

# GLOBAL STATE OF MEN AND BOYS REPORT 2026

An annual assessment of the twelve global disparities affecting men and boys



Evidence.  
Equality.  
Opportunity.



Recognising challenges.  
Advancing solutions.  
Building a better world  
for everyone.



For boys.  
For men.  
For families.  
For society.  
For the future.



**ICMB**

International Council  
for Men and Boys

Released on  
International Men's Day  
19 November 2026

## Foreword: Why This Report Matters

Throughout history, societies have flourished when they have recognised the dignity, value and potential of every human being. Genuine progress is achieved not by favouring one sex over the other, but by ensuring that every person has the opportunity to live a healthy, safe and fulfilling life.

During the last six and a half decades, the world has witnessed remarkable advances for women and girls. Educational opportunities have expanded, maternal mortality has declined, legal rights have strengthened, and female participation in public life has increased dramatically across much of the world. These achievements deserve recognition and celebration.

At the same time, an increasing body of international evidence shows that many men and boys experience significant disadvantages that receive comparatively little public attention. Boys now underperform girls educationally across much of the developed world. Men die younger than women in every country, account for the overwhelming majority of workplace fatalities and homicide victims, experience substantially higher suicide rates, are disproportionately represented among the homeless and prison populations, and often encounter barriers in family life, health services and public policy.

International Council for Men and Boys (ICMB) is the leading global advocacy organisation dedicated to improving the wellbeing, rights and opportunities of men and boys. ICMB is *The Global Voice for Men and Boys*. The Board of ICMB presents the inaugural edition of the *Global State of Men and Boys Report*, as the flagship of our proud advocacy for men and boys around the world.

ICMB was established to advance Genuine Gender Equality by recognising these realities and promoting evidence-based solutions. Our mission is not to diminish the challenges experienced by women and girls, nor to encourage conflict between the sexes. On the contrary, we believe that healthy families, prosperous communities and successful nations depend upon both women and men flourishing together.

Public responses to sex disparities are shaped by a powerful moral reflex. When women and girls experience harm or disadvantage, attention tends to turn quickly toward protection, social conditions and institutional remedies. When men and boys experience harm, attention more often turns toward their own behaviour, choices and personal responsibility. Put simply, people may find themselves seeing women primarily as needing help and men primarily as responsible for solving their own difficulties.

This asymmetry does not require conscious prejudice or deliberate discrimination; it can operate automatically, influencing which disparities are investigated, which victims receive public sympathy and which policy responses appear urgent. Recognizing this tendency does not diminish concern for women and girls. It helps ensure that serious disadvantages affecting men and boys are examined with the same care, compassion and willingness to consider systemic causes.

This inaugural *Global State of Men and Boys Report* represents the first attempt to provide an annual, internationally comparable assessment of 12 major disparities affecting males across the lifespan. Drawing on evidence from more than 50 countries examined by the International Council for Men and Boys, together with research from governments, international organisations and leading academic institutions, the report identifies recurring patterns that transcend national boundaries.

While the scale and nature of these challenges vary between countries, the underlying themes are remarkably consistent. Across education, health, fatherhood, justice, violence, homelessness, workplace safety and other domains, many disadvantages experienced by males remain under-recognised by governments and international institutions.

The *Global State of Men and Boys Report* is presented with the intention of constructively moving forward the positive agenda for men and boys around the world. It builds upon the *Human Development Index* (HDI), the *Global Gender Gap Report* (GGP), and the *Basic Index of Gender Inequality* (BIGI).

The ICMB Board unanimously endorses this report and its central principle: Genuine Gender Equality requires acknowledging disadvantage wherever it exists and responding with practical, evidence-based policies that improve outcomes for everyone.

We hope this report informs public debate, encourages better research, supports more balanced policymaking, and contributes to healthier relationships between women and men around the world.

Progress begins by recognising reality...

Published by the International Council for Men and Boys, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2026.

Endorsed by all Board Directors:

- Edward Bartlett (President)
- David Maywald (Chair)
- Mike Bell (Vice Chair)
- Carl Roberts (Secretary)



## Executive Summary

Across much of the world, boys are falling behind girls in education. Men continue to experience shorter lives, higher suicide rates, greater exposure to occupational hazards, homelessness, criminal justice involvement and violent victimisation. Many fathers are increasingly involved in raising their children, while others are forcibly restrained from active involvement in the lives of their biological children. Legal and institutional arrangements, as well as government funding, have significantly lagged behind the realities that are faced by men and boys. Media narratives frequently emphasise males as the problem, while conveniently overlooking male contributions and the challenges that many men face.

These issues are not confined to one nation or culture. Drawing upon evidence from more than 50 countries, the International Council for Men and Boys has identified 12 recurring global disparities affecting men and boys:

1. Education
2. Health
3. Boys
4. False Allegations / Parental Alienation
5. Victims of Violence
6. Fatherhood
7. Criminal System
8. Partner Abuse
9. Homelessness
10. Workplace
11. Adoption and Reproductive
12. Media

Collectively, these disparities affect billions of males worldwide.

This report does not argue that men are universally disadvantaged, nor that women and girls no longer face significant challenges. Rather, it argues that Genuine Gender Equality requires an honest assessment of where either sex experiences measurable disadvantage, followed by policies proportionate to the evidence.

A unique innovation of the analysis done by the International Council for Men and Boys is that 12 specific areas of disparity for males have been identified, as patterns of disadvantage across the world:

## AROUND THE WORLD, MEN AND BOYS ARE LAGGING IN 12 AREAS.



### 1. EDUCATION

Boys underperform in education, and face higher illiteracy rates in almost all countries surveyed.

[Read More](#)



### 2. HEALTH

Men live 5 years shorter; triple the suicide rates of women.

[Read More](#)



### 3. BOYS

Child labor and hazardous work, child soldiers, extortion, and undernutrition.

[Read More](#)



### 4. FALSE ALLEGATIONS/ PARENTAL ALIENATION

False allegations harm both the innocent accused and real victims.

[Read More](#)



### 5. VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Men, especially boys, face higher homicide and wartime death rates.

[Read More](#)



### 6. FATHERHOOD

Fathers face court biases, harsher treatment, and undue child support burdens.

[Read More](#)



### 7. CRIMINAL SYSTEM

Men receive harsher treatment at every step of the criminal-legal process.

[Read More](#)



### 8. PARTNER ABUSE

Men face equal domestic violence, more online harassment, but fewer services.

[Read More](#)



### 9. HOMELESSNESS

76% of homeless persons are men.

[Read More](#)



### 10. WORKPLACE

Men face 15 times workplace deaths, nearly double the injuries of women.

[Read More](#)



### 11. ADOPTION AND REPRODUCTIVE

Fathers left out.

[Read More](#)



### 12. MEDIA

Men: 69% unfavorable, 12% favorable, and 19% neutral or balanced.

[Read More](#)

The challenges facing men and boys are diverse, interconnected and global. They cannot be understood through a single statistic or a single country. This report therefore brings together evidence across 12 areas of life to identify where males experience significant disadvantage, where progress is being made, and where greater attention is needed.

The two-page section on each of the 12 disparities contains a summary of the strongest available international evidence, an assessment of current progress, and then identifies practical priorities for governments, civil society and international organisations.

The International Council for Men and Boys has assigned an Overall Assessment to each of the 12 disparities, based on the most compelling global evidence, the 50-plus countries that have been analyzed, and the research that is distilled in each two-page summary that follows. These are intended as a strategic policy assessment rather than a statistical measure. They provide a consistent benchmark against which future editions of the report can measure global progress.

| <b>Overall ICMB Assessment</b> | <b>Description for each of the six categories</b>                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Critical Neglect               | Severe and widespread disadvantage persists, with major deficiencies in fairness, policy, implementation and demonstrated progress.              |
| Severe Disadvantage            | Substantial disadvantage remains, with only limited or fragmented institutional and practical responses.                                         |
| Significant Disparity          | The disparity remains substantial, although meaningful responses and improvements are evident in some areas or jurisdictions.                    |
| Moderate Progress              | Material disparities remain, but substantial measures to improve fairness are established and measurable progress is evident.                    |
| Advanced Success               | The disparity has been substantially reduced, with broadly fair institutions, effective responses and strong evidence of continuing improvement. |
| Substantive Equality           | Men and boys experience outcomes, treatment, opportunities and support broadly consistent with substantive fairness and equality.                |

## Released to Coincide with International Men's Day

International Men's Day has been observed annually on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November every year since 1999, making 2026 the twenty-eighth consecutive year of worldwide observance. In 2025, International Men's Day was marked in more than 110 countries, according to [analysis by David Maywald at Celebrating Masculinity](#). This makes it the world's largest annual event dedicated to the wellbeing, contributions and challenges of men and boys.

Despite this growing international recognition, the United Nations has not yet formally recognised International Men's Day on its official calendar, even though fifteen UN-recognised international days focus specifically on women and girls. The International Council for Men and Boys is working constructively with Member States and United Nations institutions to encourage formal recognition, reflecting the principle that advancing Genuine Gender Equality requires acknowledging the wellbeing of both sexes.

In 2026, the global theme for International Men's Day is “The Future is Everyone”, which is a prompt to broaden the narrow focus of Gender Equality to genuinely support everyone in need:



The *Global State of Men and Boys Report* is intended to contribute to the goal of Genuine Gender Equality by providing an authoritative, evidence-based benchmark that governments, researchers, journalists, civil society organisations and international institutions can use to assess progress over time. The headings below are hyperlinked to the section of the ICMB website for each of the 12 disparities.

# Disparity #1: EDUCATION

## ICMB Global Assessment: Severe Disadvantage

### Summary & Overall Assessment

Boys and young men experience severe educational disadvantage across many countries, particularly in reading and literacy, school engagement, progression and tertiary participation, although the pattern is not universal and girls continue to face important educational disadvantages in some regions and contexts. Formal educational rights are generally equal, and international organisations and some governments increasingly recognise boys' underachievement, but comprehensive strategies specifically addressing male educational disadvantage remain uncommon. Evidence-based approaches capable of benefiting boys exist, yet targeted implementation at meaningful scale is limited, and there is insufficient evidence of sustained global progress in closing the principal male attainment gaps. The ICMB assessment therefore reflects a substantial and persistent disparity alongside partial institutional recognition and policy response.

### The Challenge

Education has become one of the most significant and measurable global disparities affecting boys and young men. Across much of the developed world, boys now lag behind girls at almost every stage of education, from early literacy through to university completion.

The World Bank reports that more than 100 countries now have lower male than female enrolment or completion rates in secondary and tertiary education, while boys are more likely than girls to lack minimum reading proficiency in almost every region of the world. The OECD similarly concludes that boys are significantly more likely than girls to become disengaged from school, achieve lower academic results and repeat grades.

Although many governments have developed targeted initiatives for groups experiencing educational disadvantage, relatively few have adopted comprehensive strategies specifically addressing the growing educational underachievement of boys.

### Key Evidence

- The World Bank reports male educational underachievement across more than 100 countries.
- UNESCO estimates 140 million boys are out of school, compared with 133 million girls.
- Boys are 3.7 percentage points more learning-poor than girls in general. In low and middle-income countries, “learning poverty” (lacking basic reading proficiency at age 10) is about 56% for boys compared to 50% for girls.
- OECD research finds boys are significantly more likely to become disengaged from school, obtain lower grades and repeat school years.
- Female participation now exceeds male participation throughout much of higher education across developed nations. More broadly, 76% of the 152 countries with data have lower male than female tertiary enrolment ratios (116 countries).
- The proportion of male teachers (particularly in primary schools) continues to decline across many countries.

### Why It Matters

Educational success shapes almost every aspect of later life. Persistent underachievement among boys contributes to poorer workforce participation, greater economic disadvantage, reduced family formation

and poorer physical and mental health. Closing the educational gender gap is therefore essential for improving outcomes across many other disparities examined in this report.

These educational gaps have long-term consequences. Lower educational attainment is associated with reduced employment opportunities, lower lifetime earnings, poorer health outcomes, higher justice-system involvement and reduced family stability. Improving outcomes for boys is therefore not simply an educational issue, but an economic and social imperative.

### Priority Actions

- Develop national strategies to address boys' educational underachievement (including transparent reporting of attainment gaps between boys and girls, and the promotion of evidence-informed actions).
- Focus on all areas of literacy: testing and checks, expand early literacy and language interventions.
- Increase male representation in teaching, particularly in primary education. Role models matter.
- Ensure that discipline and academic assessment are objectively applied to boys and girls, to counter the wide-spread evidence of favoritism towards girls.
- Successful schools have reliable and consistent discipline, aspirational and positive cultures, and high expectations of performance.
- Promote greater father engagement throughout children's schooling.
- Ensure scholarships, enrichment programs and educational policies are equally accessible to both sexes.

### Selected Sources

World Bank *Educational Underachievement Among Boys and Men* (2022); UNESCO; World Bank *Gender Data*; OECD (2023); ICMB Education Briefing; national education statistics from multiple jurisdictions; *Closing the Gender Attainment Gap* by APPG Men and Boys (November 2023).

#### Case Study #1: Closing the Education Attainment Gap between boys and girls in English schools

The 2023 UK parliamentary inquiry into boys' educational underachievement reached an important conclusion: the gender attainment gap is not inevitable. It identified English secondary schools that had closed or substantially reduced the gap within existing budgets, despite working independently.

Mike Bell's book from August 2026 *Yes He Can!* examined six such schools. Balcarras School eliminated a gap that had once exceeded 20 percentage points, while Heathfield Community College closed a 25-point gap. Their success came not from a single intervention, but from sustained whole-school cultural change.

What worked was remarkably consistent: high expectations for boys; strong teacher-student relationships; early and intensive literacy support; positive role models and peer mentoring; parental engagement; celebrating achievement; and reliable, fair discipline. Schools also uncovered unconscious bias, including accepting poorer-quality work from boys while sanctioning them more harshly for equivalent behaviour.

Crucially, girls did not lose when boys gained. These improvements required neither additional funding nor external experts.

Key lessons from these schools were: measure the gap, believe boys can succeed, change school culture, intervene early; and relentlessly replicate what works.

## Disparity #2: HEALTH

### ICMB Global Assessment: Significant Disparity

#### Summary & Overall Assessment

Men experience substantial health disadvantages globally, including shorter life expectancy, higher premature mortality from many major causes and markedly higher suicide mortality, although the magnitude and causes vary across countries. Formal access to healthcare is generally available without sex-based exclusion, but health systems do not always engage men effectively or respond proportionately to male patterns of morbidity, mortality and service use. Encouragingly, a growing number of jurisdictions have established men's health strategies or targeted interventions, and substantial programs addressing particular male health risks demonstrate that effective responses are possible. Improvements in areas such as suicide prevention, communicable disease and premature mortality provide evidence of progress, but the overall male health gap remains substantial.

#### The Challenge

Men experience poorer health outcomes than women across almost every country in the world. They die younger, account for the overwhelming majority of suicide deaths, and experience substantially higher occupational mortality.

Globally, men live approximately five years fewer than women, while suicide claims the lives of men at two to three times the rate of women. These patterns remain remarkably consistent across countries with very different healthcare systems and cultures.

Many of the leading causes of premature male mortality (including cardiovascular disease, workplace injury, substance misuse and suicide) are preventable through earlier intervention, improved service design and greater public awareness.

Despite these realities, relatively few countries have comprehensive men's health strategies, dedicated men's health offices or sustained investment proportional to the scale of male mortality.

#### Key Evidence

- Men live an average of five years fewer than women globally. Global life expectancy of 71.5 years for men compared to 76.3 years for women (high-income life expectancy of 78.5 years for men compared with 83.7 for women). In seven countries around the world, men live a decade less than women.
- Male suicide rates are approximately two to two-and-a-half times as high as female suicide rates. World Health Organization estimates age-standardized suicide rates of about 12.4 per 100,000 for males and 5.9 for females worldwide (ratio of approximately 2.1), while IHME reports a similar gap (12.8 versus 5.4, with a ratio of 2.4 times). High-income countries are closer to a ratio of 3:1 and in some cases 4:1 (such as the United States).
- Men account for the overwhelming majority of workplace fatalities worldwide.
- Premature mortality remains consistently higher among men across virtually every country. In the World Health Organization African Region, men aged 30–70 had a 67.1% share of noncommunicable-disease-related premature mortality versus 59.9% for women.

## Why It Matters

Health underpins every dimension of individual and national wellbeing. Poor male health affects families, workplaces, communities and public finances through reduced productivity, increased healthcare costs and preventable loss of life.

Improving men's health represents one of the greatest opportunities available to governments seeking to increase healthy life expectancy and reduce preventable mortality.

## Priority Actions

- Develop comprehensive national men's health strategies, fund them, and implement them.
- Tailor healthcare services to the needs and preferences of men, including the incorporation of research on Male Psychology. Improve early screening and preventative healthcare for males.
- Expand suicide prevention initiatives targeted toward men.
- Improve the collection and reporting of sex-disaggregated health data.

## Selected Sources

WHO *Global Health Estimates* 2021; WHO regional report; OECD (2023); national health agencies; ICMB Health Briefing.

### Case Study #2: Development of National Men's Health Policies and Strategies

Men die younger than women globally, yet relatively few governments have developed health strategies explicitly designed around men and boys. Brazil, Ireland and Australia provide important models of institutional recognition.

In 2009, Brazil established its *National Comprehensive Healthcare Policy for Men* (PNAISH), becoming the only Latin American country with a dedicated national men's health policy. Its explicit objective is to reduce male morbidity and mortality by improving access to healthcare and prevention, while addressing male-specific risks and vulnerabilities. A particularly important principle is making health services places in which men are respected, with recognition that men belong and that they are expected to seek care.

Other countries are increasingly adopting this approach. Australia's *National Men's Health Strategy 2020–2030*, building on its 2010 policy, seeks gender-responsive healthcare, stronger prevention and a better evidence base. England launched its first *Men's Health Strategy* in November 2025, including action on healthcare access, suicide, physical health, workplaces, social connection and sex-disaggregated data.

Several other notable examples include: Ireland (*National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013*, and *Second National Men's Health Action Plan 2024-2028*); Malaysia (*National Men's Health Plan of Action 2018-2023*); South Africa (*National Integrated Men's Health Strategy 2020-2025*); and Europe (*Strategy on the Health and Well-Being of Men* in the World Health Organization's European Region).

These policies recognise a fundamental principle: male health outcomes will not necessarily improve through gender-neutral policy alone. A focus on men's health is imperative.

Key lessons for public policy: every country should establish a national men's health strategy with accountable leadership, sex-disaggregated targets, male-responsive services, prevention and measurable objectives for reducing premature mortality and suicide.

## Disparity #3: BOYS

### ICMB Global Assessment: Significant Disparity

#### Summary & Overall Assessment

Boys face significant but heterogeneous disadvantages during childhood, including greater exposure to hazardous child labour and some forms of violence, conflict-related harm, educational disengagement and other risks. These patterns coexist with serious disadvantages affecting girls, meaning that the evidence does not support characterising childhood disadvantage as uniformly male. International child-rights and child-protection frameworks provide substantial formal protection to both sexes, while major international programs address child labour, armed conflict and exploitation, even when they are not explicitly designed around boys' distinctive vulnerabilities. Implementation remains incomplete, but long-term reductions in child labour and other preventable harms demonstrate meaningful progress, giving this disparity one of the stronger assessments in the report.

#### The Challenge

Across the world, millions of boys experience forms of disadvantage that receive comparatively little public attention. These include child labour, hazardous work, recruitment into armed conflict, undernutrition, online exploitation and educational disengagement.

The International Labour Organization estimates that boys are consistently more likely than girls to be engaged in child labour and hazardous work across every age group. Approximately 54 million children worldwide undertake hazardous work that directly threatens their health, safety or development, with boys substantially overrepresented.

United Nations reporting on children and armed conflict similarly shows that boys account for the majority of children abducted, killed, maimed or subjected to other grave violations during armed conflicts.

These early-life disadvantages often continue into adulthood, contributing to poorer educational achievement, reduced employment opportunities, higher rates of injury and poorer physical and mental health.

#### Key Evidence

- Boys are more likely than girls to experience child labour at every age between five and seventeen (138 million children in child labour, 78 million boys compared with 59 million girls).
- Around 54 million children worldwide undertake hazardous work, with boys substantially overrepresented.
- According to the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, boys account for approximately 62% of abducted children, 73% of children killed or maimed, and 74% of children suffering at least one grave violation in armed conflict.
- In 2024, 8.6% of boys aged 5–17 were in child labour versus 6.9% of girls; boys were overrepresented at every age under the standard economic-activity definition.
- Evidence from numerous countries demonstrates growing concern about boys' educational engagement, mental wellbeing and lack of successful transition to adulthood.

## Why It Matters

Healthy childhood provides the foundation for healthy adulthood. Failure to address the specific needs of boys increases later risks across education, employment, health, family life and criminal justice.

Investing in boys is one of the most effective long-term investments societies can make.

## Priority Actions

- Ensure that every boy knows that he is unique and valued, as well as worthy of respect and dignity.
- Reduce child labour and hazardous work affecting boys.
- Strengthen international protections against the recruitment of child soldiers.
- Expand mentoring, literacy and developmental programs for boys.
- Ensure healthy pathways for the healthy transition from boys to mature men, through family stability, rites of passage, and safe initiation.
- Increase investment in boys' mental health and positive male role models.
- Ensure national child wellbeing strategies explicitly monitor outcomes for boys as well as girls.

## Selected Sources

International Labour Organization/UNICEF 2024 Global Estimates; United Nations Children and Armed Conflict reports; ICMB Boys Briefing.



## Disparity #4: FALSE ALLEGATIONS / PARENTAL ALIENATION

### ICMB Global Assessment: Critical Neglect

#### Summary & Overall Assessment

False allegations and behaviours that unjustifiably damage a child's relationship with a parent can cause serious psychological, familial, reputational and financial harm, with fathers facing particular vulnerabilities in high-conflict family disputes. However, prevalence estimates, definitions and the interpretation of parental alienation remain contested, and internationally comparable evidence is considerably weaker than for disparities such as mortality, education or workplace deaths. Consistent institutional safeguards, dedicated policies, accessible remedies and internationally demonstrable improvements remain limited. The very low assessment therefore primarily reflects deficiencies in systematic recognition, policy, implementation and demonstrated progress, while conclusions about the prevalence and sex distribution of these phenomena should be expressed cautiously.

#### The Challenge

False allegations of abuse, sexual misconduct and family violence can have profound and lasting consequences for everyone involved. They can devastate the lives of innocent accused persons, undermine confidence in justice systems, damage children and families, and make it more difficult for genuine victims to be believed and protected.

The International Council for Men and Boys recognises that the overwhelming majority of abuse allegations are made in good faith. At the same time, research from multiple countries demonstrates that false allegations do occur and deserve careful, evidence-based attention. Surveys conducted across eight countries indicate that men report experiencing a majority of false allegations of abuse, while family law proceedings can create incentives for false claims (especially during high-conflict separations).

Protecting genuine victims and protecting the rights of the accused are complementary goals. A fair justice system must uphold both.

#### Key Evidence

- Surveys across eight countries identify false allegations of abuse as a significant issue affecting many men. Men report the majority of false abuse allegations; family-law incentives remain a documented risk. 43% of respondents knew of someone they believed had been falsely accused.
- A ten-year study of 136 reported sexual-assault cases classified 5.9% as false; its review placed previous estimates broadly between 2–10%.
- Research has documented the serious psychological, financial and family impacts of false allegations on innocent accused persons and their children.
- Scientific evidence increasingly recognises parental alienation as an important factor in some high-conflict family disputes.
- After a 2018 rebuttable presumption of equal parenting time in the U.S. State of Kentucky, domestic-violence claims filed with family cases fell by about half, over the subsequent five years.
- Due process remains a cornerstone of democratic legal systems and public confidence in justice.

## Why It Matters

Every justice system depends upon two equally important principles: supporting genuine victims and protecting innocent people from wrongful accusation. Weakening either principle undermines confidence in the rule of law.

Policies should encourage reporting of genuine abuse while ensuring investigations remain impartial, evidence-based and consistent with fundamental principles of procedural fairness.

## Priority Actions

- Strengthen evidence-based investigation procedures.
- Protect due process and the presumption of innocence.
- Improve professional training about false allegations and family conflict.
- Respond appropriately to proven malicious allegations, with meaningful deterrence.
- Support research that better distinguishes genuine, mistaken and intentionally false allegations.

## Selected Sources

Domestic Abuse and Violence International Alliance (DAVIA) press releases; Lisak et al., *Violence Against Women* (2010); ICMB False Allegations Briefing; peer-reviewed family law research; End Violence Against Men and Boys Coalition resources.

### Case Study #3: False Dowry Allegations and Indian Men, when Protection becomes Punishment

India's dowry and cruelty laws were enacted to confront a grave social problem: abuse of women within marriage. Yet the Supreme Court of India has repeatedly warned that these protections can themselves become instruments of harassment when allegations are false, exaggerated or indiscriminately directed at husbands and their families.

Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code criminalised cruelty by a husband or his relatives, including harassment connected with unlawful demands for property. In *Arnesh Kumar v State of Bihar* (2014), the Supreme Court responded to concerns about unnecessary arrests by directing police not to arrest automatically following a Section 498A complaint. Those safeguards have subsequently been reiterated by the Court.

The problem was starkly illustrated in *Dara Lakshmi Narayana v State of Telangana* (2024). Quashing proceedings against a husband's relatives, the Supreme Court warned of a tendency in matrimonial disputes to implicate family members through generalised accusations unsupported by specific evidence. It cautioned against using Section 498A as an instrument of personal vendetta.

For falsely accused men, vindication may come only after years of investigation, litigation, expense, stigma and family disruption. As the Supreme Court has recognised, even acquittal cannot necessarily erase the "ignominy" suffered during prosecution.

The challenge is not to weaken protection for genuine victims, but to ensure that protecting one sex never means abandoning due process for the other.

## Disparity #5: VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

### ICMB Global Assessment: Critical Neglect

#### Summary & Overall Assessment

Men and boys bear a very large share of serious interpersonal violence globally, including approximately four-fifths of intentional homicide deaths, as well as substantial conflict-related and other violent victimisation. General criminal laws ordinarily protect victims irrespective of sex, but the scale of male victimisation has not generated a correspondingly comprehensive international policy or service response specifically addressing men and boys as victims. Prevention, trauma recovery, victim support and public-health responses frequently fail to recognise or address male vulnerability proportionately. With the male share of homicide remaining persistently high and little evidence that the underlying disparity is closing globally, the assessment reflects a large outcome disparity combined with limited targeted policy, implementation or demonstrated progress.

#### The Challenge

Men and boys account for the majority of victims of lethal violence worldwide, yet this reality receives comparatively little attention in public discussion and international policy.

According to the World Health Organization, approximately 80% of homicide victims globally are male. Among children and adolescents killed through violence, around three-quarters are boys. During armed conflicts, civilian men and boys are frequently targeted for execution, forced recruitment and other forms of organised violence.

Despite these patterns, public narratives often focus primarily on male perpetrators of violence rather than recognising that men and boys also comprise most victims of homicide, warfare and many forms of serious physical violence.

It must be emphasized that perpetrator sex and victim sex are very separate questions. Men being disproportionately represented among perpetrators does not alter the fact that men and boys also bear a disproportionate share of serious violent victimisation. Effective prevention requires understanding both sides of this pattern.

Greater recognition of male victimisation does not diminish the suffering of female victims. Rather, comprehensive violence prevention requires acknowledging everyone who is at greatest risk.

#### Key Evidence

- Men and boys face disproportionate exposure to many forms of serious public-space violence, including homicide, physical assault, robbery, gang violence and violence associated with organised crime.
- Men comprise approximately four-fifths of homicide victims worldwide. 81% of intentional-homicide victims globally were male in 2021; the global homicide rate was approximately 9.3/100,000 for males versus 2.2 for females.
- Around 75% of children and adolescents killed through violence are boys.
- Research consistently finds that civilian men face substantially higher risks of death during armed conflict.
- Sexual violence against men and boys during conflict remains substantially under-recognised internationally.

## Why It Matters

Violence imposes enormous human, social and economic costs. Preventing violence requires identifying those at greatest risk and ensuring prevention, protection and recovery services are available without discrimination.

Armed conflict creates distinctive risks for males. Men and adolescent boys may be targeted because they are presumed to be combatants or potential combatants, exposing them to forced recruitment, arbitrary detention, disappearance and killing. Male survivors of conflict-related sexual violence can face additional barriers to recognition and assistance because services and legal frameworks have not always anticipated or served male victims.

Recognition of male victims should become a routine component of international violence prevention strategies.

## Priority Actions

- Develop violence-prevention strategies addressing the circumstances in which men and boys are most frequently victimised. Include men and boys explicitly within civilian protection strategies.
- Improve international reporting of male victims of violence. Publish comprehensive sex-disaggregated violence data (and age-disaggregated data).
- Expand services for male victims of violence and conflict. Ensure victim-support and trauma services are genuinely accessible, welcoming, and empathetic to males.
- Support prevention initiatives that reduce violence affecting both sexes.

## Selected Sources

UNODC *Global Study on Homicide 2023*; World Health Organization; UNICEF; United Nations conflict reporting; ICMB Victims of Violence Briefing.



## Disparity #6: FATHERHOOD

### ICMB Global Assessment: Significant Disparity

#### Summary & Overall Assessment

Fathers continue to experience significant disadvantages in some aspects of family life, particularly following parental separation and in access to parental leave and opportunities for sustained caregiving, although legal arrangements and outcomes vary considerably between jurisdictions. Many legal systems formally recognise shared parental responsibility, and reforms in parental leave, mediation, shared parenting and father-inclusive services demonstrate growing recognition of fathers' importance to children and families. However, implementation remains uneven, and substantial differences persist between mothers' and fathers' participation in caregiving and post-separation parenting. Nevertheless, reforms in several jurisdictions and increasing paternal use of parental leave provide credible evidence of movement toward greater recognition and participation of fathers.

#### The Challenge

Fatherhood has changed profoundly over recent decades. Around the world, fathers are spending more time caring for and raising their children than any previous generation. Yet legal systems, family policies and public institutions have often been very reluctant to recognise fathers as equal parents.

Research consistently demonstrates that children benefit from the active involvement of both biological parents. Intact families and shared parenting are associated with improved child wellbeing, higher life satisfaction and, in some jurisdictions, lower levels of parental conflict and intimate partner violence. Nevertheless, shared physical custody remains uncommon in many countries, with one international study reporting an average rate of only 5% across 37 North American and European jurisdictions.

Father absence is also associated with a wide range of poorer outcomes for children, including reduced educational attainment, greater behavioural difficulties and increased risks of offending and mental health problems. While these relationships are influenced by many factors, the evidence consistently points to the importance of maintaining healthy father-child relationships wherever possible.

#### Key Evidence

- Research consistently links active father involvement with improved child wellbeing, educational outcomes and mental health.
- Joint physical custody averages approximately 5% across 37 North American and European jurisdictions studied.
- In 75% of studies, children in shared physical custody did as well as children in intact families; sole maternal care showed the weakest outcomes.
- Joint custody raised fathers' earnings and cut antidepressant use; children scored 0.47 standard deviations higher on tests, with no rise in Intimate Partner Violence allegations.
- Across 22 OECD countries, men's share of parental-leave benefit recipients rose from 19.1% in 2013 to 26.1% in 2023.
- Children raised without meaningful father involvement experience substantially higher risks across numerous social indicators, although outcomes vary depending on broader family circumstances.
- Shared parenting has been associated with reductions in family conflict and improvements in child life satisfaction in several international studies.

## Why It Matters

Strong father-child relationships benefit children, mothers, fathers and society. Family policy should seek to preserve meaningful relationships with both parents, wherever this can be achieved safely and in the child's best interests.

Recognising fathers as equal caregivers is increasingly consistent with modern family life and the growing evidence base on child development.

## Priority Actions

- Uphold the crucial importance of families, mothers and fathers as the primary source of love and care for children. *Convention on the Rights of the Child* mentions parents having primary responsibility for a child's upbringing, and children having a right to know and be cared for by their parents. UDHR article 16(3) and ICCPR article 23 say that the family is the "natural and fundamental group unit of society".
- Expand parenting support programs that actively engage fathers.
- Promote a rebuttable presumption of shared parenting. Remove unnecessary legal and institutional barriers to father involvement.
- Improve family court data and transparency. Strengthen early intervention services that help separated parents maintain healthy co-parenting relationships.

## Selected Sources

PLOS One review of 39 studies (2010–22); Sweden court study; OECD *Paid Leave for Fathers* (2025); International shared parenting research; child development literature; ICMB Parenting Briefing; Canadian Children's Rights Council; peer-reviewed family studies.

### Case Study #4: Shared Parenting as a Catalyst for reducing several Disparities at once

Shared parenting illustrates how one policy reform can potentially improve outcomes across several interconnected disparities.

The U.S. State of Kentucky moved toward a rebuttable presumption of joint custody and equal parenting time in July 2018, while explicitly providing exceptions where domestic-violence orders apply.

Recent Swedish research provides particularly striking evidence. Using administrative and court-linked data, researchers found that joint custody after divorce increased fathers' earnings and improved their mental health. Children achieved higher standardised test scores and attended better-quality schools, while researchers found no increase in intimate-partner-violence allegations.

The wider evidence is encouraging, although predominantly observational. A 2023 systematic review of 39 studies found that children in shared physical custody generally fared better than those in sole physical custody; in 75% of studies, their outcomes were statistically indistinguishable from children in intact families.

Shared parenting therefore illustrates the value of looking across policy silos.

Key lessons from reforms that affirm shared parenting and child custody: where safe and appropriate, governments should support meaningful involvement of both parents after separation, consider rebuttable shared parenting presumptions, provide early co-parenting support, and publish sex-disaggregated family-court outcomes. This approach is based on empirical evidence and genuine child welfare outcomes.

## Disparity #7: CRIMINAL SYSTEM

### ICMB Global Assessment: Severe Disadvantage

#### Summary & Overall Assessment

Men constitute the overwhelming majority of prisoners worldwide and experience much greater exposure to arrest, prosecution, incarceration and the adverse consequences associated with criminal justice involvement. Male overrepresentation does not itself demonstrate discrimination, because differences in offending patterns and other relevant factors must be considered; however, research in some jurisdictions also identifies sex disparities in charging, remand, sentencing and access to alternatives to incarceration after relevant factors are controlled. Formal equality before the law is widely established, but systematic examination of male-specific disparities, accountability mechanisms and proportionate responses remain limited. The persistence of extreme male overrepresentation, combined with limited international policy attention to potentially remediable disparities, results in a low overall assessment for this disparity.

#### The Challenge

Men account for the overwhelming majority of criminal offenders and prison populations worldwide. Men are more likely than women to be arrested, remanded in custody, convicted and receive longer custodial sentences for comparable offences. These disparities are among the most consistently documented sex differences within modern justice systems.

Research from the United States and other jurisdictions suggests that, after controlling for relevant legal factors, men frequently receive harsher treatment than women throughout the criminal justice process, particularly during charging decisions, plea negotiations and sentencing. At the same time, men remain substantially more likely to be victims of homicide, violent assault and incarceration.

A fair justice system should treat every individual equally before the law while ensuring due process, proportional sentencing and rehabilitation. Public confidence depends not only on holding offenders accountable, but also on maintaining impartiality, procedural fairness and the presumption of innocence.

#### Key Evidence

- Men comprise the overwhelming majority of prison populations worldwide (total of about 11.6 million prisoners). Females constitute only 6.8% of the global prison population, and approximately 93.2% are male.
- Men receive more severe treatment than women at multiple stages of the criminal justice process, particularly during charging, plea bargaining and sentencing.
- Research has identified measurable sentencing disparities after accounting for offence characteristics in several jurisdictions. Multiple U.S. and comparable-jurisdiction studies find harsher charging, remand and sentence outcomes for men after offence controls.
- The presumption of innocence remains a foundational principle of democratic justice systems and should apply equally to all defendants.

#### Why It Matters

Justice systems derive their legitimacy from fairness, impartiality and equal treatment before the law. Where significant disparities exist, governments should investigate their causes and implement evidence-based reforms that improve consistency, transparency and public confidence.

Reducing offending, supporting rehabilitation and ensuring equitable legal treatment benefit offenders, victims and society alike.

Many male fights, including in prison, are less about the trigger than about status, rank and “face”. Male Psychology research emphasises men’s sensitivity to status, respect and position within male hierarchies. Helping men recognise how perceived disrespect, humiliation or status challenges can escalate conflict can help to provide practical tools for disengaging from destructive competition and responding more constructively.

### Priority Actions

- Regularly review sentencing outcomes for sex-based disparities.
- Strengthen procedural fairness and the presumption of innocence.
- Expand rehabilitation and diversion programs that reduce reoffending.
- Make use of the findings of Male Psychology in system reform and effective service delivery.
- Improve transparency through the publication of sex-disaggregated justice data.
- Ensure criminal justice policies are based on evidence rather than stereotypes.

### Selected Sources

World Prison Brief/ICPR (2025); UNODC; peer-reviewed sentencing research; national justice statistics; ICMB Criminal Justice Briefing; Men Are Good *Understanding Men #7: Hierarchy* (2024) by Tom Golden.



## Disparity #8: PARTNER ABUSE

### ICMB Global Assessment: Severe Disadvantage

#### Summary & Overall Assessment

Men constitute a substantial minority of victims of intimate partner abuse, with evidence showing meaningful levels of male victimisation and bidirectional violence, while women experience higher rates of some of the most severe consequences, particularly intimate partner homicide. Although legal protections are often formally sex-neutral, male victims can encounter barriers to recognition, reporting, specialist support and safe accommodation, and many policy frameworks continue to focus predominantly on female victimisation. Dedicated services for male victims and their children remain limited in many jurisdictions, while evidence of a sustained international narrowing of these service and recognition gaps is weak. The assessment therefore recognises both the seriousness of male victimisation and the important sex differences in the nature and severity of partner abuse.

#### The Challenge

Intimate partner violence affects both women and men, although its prevalence, severity and forms vary across different studies and populations. While female victims of severe violence rightly receive considerable public attention, a growing body of international research indicates that many men also experience physical, psychological and emotional abuse, yet often face significant barriers to recognition, reporting and support.

The availability of specialist services for male victims remains very limited in many countries. Men frequently report fear of not being believed, social stigma and a lack of appropriate accommodation or support services. Research also highlights evidence of substantial bidirectional violence within intimate relationships and calls for policies based on empirical evidence rather than assumptions about gender.

An effective response to intimate partner violence requires recognising every victim, holding every offender accountable and ensuring that services are available according to need.

#### Key Evidence

- Research has documented significant levels of male victimisation in intimate partner violence across numerous countries.
- International studies have identified substantial levels of mutual or bidirectional partner violence in many relationships.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data indicate about one in three U.S. men have experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime. About 1 in 7 report severe physical Intimate Partner Violence. About 1 in 14 U.S. men were made to penetrate someone in their lifetime (i.e. they were forced to have sex).
- A large US study of young adults found physical partner violence in almost 24% of heterosexual relationships. Among relationships involving physical violence, half involved reciprocal violence by both partners. Where violence was non-reciprocal, women were the reported perpetrators in 71% of cases. Reciprocal violence was associated with substantially greater risk of injury, while male-perpetrated violence was more likely than female-perpetrated violence to cause injury.
- Male victims generally have access to substantially fewer dedicated support services than female victims.
- Men report slightly higher rates of online harassment than women.

## Why It Matters

Domestic abuse is a serious public health and human rights issue regardless of the victim's sex. Policies that fail to recognise male victims risk leaving many people without appropriate protection while undermining confidence in support systems.

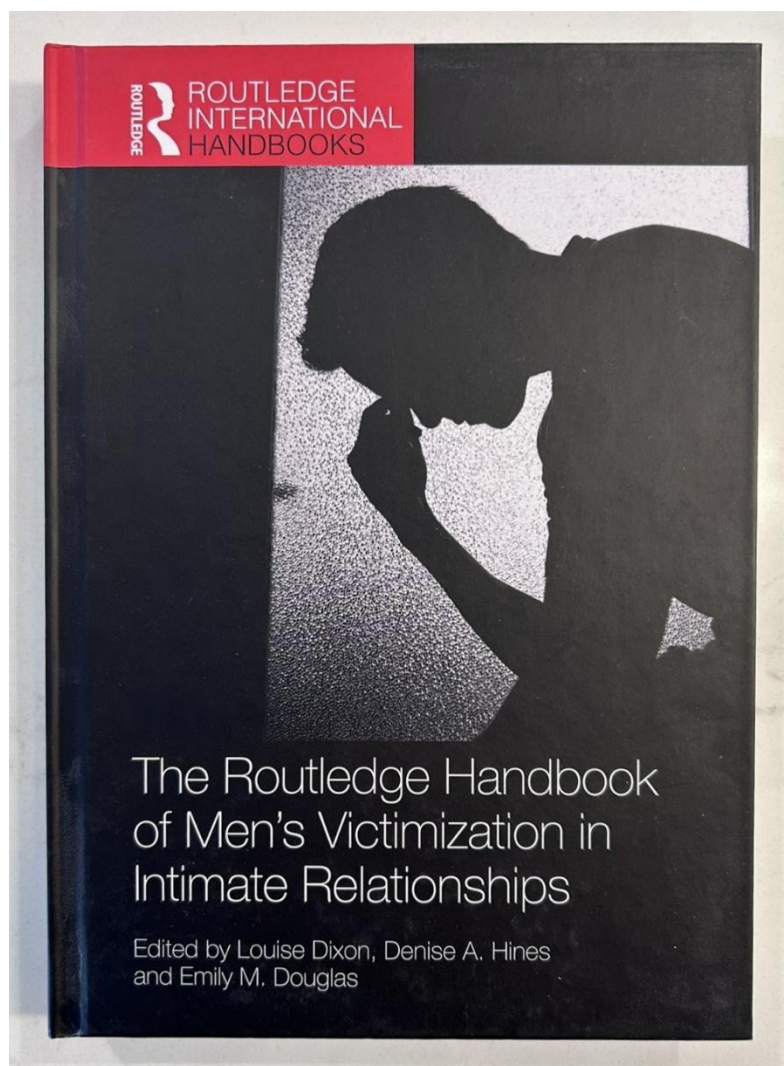
Evidence-based, gender-inclusive approaches are more likely to improve outcomes for all victims.

## Priority Actions

- Ensure support services are accessible to victims of both sexes.
- Collect comprehensive sex-disaggregated domestic violence data.
- Develop evidence-based public education campaigns.
- Improve professional training on recognising male victimisation.
- Support early intervention programs that reduce family violence.

## Selected Sources

CDC/NISVS; peer-reviewed international partner violence research, including *The Routledge Handbook of Men's Victimization in Intimate Relationships*; Whitaker et al. (2007) *Differences in Frequency of Violence and Reported Injury Between Relationships With Reciprocal and Nonreciprocal Intimate Partner Violence*; Pew Research Center; ICMB Intimate Partner Violence Briefing; Partner Abuse State of Knowledge project (PASK).



## Disparity #9: HOMELESSNESS

### ICMB Global Assessment: Significant Disparity

#### Summary & Overall Assessment

Men constitute a substantial majority of people experiencing homelessness in many countries, and their overrepresentation is often particularly pronounced among people sleeping rough or experiencing chronic homelessness. Housing and homelessness laws are generally formally sex-neutral, while many governments maintain homelessness strategies, shelters and support services; however, the predominance of men among homeless populations is not consistently reflected in gender-responsive policy, prevention or service design. Implementation is substantial but uneven, and successful approaches such as Housing First demonstrate that long-term homelessness can be materially reduced through coordinated housing, health and social support. These examples justify recognition of progress, while persistent male overrepresentation means that outcome equality remains distant for this disparity.

#### The Challenge

Homelessness is one of the clearest examples of a global disparity affecting men. Across the countries examined by the International Council for Men and Boys, approximately 76% of people experiencing homelessness are male, with particularly large disparities reported in parts of East Asia and elsewhere.

Homeless men frequently experience multiple, overlapping disadvantages including poor physical and mental health, substance dependence, unemployment, social isolation and limited access to stable housing. These challenges are often compounded by relationship breakdown, family separation, childhood trauma, military service, incarceration or untreated mental illness.

Despite the predominance of men among homeless populations, homelessness is seldom discussed as a significant men's issue. Much greater recognition is needed if governments are to design effective prevention strategies and support services.

#### Key Evidence

- Official statistics identify at least two million people experiencing homelessness across the OECD (with warnings that this is probably an underestimate).
- Approximately 76% of homeless people worldwide are male across the countries examined by ICMB. Across 33 countries with sex-disaggregated counts, women are a minority of recorded homeless people in all but two.
- Point-in-time female share of homelessness averages about 30%. The Canada 2024 shelter study found that 64.7% of users were men; Denmark's 2024 mapping found that 77% of people in homelessness were men.
- Men are particularly overrepresented among rough sleepers and chronically homeless populations.
- International research identifies high rates of mental illness among people experiencing homelessness.
- Effective responses combine affordable housing, healthcare, mental health services, employment assistance and long-term support.

## Why It Matters

Homelessness represents one of the most visible manifestations of social exclusion. Preventing homelessness improves health, employment, community safety and public expenditure while restoring dignity and opportunity to vulnerable individuals.

Recognising the predominance of men among homeless populations is an essential first step toward developing more effective policies.

## Priority Actions

- Expand evidence-based homelessness prevention strategies.
- Increase investment in affordable and supportive housing.
- Strengthen integrated mental health and addiction services.
- Improve employment and reintegration programs.
- Publish comprehensive sex-disaggregated homelessness statistics to better inform public policy.

## Selected Sources

OECD homelessness database/toolkit; international homelessness statistics; peer-reviewed mental health research; ICMB Homelessness Briefing.

### Case Study #5: Treating Homelessness as an Interconnected Problem in Finland

Finland demonstrates how tackling one of the 12 disparities can improve outcomes across several other disparities. Rather than treating homelessness simply as a shortage of temporary accommodation, Finland adopted Housing First: provide permanent housing first, then address the interconnected problems that can prevent people rebuilding their lives.

The results have been substantial. Finland's homeless population fell from more than 18,000 in 1987 to fewer than 3,500 in 2023, while long-term homelessness declined by more than 70% between 2008 and 2023.

Housing is the foundation, not the endpoint. People are connected with health and mental-health services, addiction treatment, employment assistance and social support. This is particularly relevant to men, who comprise the majority of homeless people in many countries and whose homelessness can intersect with suicide risk, poor health, unemployment, family separation, violence, criminal-justice involvement and social isolation.

Finland therefore illustrates an important principle for addressing the 12 disparities: disadvantages rarely exist in isolation, and neither should solutions...

Key lessons from the experience of dramatically reducing homelessness: set measurable national reduction targets, prioritise stable housing, report outcomes by sex, and integrate housing with health, employment, family and justice services. Address the whole person and their circumstances, rather than one problem at a time.

## Disparity #10: WORKPLACE

### ICMB Global Assessment: Significant Disparity

#### Summary & Overall Assessment

Men bear a highly disproportionate share of fatal occupational injuries and other serious workplace risks, reflecting in substantial part their concentration in hazardous industries and occupations. Unlike several other disparities examined in this report, workplace safety is supported by extensive legislation, regulatory institutions and a well-established international framework affirming safe and healthy working conditions for all workers, providing strong formal institutional protection irrespective of sex. Inspection, engineering controls, safety standards, training and occupational-health programs are implemented extensively, although their reach and effectiveness vary considerably between countries and industries. Long-term reductions in fatalities in many hazardous sectors demonstrate meaningful progress, but the continuing concentration of workplace deaths among men means that substantial outcome inequality remains.

#### The Challenge

Men perform the vast majority of the world's most physically demanding and hazardous occupations. As a consequence, they also bear the overwhelming burden of occupational deaths and serious workplace injuries.

Across the countries examined by the International Council for Men and Boys, men experience approximately fifteen times as many occupational fatalities as women and nearly twice as many serious workplace injuries. These disparities reflect the concentration of men in industries such as construction, mining, agriculture, manufacturing, transport, fishing, forestry, utilities and emergency services.

Every workplace death represents a profound human tragedy that affects families, colleagues and communities. Yet workplace safety is rarely discussed as a significant gender issue despite one of the largest measurable disparities affecting either sex.

Improving workplace safety is not simply an occupational issue. It is a matter of public health, family wellbeing and social justice.

#### Key Evidence

- Men die from workplace accident fatalities at roughly fifteen times the rate of women globally (about 6.2 versus 0.4 deaths per 100,000 workers), a disparity driven by male concentration in high-risk industries.
- In the United Kingdom for 2024/25, men were 95% of worker fatalities. While in the U.S. men were about 92% of 5,070 workplace deaths (2024 CFI).
- Men sustain almost twice as many occupational injuries as women.
- The highest-risk occupations worldwide remain overwhelmingly male.
- Occupational deaths contribute significantly to men's lower life expectancy and preventable mortality.

## Why It Matters

Safe workplaces save lives, strengthen families and improve national productivity. Reducing occupational fatalities should be regarded as one of the world's most achievable public health objectives.

Governments, employers and international organisations share responsibility for ensuring that every worker returns home safely at the end of each day.

## Priority Actions

- Strengthen workplace health and safety standards in high-risk industries.
- Increase investment in safety training, technology and enforcement.
- Increase investment in occupational health and workplace safety.
- Improve international reporting of occupational deaths and injuries.
- Support the International Labour Organization's Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health.
- Recognise workplace safety as an important component of Genuine Gender Equality and men's health policy.

## Selected Sources

International Labour Organization; national workplace safety agencies; ICMB Workplace Safety Briefing.

### Case Study #6: Cutting Mining Deaths in Chile

Chile demonstrates that deaths in dangerous, overwhelmingly male occupations can be dramatically reduced through sustained institutional action. Following the 2010 Copiapó mining disaster and rescue, mine safety received substantially greater national attention.

Between 2010 and 2020, deaths in Chile's extractive mining industry fell from 45 to 13. Over the same period, inspections by the national mining regulator SERNAGEOMIN increased more than fourfold, from 2,586 to 10,483 annually. Chile's government attributed the improvement to stronger regulation and inspection, alongside an increasingly demanding safety culture within mining companies and greater worker awareness.

The commitment has subsequently continued. In 2024, Chile ratified *ILO Convention 176 on Safety and Health in Mines*, strengthening its alignment with international mine-safety standards.

Progress is not irreversible: mining remains hazardous and fatalities continue. But Chile shows that workplace deaths should not be accepted as an unavoidable consequence of dangerous work.

Key lessons from this decade and a half include: identifying high-risk industries, strengthening inspections and accountability, building a prevention-focused safety culture, empowering workers, and setting an explicit objective of zero fatalities. Workplace safety policy can save thousands of predominantly male lives worldwide.

## Disparity #11: ADOPTION AND REPRODUCTIVE

### ICMB Global Assessment: Critical Neglect

#### Summary & Overall Assessment

Men experience extremely severe legal and practical limitations in aspects of adoption and reproductive decision-making, particularly concerning the rights and notification of unmarried biological fathers, disputed paternity and opportunities to participate in decisions affecting their parental status. These issues involve complex and sometimes competing rights and interests (including those of mothers and children) and legal arrangements vary considerably between jurisdictions. Nevertheless, the evidence reviewed for this report indicates limited international recognition, policy coordination, dedicated services or systematic monitoring of disadvantages affecting fathers in these areas, with little evidence of broad progress toward resolving identified inequalities. Given limitations in internationally comparable evidence, this assessment should be interpreted with correspondingly lower confidence than scores based on established global statistical series.

#### The Challenge

The reproductive rights of women have received increasing public attention over recent decades. However, comparatively little attention has been given to the legal rights and responsibilities of men during pregnancy, childbirth, adoption and parenthood.

In many jurisdictions, men have limited or no legal authority regarding decisions about abortion, while unmarried fathers may possess few legal rights in adoption proceedings (unless specific legal requirements have been satisfied). Questions surrounding paternity establishment, parental responsibility and reproductive decision-making continue to generate significant legal and ethical debate across many countries...

Another area of concern is paternity fraud, the intentional misidentification of a child's biological father. Although prevalence estimates vary considerably, research reviewed by ICMB reports a median estimate of 3.7% across published studies, with substantial variation between countries.

The International Council for Men and Boys supports policies that recognise the rights, responsibilities and wellbeing of children, mothers and fathers while maintaining the child's best interests as the paramount consideration.

#### Key Evidence

- In many jurisdictions, unmarried fathers have limited legal rights regarding adoption decisions.
- Published studies report a median paternity discrepancy estimate of 3.7% in non-disputed testing samples (26.9% in disputed cases), although estimates vary considerably between populations.
- Research demonstrates that pregnancy produces measurable neurological and psychological changes in expectant fathers, reinforcing the importance of paternal involvement before birth.
- Legal approaches to paternal rights remain highly inconsistent internationally.

#### Why It Matters

Children benefit when both parents are encouraged to participate responsibly in their lives, wherever this is possible and safe. Legal systems should seek to balance the rights and responsibilities of mothers and fathers while prioritising children's long-term wellbeing.

Greater legal clarity and fairness can reduce conflict, strengthen families and improve outcomes for future generations.

### Priority Actions

- Improve legal certainty surrounding paternity. Track the 3.7% median paternity-discrepancy estimate over time.
- Encourage responsible paternal involvement before and after birth.
- Review adoption laws affecting unmarried fathers, and work towards consent rights in adoption.
- Ensure family law reflects both parental responsibilities and parental rights.
- Establish a policy indicator on the number and proportion of jurisdictions that grant unmarried biological fathers enforceable notice.
- Record the lack of comparable international data as a standing evidence gap, for this disparity. Support further international research into men's reproductive issues.

### Selected Sources

Bellis et al. median paternity discrepancy; peer-reviewed reproductive health research; adoption law literature; ICMB Adoption and Reproductive Rights Briefing.

#### Case Study #7: Significantly reducing Male Suicide in Japan and Finland

Finland and Japan show that very high male suicide rates can be reduced when governments treat suicide as a preventable social and public-health problem, identify who is dying, and act systematically.

Finland began with unusually detailed evidence: its *National Suicide Prevention Project* examined all 1,397 suicides over a 12-month period in 1987–88 using psychological autopsies. This helped identify high-risk groups and shaped coordinated prevention involving health services, communities and other institutions. Suicide subsequently declined substantially from its early-1990s peak.

Japan followed a similarly systemic path. After annual suicides exceeded 30,000, the 2006 *Basic Act on Suicide Countermeasures* reframed suicide from an individual failing to a societal responsibility requiring national and local action. Japan combined prevention planning with measures addressing employment, debt and economic distress. By 2025, suicides had fallen to a provisional 19,097, which is the first total below 20,000 since national records began in 1978.

Both countries demonstrate that progress requires more than crisis lines or awareness campaigns...

Key lessons cutting across both countries are: establish statutory national strategies, analyse suicide deaths in depth, explicitly target high-risk male groups, take prevention into everyday male settings, tackle economic and social drivers, fund local action, and track outcomes by sex.

## Disparity #12. MEDIA

### ICMB Global Assessment: Critical Neglect

#### Summary & Overall Assessment

Research and content analyses provide strong evidence of negative stereotyping and unfavourable portrayals of men and masculinity in both traditional and digital media, alongside concerns that male vulnerability, victimisation and positive social contributions receive inadequate or unbalanced attention. Formal rights relating to expression and participation generally apply equally to men and women, but there is little systematic institutional monitoring of sex-based portrayals of men, few accountability mechanisms specifically addressing harmful male stereotypes, and limited evidence of coordinated efforts to improve representational balance. Because definitions, samples and media environments differ substantially and robust longitudinal global evidence remains limited, the magnitude of the disparity should be interpreted cautiously. The low assessment primarily reflects the absence of comprehensive policy, implementation and demonstrated improvement rather than certainty about a single global measure of media bias.

#### The Challenge

Public understanding of men and boys is profoundly influenced by news reporting, entertainment media, advertising and social media. While media frequently highlight problems associated with men and boys, considerably less attention is given to men's positive contributions, their caregiving roles or the disadvantages many males experience.

Research reviewed by the International Council for Men and Boys reports that media portrayals of men are 69% unfavourable, 12% favourable, and 19% neutral or balanced. Negative or stereotypical portrayals can reinforce prejudice, reduce public empathy and influence policy priorities by shaping perceptions of who deserves recognition and support.

Balanced reporting does not require ignoring harmful behaviour by some men. Rather, it requires portraying men and boys with the same fairness, complexity and humanity expected for every other group in society.

A more balanced public narrative would better reflect the diverse realities of fathers, workers, volunteers, carers, mentors, educators, first responders and millions of ordinary men making positive contributions to their families and communities.

#### Key Evidence

- Analysis reviewed by ICMB reports media portrayals of men as 69% unfavourable, 12% favourable, and 19% neutral or balanced.
- Positive male role models remain comparatively underrepresented in many forms of media.
- In U.S. survey data, 43% of men versus 38% of women reported experiencing online harassment; men were also more likely to report offensive name-calling (35% vs 26%) and physical threats (16% vs 11%).
- Persistent negative stereotyping can influence public attitudes and policy priorities.
- Balanced reporting can improve public understanding and reduce unnecessary gender polarisation.

## Why It Matters

Media narratives shape social attitudes, influence political priorities and affect how boys develop their sense of identity and belonging. Fair representation benefits everyone by encouraging mutual respect, reducing stereotypes and fostering healthier relationships between women and men.

Recognising men's contributions alongside their challenges creates a more accurate and constructive public conversation.

## Priority Actions

- Encourage balanced, evidence-based reporting on issues affecting men and boys.
- Promote positive male role models across media and education. In 2026, the ICMB Celebrating Men series was launched specifically to counter the prevalent imbalances (this is a series of short, shareable male role model content).
- Challenge inaccurate or misleading gender stereotypes.
- Improve media literacy regarding sex-based bias.
- Support research examining long-term trends in media portrayals of men.

## Selected Sources

Macnamara five-year news analysis; *Media and Male Identity*; Pew Research Center; ICMB Media Briefing; media content analysis and related academic literature.



## Global Assessment Framework

To enable meaningful comparisons over time, each of the 12 disparities is assigned an Overall Assessment as described on page 6. The six categories are: Critical Neglect (being the worst outcomes for men and boys), Severe Disadvantage, Significant Disparity, Moderate Progress, Advanced Success, and Substantive Equality (representing the best outcomes for men and boys that are consistent with fairness and equality for women and girls). These Overall Assessments are comprised of equal-weighted ratings across five dimensions:

1. **Outcome Equality** measures the current severity, prevalence and breadth of male disadvantage against an appropriate fairness benchmark. A Good rating for this dimension means equality and fairness has effectively been achieved; while Bad indicates severe and widespread disadvantage. How equal are the outcomes?
2. **Rights & Institutional Fairness** measures whether laws, regulations, rules and administrative practices provide men and boys with equitable rights, protections, treatment, due process and opportunities. This deliberately extends beyond formal legislation to institutions such as schools, healthcare, welfare, workplaces and justice systems. How fair are the institutions and rules?
3. **Policy & Accountability** measures whether governments and relevant institutions have established proportionate, evidence-based policies, objectives, responsibilities, targets and accountability mechanisms addressing the demonstrated disadvantage. Symbolic recognition or merely publishing a strategy is insufficient; much more than plans are needed. Is the formal response adequate?
4. **Implementation & Access** measures whether effective responses are actually funded, implemented at meaningful scale and accessible to affected men and boys. This encompasses services, programs, prevention, treatment, education, protection and other practical interventions appropriate to each disparity. How adequate is actual delivery?
5. **Demonstrated Progress** measures whether credible longitudinal evidence shows that male disadvantage is materially reducing, and whether movement toward fairness is occurring. It distinguishes activity and promises from demonstrated improvement in people's lives. Is it demonstrably working, during the last two, five, or ten years?

The component ratings are assigned by ICMB using a structured assessment at the global level. This draws upon public and published evidence, insight from experts in the ICMB network, a review by staff and volunteers, with final sign-off by the ICMB Board. Areas of higher uncertainty are flagged within the report.

**Assessment methodology:** Each of the five dimensions is independently rated against predefined criteria: Bad = absent or critically deficient; Mixed = partial or moderate; and Good = strong and comprehensive. Ratings are based on the breadth, quality and international consistency of available evidence. The five equally-weighted component ratings produce the Overall Assessment for each of the 12 disparities.

## Summary Of Overall Assessments, For Each Disparity

The 12 disparities vary considerably in both the severity of male disadvantage and the extent to which governments and institutions are responding. The table below summarises ICMB's Overall Assessment across the five equally-weighted dimensions.

The following table provides a snapshot of the 12 areas examined in this report. The results reveal an important distinction between the scale of a disparity and society's response to it: in some areas the formal rights are broadly equal between the sexes, yet targeted policy, practical implementation or measurable progress remain limited. The Overall Assessments therefore provide a structured baseline for identifying where action is most needed and for measuring progress in future editions of this report.

| Disparity                                  | Outcome Equality | Rights & Institutional Fairness | Policy & Accountability | Implementation & Access | Demonstrated Progress | Overall ICMB Assessment |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Education                               | Mixed            | Mixed                           | Mixed                   | Bad                     | Bad                   | Severe Disadvantage     |
| 2. Health                                  | Bad              | Mixed                           | Mixed                   | Mixed                   | Mixed                 | Significant Disparity   |
| 3. Boys                                    | Mixed            | Mixed                           | Mixed                   | Mixed                   | Mixed                 | Significant Disparity   |
| 4. False Allegations / Parental Alienation | Mixed            | Bad                             | Bad                     | Bad                     | Bad                   | Critical Neglect        |
| 5. Victims of Violence                     | Bad              | Mixed                           | Bad                     | Bad                     | Bad                   | Critical Neglect        |
| 6. Fatherhood                              | Bad              | Mixed                           | Mixed                   | Mixed                   | Mixed                 | Significant Disparity   |
| 7. Criminal System                         | Mixed            | Mixed                           | Bad                     | Bad                     | Bad                   | Severe Disadvantage     |
| 8. Partner Abuse                           | Mixed            | Mixed                           | Bad                     | Bad                     | Bad                   | Severe Disadvantage     |
| 9. Homelessness                            | Bad              | Mixed                           | Mixed                   | Mixed                   | Mixed                 | Significant Disparity   |
| 10. Workplace                              | Bad              | Good                            | Mixed                   | Mixed                   | Mixed                 | Significant Disparity   |
| 11. Adoption & Reproductive                | Bad              | Bad                             | Bad                     | Bad                     | Bad                   | Critical Neglect        |
| 12. Media                                  | Bad              | Mixed                           | Bad                     | Bad                     | Bad                   | Critical Neglect        |

The 12 disparities are interconnected. Educational disadvantage can shape employment, health and family formation; violence and homelessness can compound poor mental health; and weaknesses in institutional recognition can leave serious problems without proportionate policy responses.

# CONCLUSION

## A Shared Responsibility

The evidence presented throughout this report points to a consistent conclusion: many of the challenges facing men and boys are real, measurable and widespread. They are evident across education, health, childhood development, family life, justice, violence, homelessness, workplace safety, reproductive rights and public representation. While the scale of these disparities varies between countries, the overall patterns remain remarkably consistent across the more than 50 countries examined by the International Council for Men and Boys (ICMB).

These findings should not be interpreted as diminishing the genuine progress made for women and girls, nor the challenges that many females continue to face. The advancement of one sex should never come at the expense of the other. Healthy societies recognise disadvantage wherever it exists, and then they respond with evidence-based policies that enable every person to flourish.

The ICMB Board believes that Genuine Gender Equality requires equal compassion, equal concern and equal commitment to improving the lives of both sexes...

The purpose of this report is therefore constructive rather than adversarial. It seeks to broaden (not narrow) the conversation about gender equality.

## Looking Ahead

This report establishes a benchmark.

Future editions of the *Global State of Men and Boys Report* will monitor progress across each of the 12 disparities using the same assessment framework, allowing governments, researchers and international organisations to evaluate where meaningful improvements are occurring and where further action remains necessary. We will also celebrate the organisations and people who are achieving outstanding results.

ICMB hopes this annual report becomes an authoritative global reference for policymakers, journalists, academics and advocates seeking balanced, evidence-based assessments of the wellbeing of men and boys.

## Final Reflection

Throughout history, societies have made their greatest advances when they have expanded (not narrowed) the circle of human concern.

- The wellbeing of boys matters.
- The health of men matters.
- The contributions of fathers matter.
- The dignity of every person matters.
- When boys flourish, families are stronger.
- When men are healthier, communities are safer.
- When fathers are involved, children thrive.
- When public policy is guided by evidence rather than ideology, everyone benefits.

ICMB believes that Genuine Gender Equality is achieved not by competing for compassion, but by extending it equally.

The challenge for the coming decade is not whether we should care about women or men. It is whether we are prepared to care about both.

### **Priorities for Governments**

Governments should recognise boys and men as legitimate subjects of evidence-based public policy, while continuing to support women and girls where disadvantage exists. Priority actions include:

- Develop national strategies addressing the educational underachievement of boys. Adopt comprehensive men's health strategies focused on reducing preventable mortality and suicide.
- Improve father-inclusive family policies, support intact families, and encourage meaningful active involvement by both parents of children.
- Reduce occupational fatalities through stronger workplace safety policies.
- Improve recognition and support for male victims of violence, abuse and homelessness. Ensure justice systems maintain procedural fairness and equal treatment before the law.
- Publish comprehensive sex-disaggregated data across all major areas of public policy. Regularly evaluate whether gender initiatives are producing equitable outcomes for both sexes.

### **Priorities for the United Nations**

The United Nations has played a historic role in advancing human rights and promoting the equal dignity of women and men. The United Nations Charter reaffirms faith in "the equal rights of men and women", while Article 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* declares that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". These principles apply equally to the wellbeing of men and boys.

The International Council for Men and Boys respectfully encourages the United Nations to:

- recognise measurable disparities affecting men and boys alongside those affecting women and girls, and to improve collection and publication of sex-disaggregated international data;
- ensure that gender policies explicitly consider outcomes for both sexes, and encourage Member States to develop balanced national gender strategies;
- engage constructively with organisations representing men and boys; and
- formally recognise International Men's Day on 19 November as an official UN observance.

International Men's Day has been celebrated every year on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November since 1999. In 2025 it was observed in more than 110 countries, making it the world's largest annual event dedicated to recognising the wellbeing, contributions and challenges of men and boys.

### **Priorities for Civil Society**

Many of the most effective solutions lie beyond government. Schools, employers, universities, researchers, charities, sporting organisations, faith communities, businesses and families all have important roles to play. Progress will depend upon:

- promoting positive models of masculinity and responsible fatherhood, and improving media accuracy as well as balance in the public discourse;
- encouraging healthy relationships between females and males;
- supporting boys throughout childhood and adolescence, in their transition to mature manhood;
- recognising male victims, and expanding high-quality research into male disadvantage;
- fostering respectful dialogue that rejects zero-sum thinking.

## About the International Council for Men and Boys

Established in 2023, ICMB is the leading global advocacy organisation dedicated to improving the wellbeing, rights and opportunities of men and boys. As *The Global Voice for Men and Boys*, ICMB unites and empowers a worldwide movement to advance practical, evidence-based solutions to the 12 global disparities affecting males. ICMB works with the United Nations, governments, policymakers, researchers, and civil society organisations to promote evidence-based policy, stronger families and healthier communities.

[www.menandboys.net](http://www.menandboys.net)

### Vision

A world where every man and boy has the opportunity to thrive, where their dignity, well-being and contributions are valued, and where Genuine Gender Equality includes everyone.

### Mission

To unite and empower a global movement that advances the wellbeing, rights and opportunities of men and boys by promoting evidence-based advocacy, strengthening international collaboration, influencing public policy, and addressing the 12 global disparities that disproportionately affect males.

The International Council for Men and Boys welcomes collaboration with governments, universities, non-government organisations and community leaders who share these objectives.

### Accomplishments

- Developed the *New York Statement on Men and Boys* to provide a concise statement of the disparities affecting men and boys globally.
- Sponsored Men's Equality Month and International Men's Day on November 19.
- Published regular press releases on the 12 areas of male disparity.
- Held meetings with numerous missions at the United Nations.
- Unified country-level advocacy organizations around the world with similar objectives (including Success Stories from eight countries).

### Key Personnel

President: Edward E. Bartlett, PhD

Board Directors: David Maywald (Chair), Mike Bell (Vice Chair), Carl Roberts (Secretary)

Executive Manager: Lawrence DeMarco, LLM

## Acknowledgements

The International Council for Men and Boys gratefully acknowledges the work of researchers, government agencies, universities, international organisations and advocacy groups whose research has informed this inaugural report. Particular recognition is given to the World Health Organization, OECD, World Bank, UNICEF, International Labour Organization, United Nations agencies, the World Economic Forum, the Centre for Policy Research on Men and Boys, the American Institute for Boys and Men, and the many scholars, practitioners and advocates whose work has contributed to a more balanced understanding of the lives of men and boys.