Snow Foundation

Positive Masculinities Partnership Round

APPLICATION PACK — SECTION THREE

Research Summary

Developed by ForsythClement

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Our approach with this partnership round is based on expert insight and the evidence currently available about masculinities and women's safety. This document provides a summary of the research.

About masculinity and women's safety

1. Masculinity describes what a society expects of men, and men and boys learn it.

Masculinity refers to the expectations a society attaches to being a man.[1] Boys learn what it means to be a man from family, peers, school, sport, media, and also from pornography and online content.[2] Australia's national prevention framework, *Change the Story*, names the dominant forms of masculinity in Australia, which include dominance and control, aggression, stoicism, toughness and self-reliance.[3] Some of these traits, such as self-reliance, can be positive in context. The harm lies in the rigid social expectation that men display them all the time to count as 'real men'.[4]

2. Violence against women in Australia is common and mostly committed by men.

In 2021–22, 23% of Australian women had experienced violence by an intimate partner since the age of 15, compared with 7.3% of men.[5] Earlier survey data show that 94% of women who had experienced violence since the age of 15 experienced it at the hands of a man.[6]

3. Men who most strongly endorse rigid masculine norms are far more likely to use violence.

Australia's national prevention framework identifies rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity, meaning those that emphasise aggression, dominance and control, as drivers of this violence.[7] Among Australian men aged 18 to 30, 66% of those who most strongly endorse the rules of the '**Man Box**' (see box below) reported using intimate partner violence, compared with 12% of those who least endorse them. Men who most strongly endorse the rules were also more than 17 times as likely to express violence-supportive attitudes.[8]

What is The Man Box?

The Man Box describes a set of 19 social rules, developed using decades of global research, about how a 'real man' should think and behave. The rules sit under seven pillars: self-sufficiency, acting tough, physical attractiveness, rigid gender roles, homophobia and transphobia, hypersexuality, and aggression and control. Examples include "a man who talks a lot about his worries, fears, and problems shouldn't really get respect" and "men should use violence to get respect if necessary". Jesuit Social Services has used the Man Box to survey Australian men since 2018.[9]

4. Most men reject rigid norms, but many think other men hold them, and this belief keeps them silent.

On average, 37% of men aged 18 to 30 perceive pressure to conform to **Man Box** rules, while only 26% personally agree with them.[10] This gap keeps many men silent when other men show disrespect. The most common barriers to speaking up are fear of negative consequences and not knowing what to say.[11] Programs can close this gap among men by showing how widely other men share their equitable views and by building the skills and confidence to act on them. Among boys, programs can help prevent the gap forming in the first place.

5. Overall attitudes improved to 2021, but adolescent boys are now the group of most concern.

The 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey found slow but statistically significant improvement in understanding of violence and rejection of gender inequality since 2013.[12] More recent studies agree that teenage boys hold the most concerning views. In a 2026 University of Melbourne survey, one in four teenage boys agreed that feminism should be resisted with violence.[13] In a 2026 Monash University survey of more than 2,600 teachers, half reported an increase in gendered violence among students, and 70% have noticed the influence of manosphere ideas on student attitudes and behaviour in the past 12 months.[14]

6. Norms form in early adolescence, and online content now accelerates them.

Gender stereotypes become firmly rooted between the ages of 10 and 14.[15] Platforms push misogynistic content to teenage boys within minutes of downloading an app (rather than them seeking it), even when their accounts begin with generic interests such as fitness or video game content.[16] Nearly two-thirds of young men aged 16 to 25 in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States report regularly engaging with at least one masculinity influencer.[17]

About current programs

1. Features of effective approaches.

Australian and international evidence points to six features of effective programs:

- **Gender-transformative content** — programs that question rigid gender norms and unequal power show the most promise for preventing violence.[18] A 2023 meta-analysis of 27 trials found that such programs reduced women's odds of experiencing intimate partner violence[19]

- **Duration** — multi-session and sustained programs are more likely to produce lasting change than one-off sessions.[20] The only Australian randomised trial of a masculinities workshop tested a single two-hour session and found no change in its main measure[21]
- **Embedding** — the strongest programs sit inside a school, team, workplace or community and work with boys and the adults around them, rather than visiting as a standalone session[22]
- **Peer and bystander approaches within broader programs** — including methods that help boys and men become willing, capable and confident to speak up safely - as part of broader programs - acts on the peer pressure that sustains rigid norms[23]
- **Accountability to women's safety expertise** — work with men and boys should be accountable to women's safety organisations[24]
- **Measuring behaviour as well as attitudes** — programs can change behaviour without changing measured attitudes, and the reverse[25]

2. Risks and issues in current approaches.

Approaches that carry risk include awareness-raising on its own[26], single short sessions presented as the whole program, messages that tell boys to 'man up' or be a 'real man'[27], shaming responses, and wellbeing programs presented as violence prevention without addressing power and entitlement.[28] Hard-line responses, such as confronting boys or attacking the influencers they follow, can entrench boys' views and alienate them.[29]

3. Gaps in current approaches.

Most Australian delivery takes the form of short school workshops, and many programs measure wellbeing and help-seeking rather than outcomes linked to women's safety.[30] Few programs reach young men after they leave school, fathers or boys' online lives, and few have been comprehensively evaluated.[31] Australia has no agreed definition of the outcome and no Australian validated measures for it.[32]

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