



Man Made:

Men, masculinities and equality in public policy

Executive summary

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The Coalition on Men and Boys was formally launched on 26 November 2007. Current members are Action for Children, Bradford University's Research Unit on Men and Masculinities, the Fatherhood Institute, Men's Advice Line, Men's Health Forum, Relate, Respect (the national association for domestic violence perpetrator programmes), and the White Ribbon Campaign.

The Coalition aims to put issues of concern to men and boys firmly on the public policy agenda, within the context of moving towards greater gender equality. The Coalition is unique in that there is currently no other organisation that addresses these issues across the range of public policy and advises Government and other policymaking and service delivery agencies on them. The Coalition can also, in active collaboration with women's organisations, provide a national lead in encouraging support and responsibility amongst men and boys for measures to tackle discrimination and gender-based violence.

The Coalition has received encouragement and support from the Home Office, the Government Equalities Office and the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

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Copies of the full report (price £10) can be ordered from Respect, Downstream Building, 1 London Bridge, London SE1 9GB (email: sarah.read@respect.uk.net), or downloaded from the Coalition's website.

The analysis and recommendations in this report are the responsibility of the Coalition on Men and Boys alone and should not be taken to represent the views of any particular member organisation or the expert advisers. The views expressed do not reflect those of the UK Government, the Government Equalities Office or the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

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In recent decades there has been increasing uncertainty about how to understand and respond to the experiences of men and boys in the UK. It is often argued that economic and social change has hit men and boys so hard that they are 'in crisis', whereas they are actually experiencing a complex mix of change and continuity. In practice, the profound economic and social shifts that are affecting men and women, and the relations between them, have had uneven effects.

This report by the Coalition on Men and Boys provides a unique, in-depth picture of the circumstances and needs of men and boys in England and Wales, and the issues they currently face. It also seeks to: analyse how public policy can support and engage with men and boys effectively; explore how focusing on them within policy can promote progress towards gender equality and other social goals; and outline practical proposals for reform.

Key findings

There is emerging interest among politicians and policy-makers in addressing masculinity issues, and examples of recent policy initiatives by the current Government (e.g. in relation to fatherhood and boys' education). But men and boys are rarely addressed specifically across the full range of public policies, and there is insufficient reference to the extensive research literature on masculinity in the development of policy.

The challenges facing some men and boys at the sharp end of social change have become more pressing and visible. For example, men who are unemployed and/or unskilled (or boys with fathers in these groups) have worse health and education outcomes compared with other men and boys. Regional differences also reflect social class; life expectancy at birth for men living in Manchester is some ten years less than for men in Kensington and Chelsea.

The enduring dominance of men in positions of power remains largely unaffected. Eighty-one per cent of MPs and 71 per cent of local councillors are male. Nine out of ten boardroom directors of the top 100 FTSE companies are men, even though they make up just over half the workforce. Men continue to substantially outnumber women at senior levels across business and media organisations, the health service, local authorities, the police and the judiciary.

International and European standards – in particular the UN Commission on the Status of Women 'Conclusions on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality' (2004) and the Council of the European Union 'Conclusions on Men and Gender Equality' (2006) – provide a framework for further action and a benchmark against which progress can be assessed.

Despite the helpful introduction by the current Government of the Gender Equality Duty in 2007, which requires all public sector organisations to address the different needs of men and women in the development of policies and services, implementation at local level has been patchy. Understanding of the need for action to address the specific disadvantages faced by men or women – rather than providing the same treatment for both – is also weak. The Gender Equality Duty (and associated Race and Disability Duties) are important mechanisms for identifying and tackling issues concerning men and boys, which should be more actively exploited by key stakeholders.

In the longer term, the introduction of a single 'Equality Duty' will replace the existing duties in relation to gender, race and disability. Whilst there is a risk that the focus on gender equality may be diluted, this move will draw attention to the complex interplay of gender and masculinities with other equalities strands.

Public policies concerning men and boys tend to be reactive – because 'something must be done' – often resulting in parallel policies that fail to address sufficiently the relations between men and women, or between different groups of men. For example, simply adding 'boys' education' strategies to existing approaches to improve 'girls' education' fails adequately to address the issues at stake.

The experiences and perspectives of men are shaped by various forms of inequality, including not only gender, but age, race, class, faith, sexual orientation, disability and income too. An emerging theme within the research literature is the dynamic interrelationships between these strands, and their impact on women, children and other men. These differences must be taken more fully into account in the development of public policies.

It is essential to draw out the connections between specific policy issues. For example, there is often a tendency to separate out policies on fatherhood (and other men's relations to children) from policies on violence. Similarly, men's health is often affected by 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. Specific policy areas need to be 'joined up' more coherently.

Many mainstream government policies – e.g. in relation to the benefits system, welfare reform, employment and criminal justice – tend to be shaped, either explicitly, or more often implicitly, around traditional notions of masculinity as the 'norm'. For example, the benefits system has tended to prioritise a 'male breadwinner' model of full-time long-term employment in relation to national insurance and pensions; other 'non-contributory' benefits (e.g. child benefit, disability living allowance and carers' allowance) are more likely to be paid to women, but they are usually paid at a lower level.

Many services (e.g. in relation to health, social care, child welfare) are largely geared towards women, both supporting – but also entrenching – their roles as primary carers. Services often struggle to engage with men effectively, or do not attempt to do so. Whilst this may be due to lack of resources or skills, men may also be overlooked or 'screened out' by service providers, regarded either as too dangerous to engage with (sometimes understandably so), or as of secondary importance in comparison to women.

The approach of the Coalition on Men and Boys

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.

The Coalition seeks to promote understanding of the relevance of masculinity issues to the development of public policy – and of how new possibilities can be opened up for men and boys to live their lives in more positive and less damaging ways. Moreover, 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 anti-violence strategies.

The Coalition on Men and Boys believes 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, and is committed to working with women’s groups to this end.

Understanding masculinities

Men’s and women’s lives, and the gender relations between them, change over time, across cultures and within particular societies. In Britain over the past 40 years, for instance, patterns of male – and especially female – participation in paid work have shifted as the economy has been restructured. Many men are spending more time with their children, and voicing a desire to be more involved fathers (although men’s move into the domestic sphere has not matched that of women into paid work). These shifts undermine any crude notion that there is one universal form of ‘masculinity’ (or ‘femininity’) applicable to all societies at all times.

There are, however, dominant ways of ‘being male’ which affect many men’s attitudes and behaviour. For instance, they may display an unwillingness to take their own health problems seriously. They 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 these.

There are also significant differences between men (as there are between women), and the term ‘masculinities’ has been coined to reflect the many possible ways of ‘being a man’. In the UK and other Western countries today, some groups of men – often those who are white, university-educated and on high incomes – establish and wield enormous economic, social and political power over other men, women and children.

This dominance becomes built into social relations and structures so as to make it appear normal and natural for male superiority to be maintained. For instance, it can affect official statistics upon which policy is based. The Government’s annual Household Below Average Income figures – which are used to assess poverty levels – attempt to measure the living standards of an individual according to household income. But this assumes that both partners in a couple benefit equally from that income, whereas in practice men tend to control more household resources.

Other men may be marginalised. For example, men who used to work in heavy industry in particular regions may be long-term unemployed, or incapacitated by ill-health or mental illness. Retired men may become socially isolated as work-based networks and friendships recede. Muslim men may encounter suspicion and abuse from non-Muslims as a result of their faith and their practices. Gay men may face hostility and harassment from heterosexuals at work or in the community. Men who are disabled often define their identities in relationship to the ‘ideal’ models of masculinity based on bodily strength and performance.

The considerable body of research over the last 15 or so years (particularly in relation to home and work, and to violence by men) reflects this diversity. It rejects the argument that men and boys are ‘in crisis’, or losing out to women and girls. Rather, it seeks to highlight the problems that men create and the problems they experience, the connections between men’s power and marginalisation, and men’s actual and potential contributions to society. It also draws attention to the commonalities and differences between different groups of men (according to class, race, age, disability, faith and sexual orientation), and the dynamic relations between them. This understanding and analysis should be more strongly reflected in the development of policy.

Involving men in strategies for gender equality – opportunities and risks

There are several important reasons why some men already act in favour of gender equality – and why more men should do so. Gender equality holds the promise of improvements in men's and boys' relationships – not only with women and girls, but also in the relations they often have with other men and boys. Greater gender equality will reduce the pressures on men to conform to damaging and rigid forms of masculinity. This is likely to reduce men's violence, help to strengthen community safety and develop peaceful conflict resolution and improve family interaction.

Involving men may help to create wider consensus and support for change on issues (e.g. in relation to family, violence, sexual and reproductive health) that have previously been marginalised as 'women's issues'. Engaging with men may encourage the development of effective partnerships between men's and women's organisations.

Alongside these potential benefits, there are some risks in involving men in gender equality strategies. Resources may be diverted from support for women, in a context where such resources (e.g. for refuges or rape crisis centres) are already under threat. Engaging men in gender equality should not involve abandoning support for projects and strategies that focus on women.

Some men also will be resistant to change – especially if the proposed changes entail giving up some privileges (e.g. the positions they hold, better pay than women), and result in them having less power at work and in the home. The emergence in recent decades of a range of vocal 'men's rights' groups, both in the UK and internationally, is evidence of this.

It should not be assumed, however, that all men and boys share the expressed hostility of many 'men's rights' activists to progress for women and girls. Different groups of men and boys have different, and conflicting, interests – and many are fully supportive of moves towards gender equality. For instance, the experience of the White Ribbon Campaign – both worldwide and, since 2004, in the UK – demonstrates how groups of men are working at grassroots level to end men's violence against women. And many fathers are becoming active in local networks connected to children's centres.

Current UK Government policy

Government policy-making over the past decade has sought to address men and masculinity issues across a number of areas, the most high profile being fathering and boys' education. Some key aspects are as follows:

Measures to reconcile work and caring responsibilities must be set within a context where paid **work** pressures have been intensifying. It is disappointing, therefore, that the Government has not ended its opt-out to the European Working Time Directive. Whilst other moves to widen flexible working arrangements are welcome, there is a role for Government, working with other key stakeholders, in ensuring that these are taken up more readily by men. This could help to retain jobs and provide flexibility for workers in riding out the current recession. Failure to pursue this action is also likely to entrench existing inequalities and the endurance of the gender pay gap. Recent unemployment figures have shown increases in rates for both men and women, with job losses in sectors where men predominate (e.g. manufacturing and construction) alongside job losses in the retail and service sectors where more women than men work. Where young men are concerned, the policy emphasis has been on getting more of them into work (e.g. through programmes such as the New Deal). While the New Deal has contributed to, and indeed accelerated,

a fall in the numbers of long-term unemployed 18-24 year olds, the economic circumstances of some young men – especially those facing multiple disadvantages – remain poor, particularly in the economic downturn (see section on ‘Work’ in the full report).

The Government has struck a positive rhetorical tone on involving **fathers** in the care of children, yet concrete policy measures to promote shared parenting have not gone far enough. For example, two weeks paternity leave was introduced in 2003, and there is a current commitment to implement ‘Additional Paternity Leave’ (APL) for fathers up to 26 weeks. But making unused leave entitlements transferable from the mother to the father, as APL does, is a poor substitute for a dedicated ‘daddy month’ and for independent entitlement of fathers and mothers to parental leave (see section on ‘Fatherhood’ in the full report).

Over the past few years, there have also been moves to tackle and improve **men’s health**, especially following the introduction of the Gender Equality Duty. For example, policy-makers and practitioners are increasingly aware of men’s reluctance to seek medical help and treatment, and of the importance of improving their access to information and services. As yet, however, the overall government approach tends to be fragmentary, concentrating more on some health issues (e.g. cancer, sexual health, suicide) and less on others of comparable importance (e.g. cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes). There is, so far, less evidence of gender being ‘mainstreamed’ across health policy, although efforts to close this gap are emerging in the Department of Health (e.g. the publication of a study on the different ways men and women access healthcare, and production of guidance for the NHS on developing a Gender Equality Scheme). Understanding among health professionals of how men’s health connects to men’s socialisation and their risk-taking behaviour is also underdeveloped, and, at the local level, men’s health remains a largely marginal issue (see section on ‘Health’ in the full report).

Interest in bolstering boys’ achievements in **education** goes beyond the needs of boys from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, important though that is. Attention has also focused in recent years on tackling the differences in attainment between boys and girls, whereas in fact social class differences are far greater; research shows that, on average, children who are less able but better off overtake those who are poorer but more able, by age six. Government approaches to boys’ education have centred on improving educational practice generally, and promoting some ‘boy-friendly’ teaching strategies (e.g. boys’ literacy schemes, male mentoring, role modelling, greater use of IT). However attempts to shift the prevailing culture of ‘laddish’ masculinity, sexism and anti-school peer group attitudes are less developed. Such strategies would involve, for example: placing exploration of identity, relationships and equality at the heart of sex education; focusing more on social and emotional aspects of education and learning; and teaching about gender equality and the damaging effects of inequality more generally (see section on ‘Education’ in the full report).

In relation to the issue of men’s **violence**, there has been a trend towards increasing social control and punishment (particularly of working-class men), through a range of measures including a massive growth in the use of incarceration. Despite the huge over-representation of men in the statistics on interpersonal and other forms of violence, there has, however, been less engagement in terms of policy with the gendered nature of violence (including pornography, prostitution and child sexual abuse). Insufficient attention has also been given to tackling the links between men’s violence, increasing sexual stereotyping and objectification in the media, and the growth of pornography and the sex industry. There is some acknowledgment of this within Government. For example, ways of shifting the predominant culture and challenging male demand for sexual services (and/or criminalising their use of them) have been proposed (see section on ‘Violence’ in the full report). But overall, action is as yet uncoordinated and lacks a coherent vision.

Ways forward

If the lives of men, women and children are to be improved, then men's participation in achieving change is vital. Indeed, without their involvement, and shifts in the distribution of power between men and women (and between different groups of men), then gender equality will be far harder – if not impossible – to realise.

Whilst some men show little or no desire to give up any privileges they hold, or are wary of developing new forms of masculinity, not all resist change. Indeed many are realising that maintaining the status quo has negative consequences for their health, personal lives and quality of life – and for other men, women and children. Many fathers are spending more time caring for their children than used to be the case. Many men support the desire of their partners to have fulfilling careers outside the home. Many men are willing to take more responsibility for their health if they are offered services that meet their needs. Many women also acknowledge the potential of more flexible and less privileged forms of masculinity which place greater value on support and care.

What is required is to reach a tipping point, where the majority of men come to recognise the benefits – for themselves, women and children – of greater equality and more flexible and positive forms of masculinity, and are prepared to contribute, in all spheres of life, to its achievement.

Key general recommendations

Developing the policy framework

Men and boys should be addressed explicitly across government policies, programmes and performance frameworks, rather than their presence being left implicit. There should be a particular focus on addressing men and masculinities in relation to policies on work, fatherhood, health, education and violence, and to the priorities of the Minister for Women and Equality. The aim should be to 'join up' policies and programmes by focusing on the relations between groups and integrating ('mainstreaming') gender concerns, rather than targeting separate and parallel strategies at women and men.

In line with the Gender Equality Duty, policy and programmes should address the specific needs of men and boys, where they differ from the needs of women and girls. There may be circumstances where gender analysis leads to the conclusion that specific action orientated at women or men is necessary. The Equality and Human Rights Commission should monitor and enforce compliance with the Duty rigorously, holding public authorities to account.

Building institutional mechanisms

The Government Equalities Office and the Equality and Human Rights Commission should establish designated policy and research positions focusing on how men and boys can contribute to tackling gender and other inequalities.

Monitoring progress

The 'Gender Impact Assessments' (GIAs) required by the Gender Equality Duty of the policies, budgets and structures of public bodies should include assessment of their impact on men and boys. New statements of government policy should only be released publicly after an assessment has been undertaken.

Involving men

Men with senior positions within government, business, trade unions and NGOs should provide high-profile and proactive support for gender equality measures, and encourage other men to play

their part. They should also model good practice for men in organisations, working collaboratively with and supporting female colleagues on gender issues.

Achieving progress towards gender equality requires more than working with men as isolated individuals; the development of men's groups and networks committed to advocacy for gender equality should be encouraged at community level. At local level, these organisations have a potentially important role as stakeholders to be consulted as part of Gender Equality Duty compliance.

Sharing good practice in working with men and boys

There is a need to undertake a further study to establish clear criteria for identifying effective practice in working with men and boys and examples of this in different policy areas (drawing both from UK and international experience). Key issues are likely to include: frameworks for thinking about men, masculinities and gender; strategies for reaching and engaging men and boys; the role of 'transitions' in the lives of men and boys; co-working between men and women; integrated working between adults' and children's services; professional attitudes; and the evaluation of programmes.

Greater efforts should be made both at national and local levels to encourage cross-sectoral links and sharing of good practice between those working with men. This should include a stronger lead from Government, more innovative approaches to funding partnerships bringing together different sectors, and the development of joint training and support networks between local projects. The Coalition on Men and Boys can act as a catalyst and forum for such discussion.

There is a need for educational institutions to increase training opportunities for professionals (including teachers, social workers, youth workers, counsellors, health workers) to develop their understanding of issues relating to men and masculinities and to improve their practice.

Improving data collection

In order to fulfil the Gender Equality Duty, official statistics should be routinely disaggregated by gender. Whilst the provision of such statistics has improved since the late 1990s, gaps remain which should be addressed, e.g. in relation to the staffing of public bodies, access to services, and the intersection of social disadvantage and gender (in particular disability, sexuality, age and men's violence to children).

Furthering the research agenda

The development of policy towards men and boys should draw more extensively on the substantial body of academic research which now exists, both in the UK and in Europe.

Research is necessary to map both mainstream and specialist services working with men across a range of sectors, to improve the number and quality of external evaluations of project work and to explore and disseminate good practice in working with men (and in working with men and women together).

The impact of the different cultural contexts in Wales and England (and Scotland and Northern Ireland) on the development of masculinities has received little research attention, and should be addressed.

Increasing funding

Policy-makers and funders should seek to devote increased resources to innovative projects working with men and boys, in particular those which are seeking to address masculinity issues from a critical perspective. These may include father-inclusive children's services, anti-violence initiatives, health programmes and education programmes in schools. This support should not be at the expense of vital projects to support women and girls, such as refuges and rape crisis centres.

Key policy-specific recommendations

Work: the European Working Time Directive sets a 48-hour maximum working week, but there is an opt-out for UK employees which should be ended. Employers should also take positive measures to tackle the long hours culture, and there should be disincentives for employers to demand overtime work.

Fatherhood: antenatal, child welfare, education and health services should engage with fathers actively and routinely and support them to fulfil their responsibilities, whilst recognising the continuing importance of safety issues for mothers and children. Public service providers should use the Gender Equality Duty as a positive tool to design services around fathers' and mothers' diverse needs.

Health: action is needed to improve men's use of primary health services. This requires long-term initiatives – such as improved health education in schools – as well as more immediate changes to the opening hours, location, marketing and ambience of services. A national strategy is needed to help achieve this.

Education: concerted and planned programmes should be developed in schools to educate boys about the need for respect within relationships and towards women and girls more generally, and to ensure they understand that violence against women and girls (and each other) is unacceptable. Education on emotional well-being, building healthy relationships and on tackling violence should be embedded across the curriculum.

Violence: in addition to existing provision within the criminal justice system, each local authority should have a service for men who are perpetrators of domestic violence, accredited against the National Service Standard. This should not be at the expense of provision for victims of abuse but part of a wider strategy to promote prevention work, reduce reoffending and improve outcomes for children.

For additional recommendations in relation to specific policy areas, see sections on 'Work', 'Fatherhood', 'Health', 'Education' and 'Violence' in the full report.

About the study

The study is based on five main components: internet and library research to identify and access the range of available data, relevant policy documents and information about practical projects working with men; comments and other input from a team of academic advisers; discussions with civil servants in key government departments; and consultation with the member organisations of the Coalition. The Coalition on Men and Boys is grateful for funding received for this study from the Government Equalities Office and the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

A full report *Man Made: Men, masculinities and equality in public policy*, by Sandy Ruxton, is published by the Coalition on Men and Boys.

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