

“... society seems obsessed with the notion of ‘male privilege’. Men’s health problems are often dismissed as an effect of their own irresponsible actions, but the truth is that men are suffering ...”

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## Men’s health

Children are infected by their parents’ musical tastes. I went to see The Streets with two of my sons recently. They headed to the front to throw some beer and to do some shouting. The last song was ‘Dry Your Eyes’, about a man being distressed by a break-up, and is much parodied. Society seems to be uncomfortable with men expressing their emotions. But interestingly, when Mike Skinner, the lead singer, acknowledged his own mental health issues, the audience of young men cheered.

It is difficult to raise men’s health issues as society seems obsessed with the notion of ‘male privilege’. Men’s health problems are often dismissed as an effect of their own irresponsible actions, but the truth is that men are suffering — only, largely in silence.

Consider the facts. For almost every major health condition the incidence, severity, and outcome are worse for men.<sup>1</sup> Life expectancy is, on average, nearly 3 years less for men.<sup>2</sup> Men account for 75% of all suicides with nearly 6000 deaths in 2017.<sup>3</sup> This is roughly half the number that die from breast cancer each year, but compare the resources and attention these different issues receive.

The most extreme form of homelessness and social marginalisation is rough sleeping, and, of the estimated 5000 people sleeping rough, 85% are men.<sup>4</sup> Of the 400 victims of domestic homicide in 2018, 107 were men.<sup>5</sup> Rates of reported domestic abuse for men is high at 15%, yet men are three times less likely to disclose abuse.<sup>5</sup> Men also experience all forms of abuse as children.<sup>6</sup>

Men are 20 times more likely to be in jail and the current prison population is a staggering 82 000. Best to not even consider the appalling physical and mental health of prisoners and former prisoners.<sup>7</sup>

Of the 144 workers killed at work in 2018, 96% were men.<sup>8</sup> But this is dwarfed by the 2500 mesothelioma deaths a year, with five times more men than women dying from it. This is due to 94% of mesothelioma deaths being linked to occupational

exposure to asbestos through trade-related occupations.<sup>9</sup> Yet these preventable deaths receive virtually no public profile.

Add to this the everyday issues of poor educational attainment and custody and access problems that men face in divorce. Rightly, there is angst over gender inequality at the top of society but inequality is a two-way street and negative gender stereotyping impacts on both sexes. The health inequality experienced by men is real, long-standing, and persisting.

The NHS seems to be indifferent to men’s health inequality at best, or nihilistic at worst. The media suggests that it is women who are suffering health inequality.<sup>10</sup> Increasingly, there are fewer men working in primary care with no thought as to how this may impact on men’s use of the service.

Why is there no attempt to address or even acknowledge these inequalities?

So, is men’s health Bad Medicine? You decide.

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