



# Masculinity and gender equality

AN INTRODUCTION TO TRANSFORMING MALE NORMS



Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions



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MALE NORMS



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# Foreword

The quest for gender equality is founded on women's battle for equal rights and opportunities. However, gender equality work must necessarily also involve boys and men, and challenge the notions of masculinity that are a barrier to equality.

A gender equality strategy for changing restrictive and harmful masculinity norms can be of tremendous benefit to both women and men, and to society as a whole. It can bring about increased security, improved health, greater equality in relationships and less violence, as well as improved quality in education, healthcare, and social care. It can help to break up gender-segregation in the labour market and broaden the public service recruitment base.

This was the rationale for the agreement between SALAR and the Swedish government which led to an initiative on men and gender equality in 2016–2017.

The initiative started with a comprehensive survey of gender equality initiatives including men and masculinity norms in municipalities, county councils and regions, and has been conducted through extensive partnerships with representatives from public sector, research and civil society. In 2016 the deliverables included a number of films and regional conferences.

During 2017 the initiative has focused on gender equality in education, healthcare and parenting, as well as violence prevention. In each of these areas SALAR has produced films, reports and papers to outline possible routes to change.

This paper describes possible strategies for developing gender equality initiatives based on an understanding of gender inequality and norms of masculinity.

It is aimed at politicians, managers and strategists responsible for operational development, but also at other municipal and county council employees.

Our hope is that this material will reinforce ongoing gender equality efforts and inspire new initiatives, with the ultimate aim of women and men having equal power to shape society and their own lives.

Stockholm, March 2018

Vesna Jovic  
*Managing Director*

Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions



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# Summary

The starting point for SALAR's and the government's programme for men and gender equality is that there are notions about how boys and men act and how they should act, which counteracts the trend towards gender equality and adversely affects both men's and women's circumstances and conditions. These masculinity norms can also constitute impediments in public institutions, such as in schools, healthcare and social care.

Gender equality initiatives aimed at challenging and transforming harmful and restrictive male norms can thus contribute to increased gender equality, a better life for women and men and higher quality in the public sector. In recent decades, research on men, masculinities and power has developed dramatically, in Sweden as well as internationally. There are also a number of successful, practical processes promoting change concerning men, boys and masculinity norms, which promote gender equality and contribute to better fulfilment of goals in various initiatives.

SALAR has two starting points for the strategy of strengthening gender mainstreaming initiatives aimed at men, boys and masculinity issues. The first is that the same norms that can contribute to men's superiority over women can also contribute to men's vulnerability. The second is that masculinity norms (as well as femininity norms) differ in terms of men's (and women's) sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, religion, ableness, income, education and other factors that shape people's social conditions and positions.

During the two-year programme concerning men and gender equality, SALAR has highlighted gender equality initiatives in municipalities and county councils that both challenge norms and engage men and boys. It may involve:

- › using new methods in maternity and child healthcare, and in parental support in general, to encourage new fathers towards an equal and more involved parenthood, which can contribute to improved health for children, mothers and fathers
- › using systematic early interventions in schools to more effectively prevent violence and abuse (mainly perpetrated by young men) – which can contribute to improved safety, more peace and quiet in the classroom, more pupil's achieving the academic goals and reducing harassment and abuse



- changing the approach in primary care and psychiatry in order to better identify men with mental illness and depression – which can contribute to better and more equal relationships and reduce the number of suicides among men
- applying gender-conscious and norm-critical approaches in school – which can lead to better academic results for both girls and boys, as well as more non-traditional education and career choices
- using new norm-conscious methods in youth clinics to support young men in taking responsibility for their own and their partner’s sexuality and health.

Politicians and managers in municipalities and county councils play a crucial role in directing gender equality initiatives towards men, boys and masculinity. Male politicians and managers also play an important role as role models. This can encourage boys and men to be more involved in the issues, which in the long term is a prerequisite for achieving gender equality.

Within the men and gender equality programme, SALAR has produced papers in the areas of mental health, equality in education, parenthood and violence prevention initiatives (see page 29 for more information). This paper aims to provide an overall picture of how masculinity norms operate, what significance they may have for organisations at the municipal and regional level, as well as how successful processes for challenging harmful and restrictive norms can be designed.

The paper does not delve into the way in which cis-gender people (people whose gender identity is consistent with their biological and legal gender) and transgender people can be influenced differently by masculinity norms, but there is every reason for municipalities, county councils and regions to increase their knowledge of this, in order to contribute to equality in health and a better situation for both binary and non-binary transgender people (non-binary transgender people identify as being between or beyond the binary division of gender into women and men; binary transgender people are women or men with a different gender identity than the legal gender they were assigned at birth).<sup>1</sup>

Note. 1. SOU 2017:92.



# Men, masculinity and gender inequality

Gender equality policy has emerged in response to the struggle of the women's movement against the oppression of women and for women's rights. Even today, women as a group are disadvantaged in relation to men within most areas.

For example, men have more power and influence than women. Almost twice as many men as women hold managerial positions.<sup>2</sup> Even in municipalities and county councils, men are significantly overrepresented as managers in relation to their share of the total number of employees. The political sphere is characterized by the same male dominance – two thirds of all municipal boards have a male chairman<sup>3</sup>, for example.

Men also own more assets and earn more than women. Although direct pay discrimination is unusual, there are structural differences that contribute to women earning lower wages and working less paid hours. Ultimately, a man earns an average of SEK 3.6 million more during his lifetime than a woman.<sup>4</sup>

One explanation for the income gap is that women still have the primary responsibility for unpaid domestic and care work. The gap has decreased over time, but women still spend an hour more per day on unpaid work than men. Mothers with small children take considerably longer parental leave than fathers, and also work part-time to a much greater extent.

One area that has received a lot of attention in gender equality policy over the past ten years is men's violence against women, especially violence in close relationships and honour-related violence and oppression. The #metoo movement that started in the autumn of 2017 has revealed the extent of the sexual violence against women perpetrated by men from all walks of life.

Note. 2. SCB (2016).

Note. 3. SALAR (2015).

Note. 4. SOU 2015:50.

## Men also suffer from vulnerability

Overall, it is no wonder that men's rights or vulnerability has not been at the centre of gender equality policy, nor that many people, even today, perceive gender equality as primarily a women's issue. However, men's vulnerability can be obscured by the fact that men enjoy structural privileges and that men still dominate the upper echelons of society, within the financial, political and cultural elite.

Every year approximately 1,500 people in Sweden commit suicide. Of these, 1,100 are men, i.e., 70 percent.<sup>5</sup> A significantly higher proportion of men than women state that they do not have a close friend.<sup>6</sup> Men also do not seek medical care or help to the same extent as women, especially not when it concerns mental illness.<sup>7</sup>

Three times more men than women die from alcohol-related illnesses and eight out of ten people who drown are men.<sup>8</sup> Twice as many men with a low-level of education die before they reach 80 years of age compared to highly educated women.<sup>9</sup>

On average, boys have lower grades than girls, and more men than women leave upper-secondary school without completing their education.<sup>10</sup> More men than women are consigned to long-term income support.<sup>11</sup>

About 85 percent of those suspected of violent crime are men, but the majority of victims of violence reported to the police or registered at hospitals are also men.<sup>12</sup> For example, almost three times more men than women are murdered.

Both the perpetration of violence and being subjected to violence are most common amongst younger men.

## Traditional norms are a risk factor

It may seem like a paradox that the group that is most dominant in society is so vulnerable at the same time.

Note. 5. Karolinska Institute (2017).

Note. 6. SCB (2017).

Note. 7. SOU 2014:6.

Note. 8. The National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen (2016)).

Note. 9. SOU 2016:55.

Note. 10. The Swedish National Agency for Education (2018a), The Swedish National Agency for Education (2018b).

Note. 11. SALAR (2016).

Note. 12. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (2017).

One might imagine that it would involve different individuals or different groups of men, but men of all backgrounds and positions suffer from different forms of vulnerability.

However, the risk of vulnerability increases with factors such as a low level of education, poverty, disability and belonging to an ethnic minority.

A common feature of male dominance and vulnerability are norms for what can be seen as traditional masculinity, i.e., notions of what a man should be like – for example, strong, independent and capable – and what a man should not be like, i.e., have characteristics associated with femininity.<sup>13</sup> Characteristics associated with power – strength, self-control, having a “killer instinct”, concealing weakness – equip men for competition, but at the same time create obstacles to expressing weakness and vulnerability.

Since men, according to the norms, are expected to be strong, many men feel ashamed to openly show weakness and ask for help. Several studies and surveys conducted with men confirm this.<sup>14</sup> Men who predominantly have attitudes and rigid views that are in line with traditional and stereotypical masculinity have, to a greater extent, used physical violence against both women and men, perform housework or care work to a lesser degree, use contraceptives to a lesser extent, have been tested for sexually transmitted diseases to a lesser extent, have higher alcohol and drug use, and are less likely to seek help for their own ill-health.

Traditional masculinity norms are thus a risk factor for attitudes and behaviours that contribute to the vulnerability of individual men, but also affect women and impede the development towards an equal society. The attitudes of men and boys, as well as the expectations of the outside world about what they should be like, can also impede the achievement of goals within organisations at the municipal regional level.

Improving gender equality in the organisations that municipalities and county councils operate can ensure that women and men share society's resources equally and that services respond to the needs, wishes and priorities of both women and men.

Thus, gender equality is about improving quality. But gender equality also involves an element of social change. Personnel in schools, health care and long-term care are important norm-bearers in their interaction with children, pupils, users, patients and other citizens.

Note. 13. The very term traditional masculinity can give rise to erroneous ideas that there is a single, dominant masculinity, which will be examined later in the paper. For the sake of simplicity, the term is still used to indicate what can be perceived as constants in relation to a changing masculinity.

Note. 14. Barker et al. (2011), Ungdomsstyrelsen (2013) (The Agency for Youth and Civil Society), Hagemann-White et al. (2010).

Elected officials, managers and employees in the public sector need to have knowledge of masculinity norms and understand how they affect organisations and interactions. This is very important to whether gender equality initiatives will be successful or not, as well as for gender equality in society as a whole.

## Men are absent from gender equality policy

In Sweden, women's circumstances have improved considerably over the past 50–60 years in relation to those of men, primarily through an increase in women's power resources in the form of education, employment, entry into male dominated professions and positions, as well as more flexible norms pertaining to marriage and sexuality.<sup>15</sup> The development of the welfare system has played an important role, in that it both functions as a labour market for women and provides relief in traditional female areas of responsibility.

Women have moved into former male domains, but it is not possible to see a corresponding change in men's behavioural patterns or their positions, nor has there been any profound change in the masculinity norms. Although many men in Sweden have long had positive attitudes towards gender equality, there is a gap between words and deeds. The term used by Lars Jalmert, researcher in Men's Studies, in 1984 about the Swedish "in-principle-man" is still valid, i.e., that men in principle are in favour of gender equality but do not translate it into practice.

Lack of knowledge and indifference remain a challenge in matters concerning men and gender equality.<sup>16</sup> To a certain extent, it is because politics and gender equality initiatives have not, to any great extent, been aimed at, or attempted to engage, men and boys. Men and men's attitudes to gender equality have been discussed in politics and public discourse since the 1960s, but the analysis of men's circumstances from a perspective of power has been marginal. For example, the significance of men's violence against men has rarely been discussed or seen as a problem in any deeper sense, despite its extent. The same applies to the higher male mortality rate from alcohol-related diseases and the higher degree of male loneliness and isolation. The level of knowledge and awareness of masculinity issues is generally low, even among men themselves.

"Kvinnomaktutredningen" (The Investigation into Women's Power) (SOU 1998: 6) showed that, over time, gender equality policy has managed to increase women's power and that this also seems to lead to more equal family

Note. 15. SOU 1997:138.

Note. 16. SOU 2014:6.

relationships in parts of society. Families where both women and men have high incomes and are senior white-collar workers, have a more even distribution of household work, which would indicate a positive change amongst men as well. Gender equality policy in Sweden has also repeatedly emphasized the idea that reinforcing men's paternal commitment can contribute to gender equality.

“Män och jämställdhet” (Men and Gender Equality) (SOU 2014: 6) is the first government inquiry that analyses men and masculinity norms from a broader perspective.

A key point in the investigation's report is that masculinity norms that contribute to men's power and privileges also contribute to men's vulnerability.

The conclusion is that efforts to change masculinity norms that give men power *at the same time* have the potential to reduce the vulnerability of men.

## Equality and the Swedish male - a myth?

Improvements in gender equality have created a strong gender equality ideal that is supported by both women and men, and Sweden is regularly ranked as one of the world's most equal countries. However, different studies provide a contradictory picture of the importance of gender equality policy and the gender equality ideal in changing masculinity norms.

Some studies indicate that the idea of “ordinary” Swedish men as equal in terms of gender contributes to overestimating the improvements. As a consequence, “ordinary” Swedish men are assumed not to perpetrate violence against women and the violence is instead attributed to other men. Thus, a hierarchy is established with a superior and supposedly equal masculinity associated with being Swedish (white), middle class and heterosexual, while working-class men or men belonging to an ethnic minority are represented as unequal and thus deviating from the norm.<sup>17</sup>

The debate about honour-related violence and oppression and patriarchal families contributes to placing ethnic minorities outside the boundaries of Swedish gender equality. Swedishness is associated with a country and with a culture that is based on principles of equality and is uniquely free from gender oppression.<sup>18</sup> It creates the potential for criticism of immigrant groups by emphasizing that they are not gender equal, even though among immigrant men – just like among men born in Sweden – there is considerable variation in attitudes towards masculinity and gender equality.

Note. 17. SOU 2014:6.

Note. 18. Wikström (2012), Darvishpour (2015).





# What are norms and how do they operate?

Beliefs about the differences between women and men are often derived from visible physiological differences. However, in a large metastudy<sup>19</sup> of other studies investigating gender differences in behaviours and abilities, it was observed that the differences between men and women are in fact non-existent or very small, for example in terms of cognitive abilities, verbal ability, and ways of communicating. The study concludes that differences in behaviour are mainly due to social and cultural factors such as gender norms and context. For example, experiments have shown that both men and women violate gender stereotypical behaviour if they are not at risk of being subjected to sanctions from people around them. Research also shows that performance deteriorates as a result of negative gender stereotypes – for example, that women are not good at technical subjects, or that men are not good at providing care. When stereotypes are questioned and invalidated, there is no measurable difference in performance between women and men.

## Men and women as opposites and male superiority

Gender norms are unwritten social rules that indicate what is expected of women and men, as well as girls and boys, to be accepted and gain social status, in a given period, in a given context. Expectations become norms when they are shared or followed by a large number of people in a society. All societies also create and maintain systems in which women and men are assigned different tasks, roles and positions. The historian Yvonne Hirdman introduced the theory of the gender system in Sweden. It is based on two basic principles:<sup>20</sup>

Note. 19. Hyde, J.S. (2005).

Note. 20. Hirdman (2003).

- › Separation: Men and women, and what is considered male and female respectively, are kept separate and viewed as each other's opposites.
- › Male superiority: Men as a group are superior to women as a group. What men do, say and think, is considered more valuable, and what is associated with masculinity constitutes the norm.

The norms are conveyed in relationships between individuals, groups and organisations, but also through different institutions in society such as the labour market, the judiciary, the military, sport, the media, the education system and through religion.

The gender system's principle of the genders as each other's opposites means that characteristics and positions that are considered masculine by definition are seen as non-feminine. If men are expected to be technical, the principle of dichotomy leads to women being expected to be non-technical. If men are expected to be rational, women are expected to be emotional. If being a leader is associated with masculinity, women are not expected to be leaders, and so on. The principle leads to an actual distinction so that women and men are found in different domains and different professions. The principle of dichotomy between the genders also supports the idea that every one of the same gender should have similar characteristics. The principle that the man is the norm leads to men and masculinity norms being taken for granted, becoming the template in a variety of situations and contexts. It can be seen, for example, in language usage: ice hockey–women's ice hockey; CEO–female CEO; doctor–female doctor and so on.

Men's activities and positions are seen as self-evident, women's as aberrant.<sup>21</sup> Women therefore encounter opposition in many positions and situations, where men, as a rule, are met with a positive expectation from the people around them. Such social processes reinforce men's superiority, at a structural and individual level.

The requirement for men is instead to conform to the prevailing masculinity norms. We use the term "traditional masculinity" for the masculinity norms that have been dominant in Sweden and in most parts of the world over the last decade (more about different types of masculinity in the next chapter). This form of masculinity is based on expectations that men should be strong, successful, independent, performance-oriented, rational, inclined towards gainful employment and – in accordance with the principles of the gender system – different from women.

Note. 21. There are a number of female-dominated professions whose designation retains the feminine form, even when men perform the role. Examples of this are nurses and housewives. In these cases, it is often a professional organisation that has decided on the naming convention.

How these expectations affect individual men is influenced by a number of other factors, such as age, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, skin colour, religion, ableness, education and income. The term intersectionality (from the English word for an intersection) describes an analytical approach that considers how multiple power systems interact with each other. A black man in a wheelchair has a different experience and meets other expectations than a white man who runs a marathon. Skin colour and ableness interact. However, regardless of which categories are analysed, there are always differences between women and men that are based precisely on the fact that they are women and men or must relate to the idea of two separate sexes. Women and men with similar disabilities have different experiences and meet different expectations just because they are women and men.

Masculinity is not something natural or essentially “male”. Rather, it involves the fact that certain attributes, characteristics and expressions that every person, regardless of gender, may have, have become associated with men and masculinity. In other words, it is not only men and boys who have to deal with masculinity norms. These norms are also associated with the idea that men and women are opposites, that men should be “masculine”, with everything that it entails, and that women should be “feminine” with everything that that entails. But women also have what, according to the norm, is considered to be masculine characteristics and attributes, and likewise men have feminine characteristics and attributes. However, transgressing gender norms may often have negative consequences for the individual in the form of lost status, criticism from people around them, discrimination, harassment or even violence. This is particularly evident in the case of transgender people, a group that is very badly affected by limited perceptions of gender, and as a result of this are particularly vulnerable to mental illness.<sup>22</sup>

## **Behaviour can lead to reward or punishment**

Masculinity norms colour society’s interaction with boys, often unconsciously because norms per definition are related to notions of normality, i.e., everything we take for granted around us. When boys behave in line with expectations of masculinity, they encounter informal rewards in the form of encouragement and confirmation, and when boys deviate from the expectations, they can face punishment in the form of being ignored, ridiculed or shamed. In younger children, it is about subtle responses, such as adults stopping boys from crying by distracting them or laughing in an embarrassed manner when they violate the notions of what a “real boy” should be. As early as in

Note. 22. The Public Health Agency of Sweden (Folkhälsomyndigheten) (2015).

pre-school, children are aware that girls and boys are expected to play different games, wear different clothes and exhibit different behaviours. Children who deviate from the norm risk being teased or laughed at by other children.<sup>23</sup>

As boys grow older, violence is also more common as a sanction against those who deviate from the norms or against boys who are ranked lower. Not everyone is affected, but the message of traditional masculinity also reaches boys (and girls) who witness or hears about such sanctions.

The Swedish National Agency for Education's major survey from 2009 with interviews of pupils provides a picture of violence as part of the formation of boys' masculinity.<sup>24</sup> According to the interviewees, girls deal with disputes by backbiting, spreading rumours and verbally harassing other pupils, while boys threaten violence or exercise physical violence. The pattern is already visible in pre-school, but for some it accelerates in primary school and upper-secondary school. Not all boys are perpetrators of violence, but there is a culture of violence to which boys in particular must adhere. Even friendship and closeness between boys can be expressed in a violent manner, such as back slapping or punching one another on the arm. Threats of violence and actual fights can be seen as part of the process of forming masculinity through a power game where boys watch one another and protect one another. This power game contains elements of verbal and physical violence, sexual harassment of girls and women, homophobia and racism. Sanctions in the form of violence or serious sexist and homophobic utterances are most common during the teenage years and among younger men. It is the period during which gender identity is consolidated, and therefore they have considerable significance.

Among older men, sanctions can be expressed more subtly, but occur nevertheless. For example, men who cannot or do not want to adhere to the masculinity norms that are expected of a man in a leadership position risk being excluded from workplace promotions. It may apply to men who take extended parental leave, men who are openly homosexual or men who advocate values other than careerism, performance goals, competitiveness, financial efficiency, rationality, and so forth.<sup>25</sup>

Interview studies with men in Swedish politics provide a similar picture. The power structure promises on the one hand community, solidarity and confirmation of the male identity. On the other hand, it has a strong element of competition and the subordination of personal values, wishes and needs. Men experience other men as controllers of the male order, and there are

Note. 23. The Swedish National Agency for Education (2009).

Note. 24. The Swedish National Agency for Education (2009).

Note. 25. Collinson, D. och Hearn, J. (1994).



clear limits to what men are permitted and not permitted to do within the framework of the male community. Many men assume that there are different forms of reward and punishment that confirm, or question, male identity and affiliation.<sup>26</sup>

### **There are different forms of masculinity**

Research on men, masculinity and gender equality has over time specialised and diversified. In particular, the term masculinity has been criticized for being simplified, in a manner that may contribute to recreating stereotypical beliefs about men. Instead, the research shows a heterogeneity of different masculinities, which are also variable and dynamic. Masculinity is something that is “done” and “accomplished”. There are several ways to be a man, and this may have different meanings in different contexts.

What is designated “traditional masculinity” in this paper is not a uniform, universally prevailing pattern, but should rather be seen as a theme with variations. At the same time, there are elements that are strikingly constant over time: beliefs about physical strength, competence, independence, daring and physical courage. There are therefore many different – and contradictory – expectations, ideals, and norms about “what it means to be man”. Nor are all men and boys affected in the same way by traditional masculinity norms, because not everyone has the same experiences. However, everyone needs to relate to these norms. Different contexts or arenas also convey traditional masculinity to different degrees or in different variations.

Note. 26. Pincus, I. (2002).



Within the field of research, there is no longer a discussion about one single masculinity, but rather about masculinities, different expressions of masculinity, which in themselves are variable and dynamic. Research suggests that there is a hierarchy between different masculinities.<sup>27</sup> A masculinity that is associated with gay men is ranked lower than traditional masculinity that is associated with heterosexual men, even though the view of homosexuality has undergone major changes.<sup>28</sup> Research shows, for example, that men's fear of physical intimacy with other men is not as pronounced among young people as it previously was.

One and the same man or boy can express different forms of masculinity depending on the context. For example, a boy may display completely different behaviours in a close relationship to a trusted adult or friend compared to with his football team or other pupils in school. Therefore, it is important in any change process to analyse which specific norms are prevalent.

Note. 27. Connell (1995).

Note. 28. The number of police reports of hate crimes against homosexuals has halved since 2008. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (2016).

## Loss of power can lead to nostalgic masculinity

Gender equality means that power and resources are transferred from an advantaged group (men) to a disadvantaged group (women).

Because masculinity is intimately associated with expectations of having power (over women, over children, over other men), a loss of power can be a challenge for men who do not see the opportunity to compensate for the loss by subscribing to a more equitable masculinity. In such instances, some men may return to a more patriarchal masculinity, or to what researchers call “nostalgic masculinity”. Men’s movements with religious, fundamentalist, nationalist and anti-feminist components are characterised by that kind of nostalgic masculinity.<sup>29</sup> It tries to “turn back the clock” by seeking the “genuine inner masculinity”.

For men who belong to the majority society, nostalgic masculinity may involve a movement against nationalism, conservatism and right-wing extremism, and men and boys with a Muslim cultural background can develop a more radical or fundamentalist religious conviction. Men who immigrated to Sweden can also experience a loss of power, particularly in connection with arrival. Studies indicate that it can play a central role in understanding their attitudes to gender equality and masculinity.<sup>30</sup>

Nostalgic masculinity in the form of right-wing extremism or Muslim fundamentalism is based on an authoritarian masculinity with elements of misogyny and homophobia, which suggests that there are common features. At the same time, such a move towards nostalgic masculinity can be interpreted as increasing competition between various masculinities that exist within both the ethnic majority and the minority. Ironically, both groups have a sort of paternalistic approach and they claim they want to “protect” their “own” women from the threat of men from “foreign cultures”.

Note. 29. Johansson (2000).

Note. 30. Darvishpour (2014).





## Gender equality initiatives focusing on men, boys and masculinity issues

In 2016, SALAR conducted a survey to ascertain to what extent municipalities, county councils and regions had carried out gender equality initiatives, over the past ten years, that were focused on men, boys and masculinity norms. The answers showed that many see the work as urgent and necessary, but the survey also revealed that there is great variation in what and how much has been done in the field, partly between different municipalities, county councils and regions, and partly between different areas of operation within each organisation. This indicates that the field is new and relatively undeveloped, which was confirmed by the fact that the survey's free-text responses largely lacked information about specific methods, documented evidence or material.

Regarding documented evidence and methodology, gender education in preschools as well as social service interventions aimed at male perpetrators of violence appear to be the most developed. It is also within these fields that most municipalities state that they have worked.

Within the county councils, it is argued that masculinity issues are included in skills training about gender, gender equality and LGBTQ perspectives. The county councils also carry out initiatives to recruit more men into female-dominated professions. Initiatives aimed at residents have primarily entailed reaching more young men at youth clinics and trying to better include fathers in maternity and child healthcare.

The survey does not indicate if the initiatives reported actually raise or change inequitable masculinity norms. Many respondents state that they

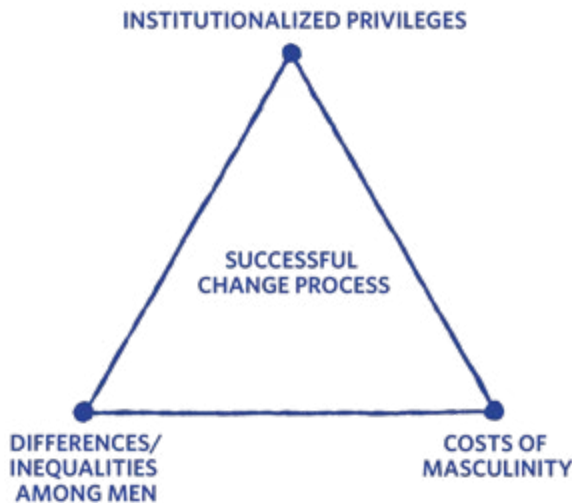
work with gender equality or with norm critical perspectives, but that it is not specifically aimed at masculinity norms or men and boys. It reinforces the suspicion that many interventions that are reported are not based on knowledge of the circumstances under which men and boys live, masculinity norms or knowledge of how they can be changed. On the whole, interventions that are more systematically based on knowledge of masculinity or on initiatives that are designed in consultation with men and boys seem to be less common.

### **The change process needs to consider power, vulnerability and diversity**

SALAR's programme for men and gender equality is based on a model developed by American sociologist Michael Messner, which describes how different dimensions of masculinity relate to each other. In "Politics of Masculinities – Men in Movements", he studies a number of organisations and stakeholders who promote issues relating to men and masculinity.<sup>31</sup> Messner identifies three recurring themes:

- › Men as a group have institutional privileges at the expense of women as a group.
- › Men risk paying dearly when they try to live up to the masculinity norms that give them status and privileges, in the form of superficial relationships, ill health and shorter life spans.
- › Some men benefit more than others from the patriarchal order. Superior masculinity (white, middle class, heterosexual) is constructed in contrast to femininity and to various subordinate masculinities (based on factors such as ethnicity, skin colour, class and sexual orientation).

Note. 31. Messner (1997).



All three themes are relevant and are supported by current statistics and research. As shown in the introduction, men still dominate the upper echelons of society and have advantages in a number of areas compared to women. At the same time, men are more vulnerable than women in many ways: men die at a younger age, more men abuse alcohol and drugs, men are often more isolated, more men are injured or die in accidents. Nor are all men equal; not all men have the same power, nor do they live with the same vulnerabilities. Men are also individuals with different life stories and they are part of groups that live under different conditions.

Messner believes that stakeholders who are involved in promoting change based on only one of the three themes face the most resistance, because it results in a description of reality that many men do not recognise. His conclusion is that change strategies involving men and masculinities must consider all three dimensions to be successful. It does not mean that all three themes must always be emphasized equally, but that each one must always be understood in the light of the other two.

Gender equality initiatives based on Messner's model provide the best conditions for engaging boys and men as well as making the right analyses of the problems that gender equality initiatives are intended to solve. It is not possible to work on issues of men's vulnerability without simultaneously looking at how they relate to power and privileges or the differences between men. Gender equality is not a zero-sum game, but men's circumstances are also improved by gender equality and a change in the masculinity norms associated with power. A gender equality initiative that incorporates masculinity norms also provides new opportunities for men and boys to participate and to get them more involved.

## A combination of different interventions has the greatest effect

In a report from 2007, the World Health Organization (WHO) presented an analysis of 58 evaluated gender equality projects with men and boys in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, parental support, maternity and child healthcare and violence prevention. The analysis also includes general interventions to promote gender equality.<sup>32</sup>

The report describes four types of interventions:

- *Interventions aimed at groups of men or boys or at gender-mixed groups in the form of education or group therapy.* A Swedish example highlighted in the context of SALAR's programme for men and gender equality is the violence prevention programme, Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP). The programme includes a number of lessons for pupils in lower-secondary and upper-secondary school, where pupils jointly identify different forms of violence and are trained to intervene against mild violence in order to prevent more serious violence. MVP has been implemented in a number of municipalities with very good results in the form of reduced violence and increased safety in schools.
- *Interventions aimed at individual men and boys, or at couples, within, for example, health care and schools* (some interventions were based on home visits or phone counselling). One example highlighted within SALAR's programme is Region Skåne's initiative for gender equal parenting, which includes individual conversations with new fathers in connection with visits to the Child Healthcare Clinic. Another example is the Young Men's Clinic in Gothenburg, which systematically works to get more young men to seek help and support in relation to both sexual and mental health.
- *Interventions aimed at the whole community, or at everyone at a school or workplace, through information or impact campaigns, or the involvement of leaders in different areas.* A Swedish example is Region Värmland's campaign: A Real Man, including video clips with hockey players displayed on the jumbotron during intervals at the Färjestad ice-hockey team's home arena in Karlstad.
- *Integrated interventions.* Combined interventions that include at least two of the three aforementioned types, such as information campaigns that are combined with group training.

Note. 32. World Health Organization (2007).

The WHO believes that all four types of interventions lead to a change in attitudes and behaviours among men and boys, but integrated interventions have a greater effect than interventions that are based on only one type of intervention. This is particularly true of change strategies that include a combination of media campaigns and group training. This would suggest that initiatives to change norms have a greater effect if the same message comes from several directions and reaches a larger audience. Another conclusion is that interventions aimed at changing inequitable norms or stereotypical perceptions of gender have a greater effect on gender equality than interventions that lack such ambition or analysis.

### **Additional success factors in initiatives related to men, boys and norms**

The initiative aiming at men, boys and masculinities is not a new type of gender equality programme, but part of existing gender equality efforts that needs strengthening. Thus, a development process involving men and boys, and challenging masculinity norms is based on the same success factors as other development processes. In order for it to succeed, it requires clear goals and that the municipality's or county council's leadership actively support the work and demand results. The gender mainstreaming strategy means that the gender equality initiative is integrated into all activities within an organisation. It assumes that gender equality is consistently represented in the governance and management systems, target documents, business plans, budgets and follow-up processes. In turn, it requires access to gendered statistics and key indicators, so that proposals, decisions and organisational outcomes can be analysed and followed up for both women and men.

The strategy also means that gender equality is not just an issue for the experts, but the responsibility for all managers and employees. Therefore, everyone concerned must be given the opportunity to learn more about gender equality, the differences in women's and men's circumstances, as well as the gender equality challenges that the initiative must overcome.

Masculinity norms affect both women and men, and both sexes contribute to maintaining masculinity norms. Therefore, gender equality initiatives that involve masculinity issues should be aimed at both men and women. Every member of staff, regardless of gender, needs to contribute to enable municipalities and county councils to develop their services for citizens and users based on knowledge of masculinity.

The WHO's analysis indicates an additional number of factors that characterise successful interventions for involving men and boys and changing masculinity norms:

- › Group training or group therapy has a greater effect if it consists of multiple sessions and provide room for reflection, with time to practice new behaviours between the sessions. Conveying only knowledge, facts or information does not seem to have any major effect on behaviours or attitudes.
- › Having critical discussions about gender norms and gender equality with other participants has an effect. Participants realizing how gender norms have influenced and continue to influence them and their relationships is also an important aspect. Skills training can be an element that contributes to behavioural change. The WHO's analysis suggests that the ability to create a safe climate by those leading the group discussions, is crucial. On the whole, the knowledge and skills of those leading the discussions are central to achieving the desired effect with this type of intervention.
- › Media and information campaigns are most effective if they convey positive messages about the kinds of changes that are sought by men and boys and what men and boys can actually do to contribute. Effective campaigns are also based on proper surveys of the target group prior to designing interventions, and they should work over a long period of time.
- › In clinic-based interventions for individual men or couples, training staff in how to work with men and women is the most crucial for achieving the desired effect. Effective interventions also attempted to make clinics more accessible and welcoming for men by having flexible hours and by adapting the premises and waiting rooms.
- › A high degree of participation or involvement from the target group is a success factor. In other words, inviting men and boys into the change process with the opportunity to reflect on and explore ways to bring about change.

Several of the Swedish examples that SALAR has identified and highlights in the context of their programme for men and gender equality are based on the same success factors that the WHO identified. More information about the Swedish examples can be found on the next page.

# Additional resources about boys, men and masculinity norms

In 2016 and 2017, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), with the support of the national government, conducted a special programme directed towards men, boys and masculinity issues.

This campaign has compiled and disseminated instructive examples, arranged conferences, seminars and workshops, and has produced a number of publications, reports and films – in consultation with politicians, high-level civil servants and employees of local authorities and regions, as well as with researchers and representatives of government agencies and civil society.

All this material is accessible on the SALAR website [skl.se/jamstalldhet](http://skl.se/jamstalldhet).

## Publications

- › Maskulinitet och jämställdhet – En introduktion till att förändra mansnormer [Masculinity and gender equality – An introduction to transforming male norms].
- › Förändringsarbete med våldsutövande män – Strategier för kvalitetsutveckling [Changing violent men – Improving the quality of batterer interventions].
- › Maskulinitet och psykisk hälsa – Strategier för förbättringsarbete i vård och omsorg [Masculinity and mental health – Strategies for improving health and social care].
- › Maskulinitet och jämställd skola – Arbete för ökad trygghet och bättre studieresultat [Masculinity and the gender-equal school – Towards increased security and better school results].

- › Maskulinitet och jämställt föräldraskap – Arbete för pappors ökade delaktighet [Masculinity and gender-equal parenting – Towards more active parenting for fathers].

### **Film series – Voices about masculinity**

- › En film om normer för killar och män. Maskulinitet – så funkar det [Masculinity – how it works].
- › Män i förskolan. Förskolläraren Per Håkan Taavo i Luleå om ett yrke som passar alla oavsett kön [Men in preschool – Preschool teacher Per Håkan Taavo of Luleå about a profession that fits everyone, regardless of gender].
- › Jämställt på vårdprogrammet. Om genusmedveten studie- och yrkesvägledning i Katrineholm [Gender-sensitive study and career guidance in Katrineholm].
- › Arbete för ökad trygghet och bättre studieresultat. Om normkritiskt arbete på Järvenskolan Tallås i Katrineholm [Norm critical work for increased security and better school results].
- › Män och våld. Om våldsförebyggande arbete på Hahrska gymnasiet i Västerås [Men and violence – violence-prevention efforts at the Hahrska Upper Secondary School in Västerås].
- › Män och normer. Om projektet Normstorm i Jönköping [Men and norms – a film on the Norm Storm project in Jönköping].
- › Vårt vatten har gått. Om pappor i förlossningsvården [Our water broke – fathers in labour and delivery care].
- › Män och barn. En film om att bli pappa [Men and children – a film about becoming a father].
- › Jämställt föräldraskap. Om Region Skånes pappasamtal med nyblivna fäder [Gender-equal parenting – about the Skåne Region’s counselling with new fathers].
- › Män och hälsa. Hur vården kan nå unga män med psykisk ohälsa [Men and health – how healthcare can reach mentally ill young men].
- › Att ha rätt till sina egna känslor. Hur vården kan nå unga män med psykisk ohälsa (lång version) [The right to your own feelings – how healthcare can reach mentally ill young men (long version)].
- › Män och självmord. En film om suicidrisk, mansnormer och att söka hjälp [Men and suicide – a film about suicide risks, masculinity norms and seeking help].
- › Killsamtal om sex och samlevnad. Om sex- och samlevnadsundervisning med killgrupper i Lund [Talking about sexuality and norms with young men – a film about Comprehensive Sexuality Education with the participation of a group of young men in Lund].



### **Articles on instructive examples at Jämställ.nu**

- › Sex- och samlevnadssamtal med unga nyanlända i Värmland [Discussions about sex and living together, with newly arrived immigrants in Värmland].
- › Jämställt föräldraskap i Region Skåne [Gender-equal parenting in Skåne Region].
- › Kriscentrum i mellersta Skåne, behandling för män i kris [Crisis centre in mid-Skåne, treatment for men in crisis].
- › Normkritiskt arbete på Järvenskolan Tallås i Katrineholm [Efforts to critically examine norms at Järven School Tallås in Katrineholm].
- › Malmö stad har flest manliga förskollärare i landet [The City of Malmö has the highest share of male preschool teachers in Sweden].

### **Conferences and seminars, documentation at skl.se**

- › Män och jämställdhet – konferens i december 2016 [Men and gender equality – Conference in December 2016].
- › Fördel flicka? Seminarium om pojkar i skolan [Seminar about boys in school].
- › Vårt vatten har gått! Seminarium om pappor som resurs i förlossningsvården [Seminar about fathers as a resource during labour and delivery].
- › Normer som dödar. Seminarium om män och suicidprevention [Seminar on men and suicide prevention].

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# Masculinity and gender equality

## AN INTRODUCTION TO TRANSFORMING MALE NORMS

Gender equality initiatives that change restrictive and harmful masculinity norms can provide considerable benefits for both women and men and for society as a whole. It can lead to greater security, improved health, more equal relationships and reduced violence, while increasing the quality in schools, health and social care. It can also help to open up the gender segregated labour market and broaden recruitment to the public sector.

This paper describes possible strategies for developing gender equality initiatives with an understanding of inequality and masculinity norms as its starting point.

It is aimed at politicians, managers or strategists responsible for operational development, but also at other municipal and county council employees.

The paper was drafted within the scope of SALAR's strategy for men and gender equality. More papers, films and other material is available at [skl.se/jamstalldhet](http://skl.se/jamstalldhet).

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