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Understanding of stereotypical masculine norms can help drive cultural change: Jesuit Social Services

A better understanding of the impact of stereotypical masculine norms on the attitudes and behaviours of young men is critical in improving relationships and wellbeing in our community, says Jesuit Social Services.

“Everybody has the right to be safe, and it is deeply distressing to hear about claims of sexual misconduct and assault and the impact these actions have had on young women. While these claims relate to a number of schools, we know that violence against women and sexual assault are problems that impact all parts of our society,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“Greater education about consent is an important part of addressing these issues, and we support calls for respectful relationships education to be provided at all schools. It is also critical that there is a stronger recognition and understanding of the impact of stereotypical masculine norms on the attitudes and behaviours of young Australian men. We must give young men the support and confidence they need to break free of these stereotypes and ultimately lead healthy lives free from violence, and hold positive and respectful relationships.”

Jesuit Social Services’ The Men’s Project has released two major *Man Box* reports, which find that young Australian men who believe in outdated masculine stereotypes are themselves at higher risk of using violence, online bullying and sexual harassment and report poorer levels of mental health.

The reports draw on a survey of 1,000 young Australian men aged 18 to 30, and show that social pressures around what it means to be ‘a real man’ are still very real in Australia. Two thirds of young men said that since they were a boy they had been told a ‘real man’ behaves in a certain way.

“Shockingly, this research reveals that young men who personally endorse societal pressures to be a ‘real man’ report poorer mental health, are twice as likely to consider suicide and are more likely to commit acts of sexual harassment and experience and perform acts of violence and bullying. This conformity clearly has dangerous and damaging consequences for not only young men themselves but for women and children.”

Ms Edwards says that those who work with young men, such as teachers, must be equipped with the language and skills they need to help create positive change around issues of respect and equality. Through the Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program, The Men’s Project is delivering this work to community leaders including teachers, sports coaches and social workers.

“A rigorous understanding of the societal pressures experienced by young men, and how these can manifest themselves in anti-social and damaging behaviours, is crucial in creating more cohesive communities for all of us. Through our Adolescent Man Box survey, we are expanding our research to understand the attitudes and behaviours of adolescents. The findings have implications for how schools can tailor their curriculum to the nuances of their school communities.”

Media enquiries – Kathryn Kernohan, 0409 901 248 or kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au