% which differs significantly from the 'I think' figure. On the part of the individual – the argument could be made that there is Homohysteria at play – in that, there is a fear of being thought homosexual because of behaviour that is typically considered gender atypical. However, this needs further investigation. The ways in which the social and cultural norms of contemporary masculinity in Ireland relate to sexual minorities requires further investigation. Nonetheless, our findings demonstrate a positive overall shift that is in line with international trends.

Finally, when observing our findings through the lens of the potentially destructive aspects of adhering to stereotypical masculine norms, our findings align with evolving research on the health impact of conformity to masculine norms for men themselves. A recent meta-analysis from 2017 found that across a multitude of masculine norms, three norms have the most substantial impact on men's mental health and help seeking: self-reliance, playboy image, and power over women[2]. In our study, strong personal endorsement of these masculine norms has a direct impact on violent behaviours such as bullying, violence and sexual entitlement. Additionally, positioning the male (who endorses such norms) as beyond help seeking and removed from emotional expression – expressed, particularly, when their health is compromised. Highlighting that it is not only others who are disadvantaged by aggressive out-bursts, but also those who endorse and play-out such behaviour.

[1] Keleher, A., & Smith, E. R. A. N. (2012). Growing Support for Gay and Lesbian Equality Since 1990. *Journal of Homosexuality, 59*(9), 1307–1326. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2012.720540

[2] Wong, Y. J., Ho, M.-H. R., Wang, S.-Y., & Miller, I. S. K. (2017). Meta-analyses of the relationship between conformity to masculine norms and mental health-related outcomes. Journal of Counselling Psychology, 64(1), 80-93. doi:10.1037/cou0000176

Future research

Men's relationships with the norms and patterns of manhood are often complex and confusing, and the process of finding one's own sense of self, and empowering men to be the best of themselves is not a straightforward one. Our study reveals some contradictory trends, which need further investigation. We believe, however, that they are accurate and logical representations of the dilemmas men face in navigating society's paradoxes of manhood in Ireland today. Future research should explore the many nuances at play that shape societal and masculine norms through qualitative methodology. In doing so, providing rich descriptions of complex occurrences by illuminating the experience and interpretation of events by actors themselves - with widely differing stakes and roles. Moreover, contextualizing the voice of those rarely heard (i.e. those who might have limited access to remote surveys such as this one). Thus, the quantitative findings from this report should be used to complement the qualitative design and investigation of future research, both in sequence and in tandem. Thus, enabling a systematic and rigorous approach that reduces bias and error to identify evidence that is just and actionable, and that can more roundly (and congruently) capture the many nuances at play that shape masculine norms.

Men's
Attitudes
Now

Men's Development Network

Part of our 25th Anniversary Programme

Men's Development Network CEO Seán Cooke says:

" This survey, which is the first of its kind to be undertaken in this country, is a key part of our 25th-anniversary events calendar. We believe that by gathering good data, the findings from Men's Attitudes Now can influence the policy, practice, and processes of engaging men, as well as in advocating for social change and greater gender equality."

The Men's Development Network is a non-profit organisation headquartered in Waterford, Ireland, with the key focus on being leaders in promoting change and equality within society. Approaching our work from a transforming masculinities and gender-justice perspective, we are marking 25 years of positive engagement with men, boys, women's organisations, and other like-minded partners in 2022.

Under the mission statement "Better Lives for Men; Better Lives for All," the Men's Development Network interacts with men on various levels including one-to-one, developmental, parenting, behaviour change group work, training, phone line support and awareness raising.

Our funded projects include the White Ribbon Campaign, Men's Health & Development Programme, the MEND Domestic Violence Intervention Programme, the national Male Advice Line, FarmConnect, and a Men's Counselling Service. We also run many sub-programmes at local, regional and national level.

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