

1. Background to the Report

Why this report is needed

In recent decades there has been increasing uncertainty about how to understand, portray and respond to the experiences of men and boys in the UK. The media and popular culture have played a key role since the 1990s in weaving together a range of issues – the decline in male manufacturing jobs, educational ‘underachievement’ among boys, suicide rates among young men – into a recurrent story of ‘masculinity in crisis’. In response, they have created new stereotypes of men – the ‘New Man’, ‘New Lad’, ‘Metrosexual Man’ – only to knock each down in turn and replace it with another transitory label.

These representations can be easily dismissed as lightweight, yet to some extent they reflect more profound economic and social shifts that are affecting men, women and children and the relations between them. Contrary to media portrayals, this is a complex mix, not only of change, but also of continuity. The circumstances of some men – especially those who occupy positions of power – have been relatively unaffected. There is a paradox here that, as the challenges facing some men have become more pressing and visible, the enduring dominance of others remains largely unaddressed and invisible.

The Coalition on Men and Boys believes that responding to the issues facing men and boys matters. If we are to improve the lives of women, children and men themselves, public policies must reflect the specific needs and experiences of men and boys and address both their power and their needs in a much more sophisticated way than hitherto. This involves thinking not just about what men and boys do, but also about who they are and how their identities are formed. Going beyond biological explanations, the Coalition seeks to promote understanding of how various forms of masculinity (or ‘masculinities’) are socially constructed – and how new possibilities can be opened up for men and boys to live their lives in more positive and less damaging ways. This may mean, for example, re-examining men’s participation in domestic labour and caring; developing their emotional literacy in relationships with women, children and other men; challenging their use of pornography and prostitution; and holding them to account for their violence.

Recent equality legislation has created a new and unique opportunity to tackle these issues and to identify issues concerning men and boys across the full range of public policies. The Gender Equality Duty, effective from April 2007, requires a process of consultation and involvement with men and women and the organisations that seek to represent them. It also requires all public sector organisations to address the different needs of men and women in the development of policies and services.

Against this background, this report aims to analyse the opportunities and risks in supporting, engaging, and where necessary challenging men and boys in order to make progress towards gender equality and other social goals. The Coalition on Men and Boys believes it is time to stimulate and harness far more effectively the huge potential that men and boys have to contribute to the well-being of society, for example in relation to parenting and caring, relationships, health, work, education and women’s and public safety. It also seeks to explore the problems that men and boys experience and the problems they create, to identify how policy and legislation in England and Wales can impede or promote progress, and to outline practical proposals for reform at all levels. In addressing these issues, the report is unique, providing a benchmark against which future action can be assessed.

The Coalition also believes that men and boys can and should be the allies of women and girls in working towards more equitable and just relationships, and that men themselves have much to learn and to gain in this process. This report starts from the perspective that the pursuit of gender equality – including more co-operative and equal relations, greater sharing of care and work responsibilities and reductions in interpersonal violence – is hugely beneficial for both men and women.

Running through the report there is a tension between the desire to provide short-term policy solutions to specific concerns and the long-term need to understand and address masculinity issues through policy and other measures. This emerges strongly in the recommendations. We acknowledge the difficulties faced by government departments and other stakeholders in responding to conceptual frameworks, and in 'joining up' policy measures (despite recognition in recent years by government of the need for this to happen). Nevertheless we hope that those reading the report, and seeking to develop policy based on its findings, will not simply 'cherry-pick' the easier options and neglect the more complex and important underlying issues.

Objectives of the report

The report addresses the following specific objectives:

Contexts and theory: to identify key issues arising from the existing literature on men, boys, masculinities and gender equality.

International comparisons: to draw relevant comparisons with other countries and the UK's international obligations.

Policy issues: to consider a range of public policies regarding men and boys and make clear their needs, and the needs of women and children, in relation to them.

Good practice: to highlight examples of good practice from around the UK (and internationally, if relevant).

Participation: to engage with key stakeholders including NGOs, employers, trade unions, community groups, local authorities, relevant agencies and government departments.

Recommendations: to highlight findings that could be shared with government officials and stakeholders to support policy development.

Based on the report's findings, the Coalition on Men and Boys will set out its work programme and priorities for the future.

Methodology

The methodology has involved five main components. First, internet and library research was undertaken to identify and access the range of available data, relevant policy documents and information about practical projects working with men. The report is not intended to provide a systematic review of the literature; however it does seek to highlight and reference key texts in relation to the issues covered. An important starting point was the online *Men's Bibliography*, which provides a comprehensive and up-to-date list of over 22,000 books and articles on men and masculinities internationally, sorted into over 30 major subject areas (see <http://www.xyonline.net/mensbiblio/> for details). Another essential source was the multi-author *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*,¹ a key reference guide to current theoretical and empirical research about men and masculinities around the world.

1. Flood M., Gardiner J.K., Pease B., Pringle K. (eds.) (2007) *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*, London: Routledge

The report draws significantly upon feminist scholarship, and reflects the growing body of critical studies on men and masculinities which provides the theoretical background to the report's analysis. Much of this latter work, from the mid 1980s onwards, has originated in the US, Canada, Australia and parts of Europe (e.g. the Nordic region, Germany, the UK)² – however it is now expanding to include a range of developing countries.

Particular inspiration has also come from the Research Network on Men in Europe³ (*Critical Research on Men in Europe [CROME]*, www.cromenet.org), which has been engaged in a joint collaborative project since 1999 to explore men and masculinity issues across Europe.⁴ This report draws extensively upon the evidence highlighted by CROME, particularly in relation to home and work, social exclusion, violence, and health. The Network has analysed boys, men and masculinities from the dual perspectives of the problems some men create, and the problems some men experience.⁵ This approach goes beyond the simplified focus of much previous research and policy, which tends to regard men and boys either as in need of control or punishment, or in need of help or support. Instead, CROME researchers have rightly been interested in both perspectives, and in particular in the interconnections between them. This approach is reflected in the current report.

Second, a team of academic advisers (full biographies are listed on pages 3-4) has supported the development of the project throughout. Their role has included ensuring the report draws upon the most relevant research, commenting on drafts of the report, identifying gaps in the analysis and providing advice and ideas. In relation to some specific sections of the report, additional comment has been sought from other academics with particular expertise (listed in the 'Acknowledgments' on page 3).

Third, the member organisations of the Coalition have been consulted on all drafts. This process has not only greatly assisted the drafting of the text of the report, the clarification of the style and tone and the targeting of the recommendations. It has also helped the Coalition, at an early stage of its development, to refine and clarify its own values, policy positions and objectives.

Fourth, a series of discussions have been held with civil servants and advisers in three government departments (the Home Office, Department of Health and Government Equalities Office), in order to explore their reactions to drafts of the report, and to make sure the analysis responds appropriately to current debates and public policy issues. Although funded by the Government Equalities Office and the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the report is, however, the outcome of an independent project.

Fifth, the progress and delivery of the project has been overseen by the Steering Group of the Coalition on Men and Boys, composed of the representatives of the member organisations. This group met formally on eight occasions where the report was discussed, but much of the work of revising and commenting was carried out via email and phone contact.

2. Some key early texts are: Kimmel M. (1987) *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinities*, Newbury Park, CA: SAGE; Connell R. W. (1987) *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*, Palo Alto, California: University of California Press, and (1995) *Masculinities*, Cambridge: Polity Press, Segal L. (1997) *Slow Motion*, Virago: London

3. The network originally included researchers from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation, and the UK – and subsequently Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Spain, and Sweden

4. This work continued as part of another EU-funded programme, *Concerted Action on Human Rights Violations within the EU* (www.cahrv.uni-osnabrueck.de)

5. See Hearn J., Pringle K. (eds.) (2006) *European Perspectives on Men and Masculinities*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; and Pringle K., Hearn J. et al. (2006) *Men, Masculinities and Europe*, London: Whiting and Birch

Comments on the methodology

The current project was commissioned through an open tendering process at the beginning of January 2008. The research began in February, and was completed in October. This nine-month period is longer than was originally anticipated, but proved very necessary given the extent of the information uncovered, the complexity of the issues involved, and the need for extensive consultation both with the academic advisers and with the members of the Coalition.

Inevitably, in a wide-ranging short-term project of this kind, it proved impossible to include every relevant public policy issue. We acknowledge there are some gaps. For example, ideally there would be more in the report on issues such as the economic downturn, care (beyond fatherhood) and criminal justice (beyond violence). International issues – foreign policy, trade, environmental policy and so on – are not addressed in any detail. In relation to cross-cutting issues, there is less focus on disability and on sexual orientation than on the other equalities strands. These omissions reflect not only the tight time schedule, but also the restricted remit of the members of the Coalition; for instance, none of the current members focus specifically on disability or sexual orientation. In some areas, there was also a lack of information; for example, less research has been undertaken on the interconnections between disability and masculinities.

Whilst the report does seek to identify some examples of good practice in working with men and boys, we acknowledge the difficulties of defining what 'good practice' is. The theoretical models, aims, objectives and methods of particular interventions vary hugely.⁶ Moreover, little of this work has been evaluated and outcomes must be treated with caution. Where case studies are described (usually in box form in the text), they are therefore used for illustrative purposes, and should not be seen as the 'last word' in the field concerned. Further work is required to establish principles and criteria for good practice, and to apply these to existing project and programme work, but this goes beyond the scope of the current report.

Another impact of the short timescale, and the extent of internal consultation with Coalition members, was that it proved impossible to engage with, and interview representatives from, all the stakeholder groups identified in point five of the objectives. Having said this, the report references the research and policy analysis of a wide range of organisations from most, if not all, the sectors identified. In addition, the report's authors had access to, and drew upon, the transcript of the seminar on gender equality held on 3 December 2007 under the auspices of the Government Equalities Office; many of the key stakeholders were present at the seminar.

Finally, the coverage in the report of issues specific to the Welsh context is limited.⁷ This reflects both the very small number of sociological studies on men and masculinities in Wales and the lack of a Welsh representative within the Coalition membership (although some organisations do have offices in Wales). Given that it was not possible to do justice to this dimension, we believe that it is necessary for an additional analysis to be undertaken, led and informed by researchers in Wales.

6. For further discussion of the relationship between theory, policy and practice, see Featherstone B., Rivett M., Scourfield J. (2007) *Working with Men in Health and Social Care*, London: SAGE

7. The report was commissioned by the funders to address issues in relation to men and boys in England and Wales, rather than Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

Section 2 ('Introduction') identifies key features of the economic and social context in relation to men and masculinities in the UK, and sets out a framework for analysis. It then highlights the reasons why men and boys should be involved in strategies for gender equality, and the risks in seeking to engage them.

Section 3 ('Men, boys and policy') sets out the international, European and UK policy background, identifies key features of the institutional architecture in England and Wales and provides an assessment of the policy approaches of the two main political parties to issues in relation to men and boys.

Section 4 ('Introduction to key sections') introduces the specific thematic sections of the report, and explores the importance of identifying the connections between themes.

Sections then follow which address in more detail the cores themes of **'Work' (section 5)**, **'Fatherhood' (6)**, **'Health' (7)**, **'Education' (8)** and **'Violence' (9)**. Each of these sections outlines the main economic, social, demographic and political trends affecting the specific policy area, sets out current policy approaches and key policy issues, and identifies recommendations.

Section 10 ('Ways forward') examines the potential for achieving change through a range of sites and strategies, including public policy, organisations, the media and men's networks. It concludes with a set of general recommendations.