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A Crisis in Modern Masculinity: Understanding the Causes of Male Suicide

Men need new rules for survival, misplaced self-beliefs are proving lethal

London, November 19th, 2014 – The role of men is being transformed by globalised forces from economics to technology to feminism. And men are faring particularly badly in many areas of life. From homelessness to education, alcohol and drug misuse to general life expectancy, they are clearly finding it increasingly difficult to cope as they try to adapt to circumstances that are entirely unprecedented.

Male suicide at a 15 year high

As a result, male suicide rates are at a 15-year high. Every year in the UK over 4,500 men kill themselves – nearly three times as many annually as all deaths caused by road accidents*.

This hidden killer is now the single biggest cause of death in men aged 20–49 in England and Wales, with males accounting for 78 per cent of all suicides in the UK. In contrast, female suicide rates are declining.

Identifying the causes of male suicide

In order to fully understand this phenomenon, male suicide prevention charity the Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) commissioned wide-ranging research about men from independent specialists, Public Knowledge.

Jane Powell, CALM's chief executive says: "For the first time ever, we have developed a state-of-the-nation audit of a representative sample of men and women in the UK to discover what is really going on behind the UK's crisis in modern masculinity and male suicide."

The research aimed to test assumptions about the particular expectations and pressures that men face currently: to find out how these expectations and pressures differ between genders; to test assumptions about the expectations that women and men have of men, and to inform further research into the consequences of men not feeling able to live up to the expectations and pressures identified.

Breaking the cycle

The research finds that men and women respond differently to the pressures of modern life, relationships and employment. Whilst both men (50 per cent) and women (59 per cent) are likely to have experienced depression at some time, it is clear that around half of these men didn't feel able to talk about their problems or 'burden others'.

In particular, ensuring men do feel they can speak to someone about depression is paramount as there are evident connections between a number of key areas including depression, risk taking behaviour (including getting drunk and taking drugs), frustration with life and job loss.

The report suggests a cycle of depression, frustration and unhealthy behaviours develops in men which is difficult to break. Not only do males feel they cannot talk about their problems and resulting depression but astoundingly, less than one in 10 men thought that employers, government and unions were taking their specific needs into account. This is remarkable given the size of the male workforce, the higher levels of job loss reported amongst males, and the reported self-esteem that comes from employment for men.

New rules for survival

Powell, emphasises: “The research underlines that so often their own worst enemies, men need new rules for survival. Outmoded, incorrect and misplaced male self-beliefs are proving lethal and the traditional strong, silent response to adversity is increasingly failing to protect men from themselves.

“Men need to talk before they hit a wall in a crisis or feel they are at the end of the road. The normality of women freely discussing their troubles is undoubtedly a factor in declining rates of female suicide and underlines the need for a gender-based strategy in suicide prevention. So far, Government and society has failed to act on this self-inflicted yet preventable slaughter of our husbands, partners, brothers and sons.”

Professor Damien Ridge, an expert in male mental health at the University of Westminster says: “CALM has pieced together for the first time the likely pressures points for male suicide UK-wide. That half of males self-report serious depression is well beyond what we might have expected given the stereotype that it is women who get depressed, not men. I am particularly concerned that men overwhelmingly think that government organisations are ignoring their needs.”

Powell adds: “Despite the fact road accidents kill two thirds fewer men every year, the budget for road safety is massive yet spending on male suicide prevention is tiny. Also, in contrast to the range support extended by State agencies to victims of crime, there is no help whatsoever provided to those that suicide leaves behind. This has to change.

“Men need help and they need it now. As a nation we must put in place both short term and long term properly funded and coordinated gender-specific response to this crisis with solutions that are replicated across the country. The CALM Helpline and CALMzones on Liverpool and London have demonstrated that, given the opportunity, men will talk about what worries them and this is the first stage in preventing suicide.

“But ultimately attitudes to suicide in society at large need to change to help men evolve their behaviour. Only then will we bring this pernicious hidden killer under control. “



* Figures from RAC Foundation

* Statistics provided by Office for National Statistics and Department for Transport. There were 5,981 suicides in the UK in 2012. 77 per cent - 4,590 - were male. Road deaths in 2013 were 1,713. This is the lowest figure since national records began in 1926

About CALM

CALM, the Campaign Against Living Miserably, is an award-winning charity dedicated to preventing male suicide in the UK. It provides a free, confidential helpline open every day 5pm – midnight on 0800 585858 (national) 0808 802 5858 (London). CALM runs www.thecalmzone.net an innovative mix of articles, cartoons and stories where men can find information, share stories and access support. It also publishes a free London bi-monthly men's lifestyle magazine, CALMzine distributed by TOPMAN. CALM is a registered charity no. 1110621

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The full audit report is available for download [HERE](#)

Appendix 1 - A Crisis in Modern Masculinity: Understanding the Causes of Male Suicide

Survey findings summary

Not dealing with depression

In total, 50 per cent of males and 59 per cent of females said they had previously suffered from depression. Some differences relating to sexual orientation are also evident and 71 per cent of gay men within the sample reported having been depressed compared to 49 per cent of heterosexual men.

Whilst females are significantly more likely to report having been depressed previously, they are more likely to have spoken to someone about being depressed (74 per cent) than males are (53 per cent). Males aged 25-34 years, who are according to sample responses more likely to have experienced depression than females, are significantly less likely to have spoken to someone about their depression (52 per cent) compared to females of the same age (83 per cent). This is also the case amongst the oldest age group (65+).

The participants' main reasons for not talking to anyone about their depression include that they prefer to deal with the problem themselves (63 per cent), that they didn't want to burden someone else (52 per cent) and that talking to other people wouldn't help (35 per cent).

Males are significantly more likely to say that they prefer to deal with the problem themselves (69 per cent). They were also more likely, though not statistically more likely, to give the following responses: `I didn't want to burden people` (56 per cent), `I'm worried what others will think of me` (27 per cent) and `I felt disconnected from the world and could not reach out` (27 per cent).

Frustration with life

More than a quarter (28 per cent) of the total sample say they feel 'very often' or 'often' frustrated with their lives. Just over a quarter of males in the survey participants (26 per cent) say they 'very often' or 'often' feel frustrated with their lives. Males are more likely to say they are 'very often' frustrated with their life (ten per cent of males compared to seven per cent of females) though not significantly so. However, on balance, females are more likely to say they are 'very often' or 'often' frustrated with their lives (30 per cent compared to 26 per cent of males).

In total, two-thirds of the sample (66 per cent) admitted to undertaking some sort of risk taking behaviour within the last three months. This was significantly higher amongst males than females with 73 per cent of males admitting to some sort of risky or extremely behaviour.

The data also suggests that there is a stronger connection between depression and risk taking behaviour in males than there is in females. Males who have suffered from depression are significantly more likely than females who have suffered from depression to have got drunk in the past three months, driven over the speed limit and taken drugs.

Being the breadwinner

According to the research, two-thirds of the sample (66 per cent) rate their job as 'very important' or 'important' to their self-esteem. There is very little difference in responses between males (67 per cent) and females (66 per cent). The relationship between work and self-esteem is more noticeable amongst males aged 35-44 years and 80 per cent rate their job as 'very important' or 'important' to their self-esteem, notably higher than other males and females of the same age.

Pressure to be the main breadwinner within a household is particularly pronounced amongst males. Just over two-fifths (42 per cent) feel this pressure compared to only 13 per cent of females with 81 per cent of males saying this pressure comes from `themselves`.

Just under a fifth (19 per cent of those asked) worry that if they lost their job their partner would see them as less of a man or woman. This is exaggerated amongst the male sub-set, with males significantly more likely to 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with this statement. This is particularly true of males aged 25-34 years and 45-54 years.

Males are significantly more likely to have lost their job previously (54 per cent compared to 35 per cent of females) and to have lost their job more than once (25 per cent compared to ten per cent of females).

Confidence and relationships

Just under a third (29 per cent) of the respondents feel that a man should be emotionally strong when there's a crisis and take practical charge in a crisis. Again, this feeling was much more pronounced amongst males with two-fifths believing a man is 'mostly responsible' for being emotionally strong (42 per cent) and taking practical charge (43 per cent) in a crisis compared to only 17 per cent and 16 per cent of females respectively.

Almost a third of men (32 per cent) feel they personally lack qualities and abilities that sexual or romantic partner looks for in a man.

Single men, those separated and divorced, are more likely to think they lack essential qualities and abilities suggesting their view may have been affected by their lone status or past experiences. Men aged 25-34 years are significantly more likely to feel they lack some of these qualities. Unsurprisingly there is an evident connection between a feeling of lacking qualities/abilities and depression, risk taking behaviour and frustration with life.

Those who feel they personally lack required qualities and abilities are significantly more likely to have lost their job more than once (40 per cent), be very often (72 per cent) or often (47 per cent) frustrated with their life, undertake risk taking behaviour (35 per cent) or have been depressed (42 per cent).

Whilst heterosexual males appear to be correct in their assertion that sexual/romantic partners look for a good sense of humour in a man, they seemly over-estimate the importance of physical attractiveness and financial stability/dependability as a main attribute that women look for in a man.

Interestingly, it is also evident that gay men misjudge to some extent what men are looking for in a partner. Whilst 43 per cent of gay men said they think sexual or romantic partners look for physical attractiveness in a man, only seven per cent said they actually look for this attribute.

Role models

The largest proportion of the sample (43 per cent) cannot find their role model listed amongst the options given and selected the response 'none of the above'. To some extent this suggests that men lack male role models amongst their close family circle and male authority figures. Of those who did select a male role model, just under a third (30 per cent) selected their father with their grandfather coming second at seven per cent.

When males are asked what qualities they admire in their role model a wide variety of qualities were cited. But it is clear that the qualities most admired include care and helpfulness (15 per cent), honesty (15 per cent), decisiveness/leadership (11 per cent) and a hard working nature (11 per cent). Other qualities cited included strength, generosity, intelligence, sense of humour, reliability, loyalty and determination, amongst others.

Whilst both males and females agree that the ability to show love is the most important quality for a father to have, women are significantly more likely to select this quality (50 per cent)

compared to men (34 per cent). Other qualities deemed to be the most important include being a good role model (13 per cent) and reliability (ten per cent).

Media stereotypes

Two thirds of the total sample feels that men are stereotyped in the media (66 per cent) with a slightly higher proportion of males giving the response 'yes' (68 per cent) compared to females (65 per cent).

Of those who think males are stereotyped in the media, more than a quarter (27 per cent) think that these stereotypes are generally negative, 15 per cent think they are generally positive, ten per cent think they are neither positive nor negative and eight per cent think they are both positive and negative.

About the survey

In order to conduct the state-of-the-nation audit of modern masculinity, a robust quantitative survey was undertaken with data collected via an online methodology. A questionnaire approximately 10 minutes in length was designed by Public Knowledge in collaboration with CALM and representatives from their Year of the Male Steering Group; Damien Ridge (University of Westminster), Steve Robertson (Leeds Metropolitan University), Martin Todd (Men's Health Forum), Martin Seager (Honorary Consultant Clinical Psychologist/Adult Psychotherapist), John Barry (?), activist Glen Poole of @HelpingMen and advice from the Young Foundation.

The survey ran from Friday 25th April to Friday 2nd May 2014 and generated a total of 1,002 responses. A sample of 1,002 is considered to be robust with a margin of error of +/-3.1 per cent at the 95 per cent confidence level. Online data was collected via Public Knowledge's in-house online panel, panelbase.net, which has over 210,000 registered members. Quotas were imposed on the data to ensure a representative sample was collected in terms of age, gender and region, and weighting was applied to adjust for minor variations.