

What every social worker needs to know about men

As Social Workers we are well informed on women's issues. The media along with our professional publications have traditionally focused on the issues of women but what about the issues of men? We have heard precious little about men and their unique problems they face. This short article will focus on men and boys and where they face hardship and discrimination.

Often it is difficult for people to be able to hear the pain of men. I know this from the workshops I offer around the country on the topic of men and grief. I sometimes present a scenario that helps in understanding this difficulty. Try this: Imagine that you are walking into your favorite restaurant and as you are being seated you see a woman at a corner table who has her head down on the table and is obviously crying. What is your immediate thought? What do you think of her? Most say "Poor dear, she is upset" or "She needs support" or something along those lines. Now erase that image and again imagine you are walking into the same restaurant and being seated and now you see a man sitting at the same table with his head down obviously crying. What is your immediate thought? What do you think of him? Most say "I avoid him" or "He must be drunk" or something similar. After asking thousands of mental health professionals that question I am convinced that we have a strong inclination in our culture to avoid the emotional pain of men. You might want to be aware of that as you read through the following list.

Did you know that 80% of suicides are men and boys? The saddest part of this is that no one knows why and no one is trying to find out. It's as if no one really cares. In a 2006 San Francisco Chronicle article the Executive Director of the American Association of Suicidology, Dr Lanny Berman was quoted as having said that, "As much as I would love to lead the charge (in finding out why boys kill themselves), try to go out and get funding for it," said Lanny Berman, the executive director of the association. He is frustrated that funders aren't interested in studying boys and men."

With 80% of suicides being men or boys one would expect to have heard public service announcements specifically for males but I have never heard one. One would expect that services for suicide prevention would focus special emphasis on men and boys but I have never heard of this either. It seems that men and boys comprise the lions share of suicides and it goes relatively unnoticed. It is true that women and girls 'attempt' suicide more often than men and boys do, but many such incidents are thought by at least some experts as being 'parasuicidal' pleas for help. Men, on the other hand, like the man crying in the restaurant, know that help for them is in short supply -- even if they could overcome their nature and ask for it.

Did you know that men are three times more likely to be homeless than women?

With a strong cultural emphasis placed on men being able to provide and protect when men deviate from that role they are often quickly devalued. Here's how one man, Peter Marin, describes it: "To put it simply: men are neither supposed nor allowed to be dependent. They are expected to take care of others and themselves. And when they cannot or will not do it, then the assumption at the heart of the culture is that they are somehow less than men and therefore unworthy of help. An irony asserts itself: by being in need of help, men forfeit the right to it."

Did you know that 23% of the victims of domestic violence in Maryland are men?

This statistic comes from the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. It is a shock for many people who wonder how smaller and less physically powerful women could abuse men. The research is clear in showing that women who are violent in relationship make up for their lack of physical strength by using weapons and the tactic of surprise. Think of Lorena Bobbitt (cut her husband with a knife) Clara Harris (killed her husband with a car) and Mary Winkler (who killed her husband with a shotgun). All used weapons and the element of surprise. I have heard and seen many public service announcements for domestic violence but I have never seen one specifically for men.

Did you know that men die earlier and more often from every major cause of death?

Here's a quote from health researcher Randolph Nesse "Being male is now the single largest demographic factor for early death," says Randolph Nesse of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Nesse says that the finding has important implications for public health. "If you could make male mortality rates the same as female rates, you would do more good than curing cancer," he says. Nesse's colleague Daniel Kruger estimates that over 375,000 lives would be saved in a single year in the US if men's risk of dying was as low as women's.

Did you know that women on average outlive men by five years? Men live shorter lives than women by five years. Women 80.1 Men 74.8 (White women 80.5, Black women 76.1, White men 75.4, Black men 69.2)

Did you know that circumcision of girls is against the law but circumcision for boys is the most popular surgical procedure in the US? Over 1 million baby boys are circumcised each year in the United States. Both female and male circumcision are

classified by the International Coalition for Genital Integrity as being genital mutilations but only one is against the law.

Did you know that Men face harsher and longer sentences than women for the same crime. Gender is the most significant biasing factor in determining whether or not someone will be charged, prosecuted, indicted and sentenced, as well as determining the severity of the sentence.

Did you know that men have no reproductive rights? Men at times find themselves in the very difficult position of wanting their child to be born but having no say in whether their wife aborts their child. The men must sit back and accept whatever his wife decides. If on the other hand he decides, as a woman can, that becoming a parent is undesirable for him at the time, he, unlike a woman, will be completely powerless to determine his fate. He has no rights.

Did you know that men are greater than 97% of our military war deaths? If this was any other birth group there would be huge protests. Imagine it was only Jews or only Blacks or only women. The wholesale deaths of any of those groups would not be tolerated. Why do we tolerate it with men only?

Did you know that in the recent crash landing of flight 1549 into the Hudson River that the flight crew in their emergency evacuation called for “Women and Children first”? This means that elderly or handicapped men would have been forced to wait as healthy women were given preference. If we are truly equal why should one sex be put in front of the other? And what would have happened to a father traveling with his children? Would he have been required to 'abandon' them?

Funding for men's health is only a fraction of the budget for women's health. We have numerous federal commissions for women's health but none for men. In 1990 a well known U.S. Senator made national headlines by citing the fact that women-specific health research comprised only 14% of the budget of the National Institute of Health (NIH). She called it "blatant discrimination" and led the successful campaign for the creation of the OWH. What the good Senator and many in the media who publicized the claims did not understand was that only 6.5% of the NIH's budget went to male-specific research--the vast majority of the NIH's research was gender neutral.

Men are often victims of paternity fraud. Of those tested for questionable paternity nearly one third were found to not be the actual father of the child. This leaves men paying child support for another man's children and the children not knowing their real father.

Men get custody of their children after divorce a small fraction of the time. The 2000 US Census estimated that mothers were 83% of custodial parents.

We have left out other issues including the male bashing in the media where a kick to the groin of a man is seen as humorous, false accusations, the anti-male atmosphere of our schools that impacts our boys. our lack of male friendly men's studies departments in our universities just to name a few. It seems clear to me that Social Workers need to be more aware of these issues their origins and their solutions. We are starting an informal group of Social Workers in Maryland who are interested in these problems and in seeking solutions. Please email me if you would like to know more.

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An online version of this article with hyperlinks to documentation can be found here <http://webhealing.com/nasw.pdf>

Suicide <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2006/01/26/BAGHRGT0DV1.DTL>

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/suicide-in-the-us-statistics-and-prevention.shtml#risk>

Homelessness <http://www.alphaproject.org>

<http://www.aliciapatterson.org/APF1403/Marin/Marin.html>

Domestic Violence 23% stat -- <http://www.ncadv.org/files/Maryland.pdf>

- (1) <http://pn.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/42/15/31-a>
- (2) <http://www.barbarakay.ca/archive/20081206fedonmythspreyingonmen.html>
- (3) <http://www.csulb.edu/~mfiebert/assault.htm>

Dying <http://news.bio-medicine.org/biology-news-2/Men-die-young--even-when-theyre-old-7134-1/>

Longevity <http://www.webmd.com/news/20050228/us-life-expectancy-best-ever-says-cdc>

Circumcision (1) http://www.mothering.com/articles/new_baby/circumcision/against-circumcision.html

(2) <http://www.notjustskin.org/en/circumcisionfaq.html>

Sentencing <http://www.ifeminists.com/introduction/editorials/2002/0423a.html>

Reproductive Rights http://dir.salon.com/story/mwt/feature/2000/10/19/mens_choice/index.html?sid=988805

Military Deaths <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/oif-deaths-total.pdf>

Men's Health Funding http://www.glennsacks.com/when_mens_health.htm

Paternity Fraud <http://www.australianpaternityfraud.org/pdf/>

[American_Blood_Banks_study_2001.pdf](http://www.australianpaternityfraud.org/pdf/American_Blood_Banks_study_2001.pdf)

Child Custody <http://www.census.gov/prod/2007pubs/p60-234.pdf>