

4. Introduction to key sections

Making the connections

There is a risk that the analysis of key themes in sections 5-9 of this report – work, fatherhood, health, education and violence – will be read as separate and discrete areas. We have sought to bring these perspectives together throughout the report.

It is essential to draw out these connections. For example, there is often a tendency to separate out policies on fatherhood (and other men's relations to children) from policies on violence. These areas need to be 'joined up'; there is no contradiction between promoting men's active involvement as carers and simultaneously emphasising the imperative of protecting children from men's violence.¹¹⁰

Fatherhood can also be linked to health in positive ways. According to the World Health Organisation,¹¹¹ fathers can, for example, give important psychological and emotional support to mothers during pregnancy and delivery, and fathers' participation in maternal and child health programmes can reduce maternal and child mortality during pregnancy and labour. Increased involvement in fatherhood and caring can also improve men's own health and well-being, as well as contributing significantly to their children's development.

Men's health is often affected by their relationship with their work – by the risks in particular occupations, by long working hours, by workplace restructuring, downsizing and redundancies or by stress and insecurity within the 'flexible' labour market. Their health is affected too by violence and abuse, either to the self or to others. Examples are the risk-taking and/or pleasure-seeking activities of some young men, through smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, gambling or unsafe sex.¹¹² In some cases, activities such as these contribute towards disability through illness and injury.¹¹³

Thematic areas such as these also connect to dominant ways of being male. Some men may display an unwillingness to take their own health problems seriously. Some may adhere to restrictive codes of masculinity – 'be tough, independent, competitive' – leading to overwork, emotional unresponsiveness, poor health, a desire to control others or a combination of all of these. These processes are linked to power relationships between men, and between men, women and children.

As we have identified earlier in this report, the experiences and perspectives of men are also shaped by various forms of inequality, including not only gender, but race, class, faith, sexual orientation, disability and income too. An emerging theme within the research literature is the significant interrelationships between these strands, and their impact on women, children and other men.¹¹⁴ Again, we seek to link these dimensions as far as possible in the sections that follow.

110. Hearn J., (2007) *The Problems Boys and Men Create, The Problems Boys and Men Experience*, in Shefer T., Ratele A., Strelbel N., Shabalala N., Buikema R. (eds.) *From Boys to Men: Social Constructions of Masculinity in Contemporary Society*, Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press & Human Science Research Council Press

111. World Health Organisation (2007) *Fatherhood and Health Outcomes in Europe*, Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe

112. Hearn J., Kolga V., *Health*, in Hearn J., Pringle K. (eds.) (2006) *European Perspectives on Men and Masculinities*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

113. Shakespeare T. (1999) *The sexual politics of disabled masculinity*, *Sexuality and Disability*, 17(1)

114. Hearn J., Pringle K. (eds.) (2006) *European Perspectives on Men and Masculinities*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

‘There are discernible links between traditional definitions of masculinity, men’s neglect of their health and propensity for violence and men’s absence from childcare and domestic responsibilities... Research suggests that nurturing others leads to greater emotional literacy and a more intimate relationship to the self. The direct benefits to men in caring directly for children include physical health and longer life-expectancy, better mental health, more balanced and contented relationships with partners, and the pleasures of deep relationships with children. A new ethic of care can emerge which can be acknowledged and developed in public policy and celebrated as part of the construction of non-violent masculinities’.

Ferguson H., Hearn J., Holter O., Jalmert L., Kimmel M., Lang J., Morrell R. (2004) *Ending gender-based violence: A call for global action to involve men*, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)