

Cross Party Group on Children and Young People

From Toxic to Positive – How Can Scotland Lead the Way in Reframing Masculinity?

Wednesday 15th May 2024 13:00 – 14:30

Minutes

Chair: Pam Duncan Glancy MSP

Present MSPs

Pam Duncan Glancy MSP

Fulton MacGregor MSP

Colin Beattie MSP

Katy Clarke MSP

Invited guests

Emma Davidson, University of Edinburgh

Jenni Snell, The Young Women's Movement

Rebekah Cheung, The Young Women's Movement

Vicki Ridley, YouthLink Scotland

Non-MSP Group Members

Parisa Shirazi, Children in Scotland

Hannah Priest, Children in Scotland

Sarah Robinson Galloway, YouthLink Scotland

David Yule, Children in Scotland

Katie Gilmartin, Children in Scotland

Abbey Stone, Children in Scotland

Phillipa Balshaw, SYP

Olivia Brown MSP, SYP

Catherine Robertson, Zero Tolerance

Erin Hawthorne, Zero Tolerance

Iain Corbett, Straclyde

Angus Maclean, Befriending Networks

Janette Pow, Edinburgh Napier University

Geroge Hosking, Wave Trust

Tim Frew, YouthLink Scotland

Gillian Lithgow
Amy Calder, Youthlink Scotland
Janet Morton, Children in Need
Joan Mowat, University of Strathclyde
Amanda Skinner-Welsh, Scottish Mentoring Network
Emily Beever, Youthlink

Vikki Carpenter, CLD Standards Council Scotland
Lizzie Coutts, Aberlour
Lara Wood, Abertay University
Rebecca Mason
Bex Salvesen Mindroom

Welcome from chair

Pam Duncan Glancy MSP welcomed members of the CPG to the fourth meeting of the new parliamentary term. Pam informed the group that the meeting would focus on positive masculinity, how we can flip the script and change the narrative from ‘toxic’ to ‘positive’ masculinity.

Pam introduced the topic by addressing the evidence that young men are struggling. From the statistics on men's mental health to concerning educational attainment levels and tragically high suicide rates, there are many barriers and challenges for young men and boys in today's society.

Pam expressed that this meeting of the CPG gives us the opportunity to hear from those who are actively working to raise awareness of the issue and who are piloting great work with young people.

Pam ran through a range of housekeeping measures before passing over to Parisa Shirazi, Children in Scotland, to go over some CPG business.

CPG Business

a. Previous Minutes

Parisa stated the secretariat had shared the previous minutes from the February meeting with members of the group. No issues were raised in relation to the minutes, and members were asked to confirm if they were happy to take the previous minutes as read.

This was approved by membership and the minutes were ratified.

b. Previous actions

A CPG summary paper will be created from the discussions of this meeting. This action is being carried over.

c. New members of the group

The following organisations asked to join the CPG:

- Scottish Mentoring Network
- Corra Foundation
- Nesta
- Wave Trust

All members agreed for the above-mentioned organisations to join the group.

Proposer: Emily Beever

Seconder: Philippa Balshaw

Parisa then passed back to Pam who briefly introduced and handed over to the speakers to share their research and experience on the topic of toxic masculinity and its impact.

Emma Davidson, University of Edinburgh

Dr Emma Davidson is currently a Senior Lecturer in Social Policy and Qualitative Research Methods and Director of The Binks Hub and is also Director of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR). Emma is also a member of the steering group for the Imagine a Man Toolkit.

Emma set the scene for attendees' providing information of what masculinity is. Emma shared her expertise and knowledge providing a context for the discussion of the topic of toxic and positive masculinity. Her research focuses on youth and community studies with particular focus on the experiences of working-class young people. Emma highlighted how societal anxieties about antisocial behaviour, educational disengagement, and mental health issues disproportionately target boys and young men, especially from working-class backgrounds.

The term "toxic masculinity" was also critiqued for oversimplifying the issue by blaming individual behaviours rather than addressing underlying structural problems. In addition, Dr Davidson highlighted ongoing and initiatives and research by her CRFR colleagues aimed at promoting healthier gender dynamics. This included:

- Dr Fiona McQueen's study on the pressures faced by young men in Scotland
- Professor Anna Tarrant's work on the benefits of positive father involvement.
- Dr Ruth Lewis is involved in projects addressing gender-based violence in schools and promoting gender-equitable attitudes among young men.

Jenni Snell & Rebekah Cheung, The Young Women's Movement

Jenni Snell is the CEO of the Young Women's Movement. The Young Women's Movement is Scotland's national organisation for young women and girls leadership and rights. Their vision is a fairer Scotland for young women and girls.

Jenni's presentation highlighted the impact that toxic masculinity has on young women and girls. Additionally, highlighting how many young men and boys are targeted and groomed online and as a result are at an increased risk to being radicalised, contributing further to violence against women and girls and other men and boys. Therefore Jenni stated the importance of increased support funding to contribute to understanding that there is not one specific way to be a man.

Jenni's presentation also discussed the importance of language and how we must be careful how we use the terms 'toxic' and 'positive' when discussing masculinity. 'Positive' could be seen by some to be patronising and such language may push young men and boys away from conversations. Whereas 'Healthy Masculinity' can incorporate dealing with emotions such as anger which may not be seen as positive but are emotions that can be addressed in a healthy manner. Jenni also included in her presentation that need for more positive male role models from a range of jobs and experiences to begin to move towards a holistic reframing of manhood.

Rebekah Cheung from White Ribbon Scotland who is part of the Young Women's Movement Advisory Collective (30 young women under 30) also presented. White Ribbon Scotland provide information and training to stand up to violence against women for men, organisations, colleges and schools. The White Ribbon Campaign is the largest effort in the world of men working to end men's violence against women.

Rebekah followed Jenni's presentation highlighting that the conversation surrounding toxic masculinity has started to be used by some as an additional method of silencing women.

While positive conversations have been had in research, social media contains significant resistance and a negative perception of masculinity. Additionally, when asked why some young men and boys support individuals with toxic views of masculinity, responses have shown that they claim to ignore the extreme views because they believe that they make good points and advice about 'being a man'.

Rebekah also highlighted that education is important and engaging with boys at a young age and having these conversations about masculinity and relationships would be beneficial. But this is often met with resistance with false conceptions that having these conversations is not age appropriate and would encourage sexual behaviour. Rebekah concluded that there is no gender benefit from patriarchy and gender inequality.

Vicki Ridley and Amy Calder, YouthLink Scotland

Vicki Ridley from YouthLink Scotland led on Scotland's first positive masculinity programme Imagine a Man and was joined by Amy Calder from YouthLink who leads on using participatory research methods to demonstrate the impact of youth work on young people's lives.

Amy provided an introduction to the research Imagine a man and provided some statistics and findings. Imagine a man is a research project delivered by No Knives, Better Lives and YouthLink Scotland to explore what it is like to be a boy or young man in Scotland. The purpose of the research was to develop and deepen understanding of how young people feel about masculinity and growing up. A total of 1230 of young people across Scotland completed the survey, 25 young people took part in focus groups and 5 adult practitioners who work with young people were interviewed.

This research explored stereotypes and expectations, risky behaviour, community and relationships, ideal futures and the support needed to explore masculinity. They found that there is a need for safe spaces or brave spaces for young people to explore and understand masculinity, more funding and investment in youth work as a safe space to have these conversations and increase adult role models for boys and young men to learn about positive masculinity including from women in their lives.

Vicki emphasised the need to look through a feminist lens, in which boys and young men can approach so they can be their best selves. Vicki echoed the findings above and reiterated the importance of following the research and to build a positive masculinity movement that includes everyone, including disability, LGBTQ+, gender equality and more.

[Click here to access the Imagine a Man Report](#)

Group Discussion Summary

Following the discussion, members were placed into breakout groups, facilitated by the secretariat. Questions discussed were as follows:

1. From what you have heard in the presentations, what would 'flip the script' from toxic to positive in your domain (family, community, peers, school)
2. What policy changes are needed to support and enable those changes?
3. Where would you like us to share the evidence gathered today?

The main points raised were as follows:

- Funding – The need to invest in further research in this area in addition to investing in youth work was highlighted by all groups as vital in the push for change.
- It was identified that there are many intergenerational barriers within families, and this should be considered when addressing embedding new ideas of

masculinity. How you grow up and how you are raised impacts your understanding of masculinity. It is difficult for boys and young men to then go against these learnt behaviours.

- Big societal shifts are required. To achieve this focus should be on working with young people and including youth-led solutions.
- In addition, providing incentives for boys and young men to be involved in participation about conversations surrounding masculinity. There is always the concern that research is not reaching those that are impacted the most by toxic masculinity.
- A focus on love in the school curriculum and what love looks like for different relationships, including non-romantic healthy relationships between men.
- Education was mentioned by all groups as being important in the movement towards positive masculinity. However, it was noted that schools are at crisis point and already do have guidance and relevant content in the curriculum. However, it often falls to wayside due to lack of capacity and time, or only mentioned once.
- Training for teachers and youth workers on how to have these conversations surrounding masculinity.
- Increase in positive male role models. Each group discussed the importance and impact of having more male role models in a variety of ways throughout boys and young men lives. While also understanding that role models are not always positive but can be damaging and further embed toxic masculinity.
- Increase in men undertaking roles in primary and early years education and care. Contributing to boys experiencing a different type of masculinity in a caring and supportive role while children are forming their ideas of the world. It was noted however for the above to be effective, ideas of positive and healthy masculinity would need to be embedded by the individuals taking these roles. It was also noted however that there is still suspicion surrounding men who undertake these roles from the community and work will need to be done to also address this to ensure more enter the workforce.
- The importance of digital safety and monitoring and evaluation of social media algorithms was highlighted by one group. It is often through social media that young men and boys become aware and groomed into extremist views through incel communities and influential extreme voices such as Andrew Tate.

Algorithms embedded in social media and sites such a YouTube will recommend this content.

- Involvement of institutions and organisations that work closely with young men and boys. In particular ones that fit in the traditional views of what is masculine. An example given was football clubs.
- Many of the groups further discussed the problems with using specific language. Words such as “positive” masculinity and that not all emotions boys and young men feel are positive. There was agreement in some groups that words like “healthy masculinity” would be more suitable. Another group also identified that language about boys and young men can be extremely negative which could impact participation and willingness to be involved in these difficult conversations.
- Some examples of other countries work in this area were identified to take learning from, this included:
 - Norwegian approach to parenting, which is much more positive including positive reinforcement and open communication. Social investment in families that are living apart.
 - Washington incorporating a trauma-informed approach. The evidence shows that this is having a positive impact and economic benefit.

Close

Pam thanked all attendees for attending and sharing their thoughts. She advised that the secretariat would be in touch shortly to inform members of the next meeting date for the CPG.

Sarah informed the attendees that the information shared at the meeting would be used to create a summary paper that would be used for future policy outputs.

Information from CPG members to be shared:

Zero Tolerance working in partnership with White Ribbon Scotland and Equally Ours

Zero Tolerance are working in partnership with White Ribbon Scotland and Equally Ours to identify the best way to talk to men and boys about violence against women and girls. This strategic communication project will give us insight on the best way to engage men and boys in the fight for gender equality.

To access their website visit: [Zero Tolerance](#)

UCAS announces new initiatives to encourage students from low-income families to apply for university.

For the 2025 cycle, UCAS will be waiving the application fee for students in receipt of free school meals. Any student applying through their school or college who has been in receipt of free school meals at any point in the last six years will be eligible for the fee waiver.

This will become effective from September 2024, for applications for university entry from September 2025 and beyond. This is being announced alongside a new entry grades tool for the 2025 cycle, which will enable students to see both offer rates and the historic A-level grades held by previous successful applicants on admission to a particular course and will later include other qualifications.

For more information visit: [UCAS announces new initiatives to encourage students from low-income families to apply for university | Undergraduate | UCAS](#).