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Better Lives for Men, Better Lives for All



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SURVEY

How Irish males feel
about themselves, their
place in Society, gender,
masculinities & more

INTERIM REPORT

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Introduction

This report - developed within the scope of Equimundo (Center for Masculinities and Social Justice), the UN Joint Programme for Gender Equality, and the national men's health policy framework in Ireland - presents quantitative research results about public perceptions on various issues related to masculinity and gender equality in Ireland.

Social scientists globally contend that men who ascribe to inequitable gender norms (e.g. believe women are solely responsible for household chores and child-rearing) and endorse dominant masculine norms of behaviour (e.g. believe women are sexual conquests) have higher rates of engaging in psychological, physical and sexual violence against women (Burgher & Flood, 2019; Hill et al., 2020; Pulerwitz & Barker, 2008; River & Flood, 2021). Violence against women has been recognized as a global health epidemic in which one in three women are impacted during their lifetime – resulting in higher rates of depression, sexually transmitted infections, and a rise in chronic health conditions. There is also emerging evidence between “*harmful masculinities*” and perpetrating aggression and hostility towards gay, lesbian, and transgender people – or indeed, those who do not conform to heteronormative modes of behaviour. Furthermore, studies have explored the impact of “harmful masculinities” on the health of the individual who endorses them - with Courtenay, (2011) stating that men may deliberately engage in health-damaging behaviours to actively perform masculinities and reinforce their masculine identity. Indeed, the act of opposing health and emotional engagement could be seen as an active demonstration of manliness for some men and a rejection of the more feminine connotations of weakness and stigmatisation associated with health, and emotional engagement. This article builds on work that recognises masculinities as plural social constructs constituted through interaction (Connell, 1995; Pascoe and Bridges, 2016). This paper – through quantitative surveys - works to explore Irish men's conceptualisation of masculinities and uncover what being a man means to males in Ireland today –and therefore, adds to other empirical work that have studied Irish masculinities.

Against the backdrop of this research associated with harmful masculinities there is an imperative towards improving our collective understanding of how such norms manifest and impact wellbeing in order to resolve widespread gender inequities. As Connell (1995) notes masculinities are relational, geographically specific and contextually dependant – thus, the mode of masculinity that garners recognition in a particular environment shifts across time and space. It is, therefore, important to analyse masculinities within varying social geographies. This research focuses on Ireland, and examines the forms that masculinities are taking in Ireland. It provides an overview of what is known about men's lives in terms of core issues such as gender roles, sexuality, social inclusion (and exclusion), and marginalisation. This study addresses calls at a national men's health policy level for more targeted understanding and gender-sensitive approaches to males in Ireland (Richardson & Carroll, 2009). Typically, in Ireland, explicit attention to gender has focused on the feminine, and invariably women – and women's issues. Scholarship in Ireland has been slower to incorporate the study of men, and cultural

influences on masculine behaviour and societal norms. To address this knowledge gap, researchers with the Men's Development Network (Ireland), in conjunction with Equimundo (Global Center for Masculinities and Social Justice) – conducted quantitative research via questionnaires. This explored theoretically - and empirically - derived aspects of masculine norms, including self-sufficiency, sense of self and physical attractiveness, rigid masculine gender roles, heterosexuality, homophobia, and aggression/control.

Ireland and masculinity

In order to situate this study, the following section gives a snapshot of the Irish gender landscape over time – in doing so, we highlight how Irish masculinities have historically been constructed, and developed within the popular discourse.

Traditional masculinity in Ireland was rural, church based, and privileged heterosexual marriage and sexual purity – allied to this was distinct gender roles between the sexes. The Roman Catholic Church dominated Irish society during the mid-late twentieth century and was significant in shaping Irish masculinities (Inglis, 1998). As a result, Irish masculinities were deeply influenced at an institutional and governance level and (re)produced by structures such as schools, family life and devotional practices (Inglis, 1997). Allied to this were indigenous forms of Irish patriarchy; such as nationalism, the GAA, pub culture, agriculture, land ownership and the exposition of the Clergy (Cullingford, 2002). Indeed the balance of power in Irish society was exclusively held by men, with strict tropes on how manhood should be demonstrated (Ferguson, 2002). For many this was driven by manual labour – and played a central role in Irish men's gendered performances (Lloyd, 2000) with the male exerting “his” authority over the natural landscape, battling against environmental/economic obstacles, and prioritizing ‘hard’ work over self-care (Ní Laoire, 2005). Allied to this was drinking practises as a coping strategy for many Irish men; used as an emotional numbing, to momentarily escape adversity and dissociate “the self”(Darcy, 2019). All of this heavily impacted on Irish gender patterns – as behaviour plays a significant role in the construction of gender (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). As men's behaviour shaped the land and environment around them, their masculine identity, was in turn, shaped by it – and thus, the breadwinner role features heavily in Irish men's construction of what it traditionally meant to be a ‘good man’ in Ireland (Ní Laoire, 2001). Indeed this is framed in counter-distinction to what it meant to be a ‘good woman’; caregiver, domestic agent and the living embodiment of ‘Our Lady’; humble, pious, abstinent from alcohol and patterned for procreation (Inglis, 1997, 1998).

Perhaps the most compelling problem of this era was the stigmatization of sex and sexuality. Celibacy – or sex as a means of procreation - was a central feature of traditional Irish hegemonic masculinities, as was the notion of “the private family and heterosexual marriage” (Ferguson, 2002). The Catholic hierarchy in Ireland expected strict adherence to the compulsory celibacy rule and a form of indigenous hegemonic masculinity was cast around celibacy. In Ireland, sex went underground and erotic culture

was demonized, leading to a culture of secrecy around sex that gave rise to the violation and exploitation of women, children and less-masculine men; perpetrated - not exclusively – in the family home and through church and state led Magdalene laundries and industrial schools.

This social order which remained intact for over a century, was accelerated in the aftermath of the Great Famine (1845 – 1852) and slowly dissolved from the late 1960s and 1970s onwards as Ireland entered Europe and started to become more globalized (Whelan, 2005). In doing so, masculine forms of expression started to evolve into more pluralistic ways of being. In more recent decades, masculinity in Ireland has been complexly (re)shaped through constitutional legislation (Ferguson, 2002), transitional notions of familism (Cassidy, 2014, 2017), sporting institutions (Lloyd, 2000), anti-homophobic and feminist movements (Elkink et al., 2020; Ryan, 2010) and media and film (Cullingford, 2002; Ging, 2009).

With the onset of the 1990s, the country experienced unprecedented growth, with a sharp rise in the standard of living for the population as a whole. This colloquially became known as the *'Celtic Tiger'* – and marked, in terms of the gender order, a huge rise in the number of women, particularly married women, working outside the home. During this period, and against a backdrop of traditional masculine notions, Ging (2009) and Johnston & Morrison (2007) contend that many Irish men maintain an ambiguous understanding of their masculine identity. Clay J. Darcy (2019) contends that this ambiguity stems from a transition occurring in Irish society from traditional to contemporary masculinities. Predicated, for instance, in the proportion of women working in the Irish labour force; increasing from 28 per cent to 36 per cent between 1970 and 1996, and represented a new challenge for men to share domestic responsibilities and be as committed to child rearing and household duties as they are to the prestige of *'breadwinning'* (Ferguson, 2002). Thus, in late 20th century Ireland, conflict between the old and the new structures start to emerge. Clay J. Darcy (2019) claims that Irish gender constructs have been influenced by a recent shift in people's relationship with Irish religiosity, a rising economic climate, a more heterogeneous society and the growth of media influence consequently leaving *"the gender landscape in Ireland saturated with paradoxes and contradictions"* leaving the men often feeling misplaced, not fully knowing which stereotypes to follow and how to define one's masculinity (Práice, 2019). However, the outcomes of two recent Irish referendums - on marriage equality in 2015 and abortion in 2018 – have signified a distinct change among the Irish populace that is in sharp contrast with their long-standing conservative Catholic reputation (Elkink et al., 2020). Nonetheless, such progress has not come without its consequences, the decline in power of moral authorities such as the Catholic Church, and the rise of economic development and fast capitalism has been marked by a distinct individualisation (Ferguson, 2002), a decline in community engagement (Laoire, 2005); and internationally, the valorisation of idealised body images (Murray et al., 2013), pornography (Setty, 2022), and indeed loneliness (Cacioppo & Hawkey, 2009) to name but a few.

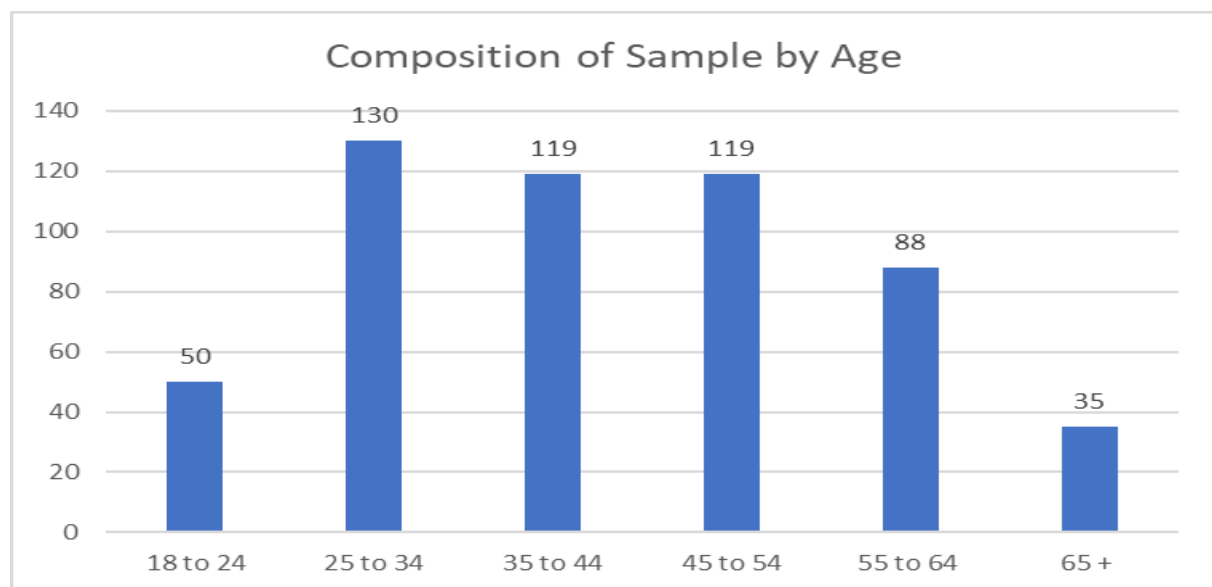
Given how damaging many masculine norms of behaviour and can be to individuals (of all genders) and varying social structures, it is important to analyse how masculinities are played out individually and socially. This study works to provide a snapshot of understanding into the meanings Irish men ascribe to being a man in contemporary Ireland. The following section details the research methodology employed to carry out this work.

Methodology

This study which comprised of up to 48 questions was based on the Man Box study which has been carried out in a number of countries across the world by Equimundo. The Man Box study stems from the need to answer a range of questions relating to what exactly it means to be a man, the expectations placed on men in their daily lives and in their relationships with others, and the extent to which meeting these expectations matter.

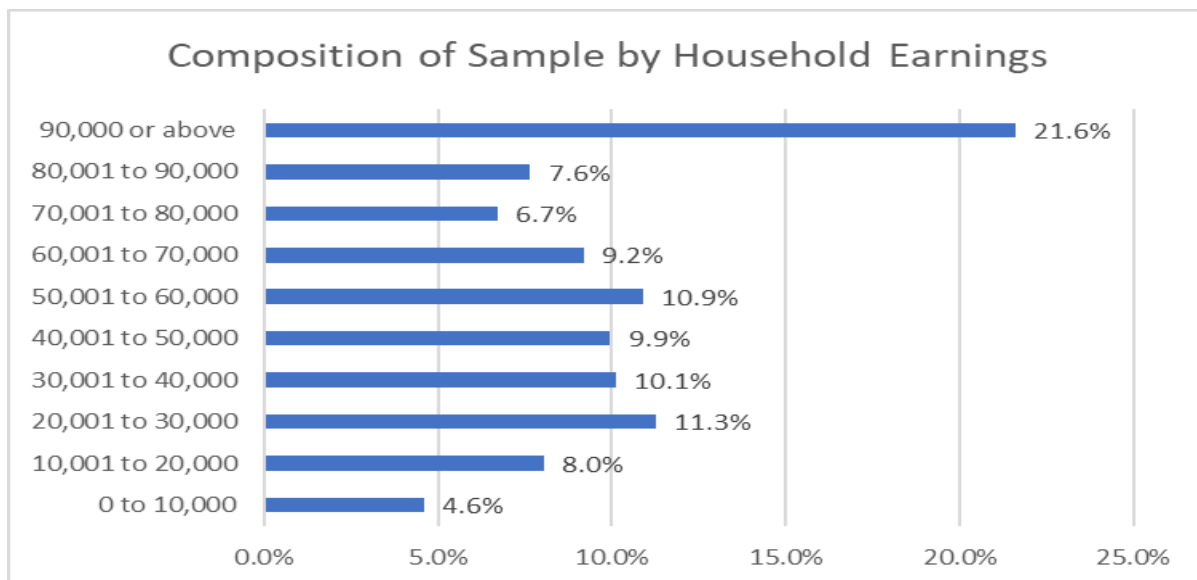
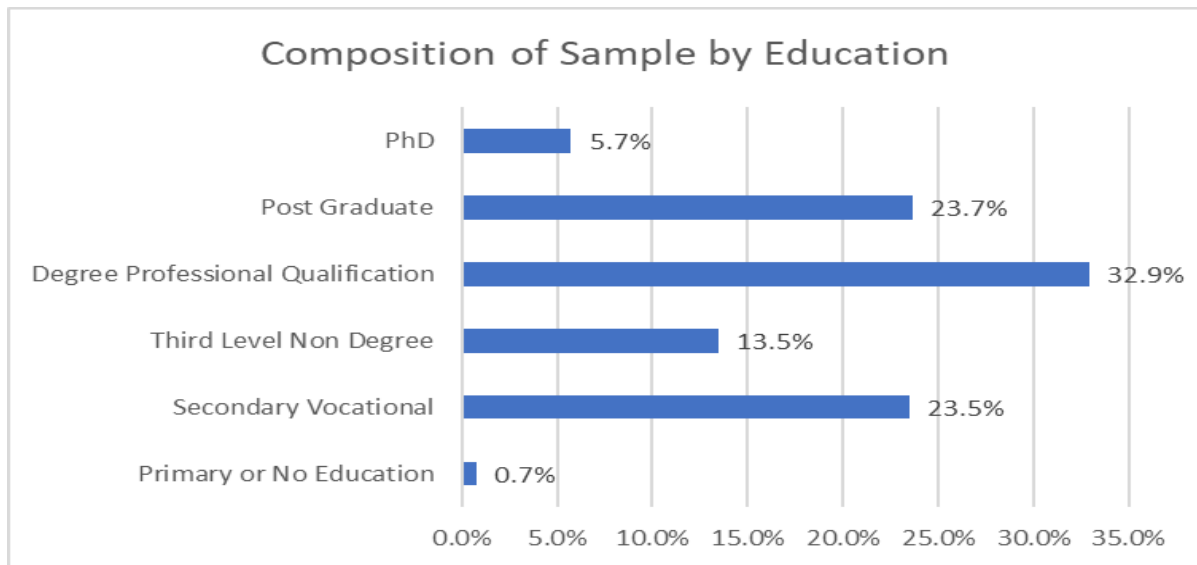
This study covers a range of topics including life satisfaction and self-confidence, friendship and support seeking, self- conceptions of attractiveness and the acceptability of violence. It was adopted and adapted for use in the Irish context with slight changes made in language and terminology. There were also questions added relating to the use of pornography, drinking and drug taking as well as questions on satisfaction with work, hours and pay.

The survey went live on Wednesday the 11th of May 2022, the sample is based on data taken from the survey website on Monday the 4th of July 2022. There were 541 fully completed responses to the survey and it is this data which forms the basis of our analysis.



The majority of the sample under consideration are aged between 25 and 54 (n = 368) with the 65+ group being the smallest followed by the 18 to 24 group.

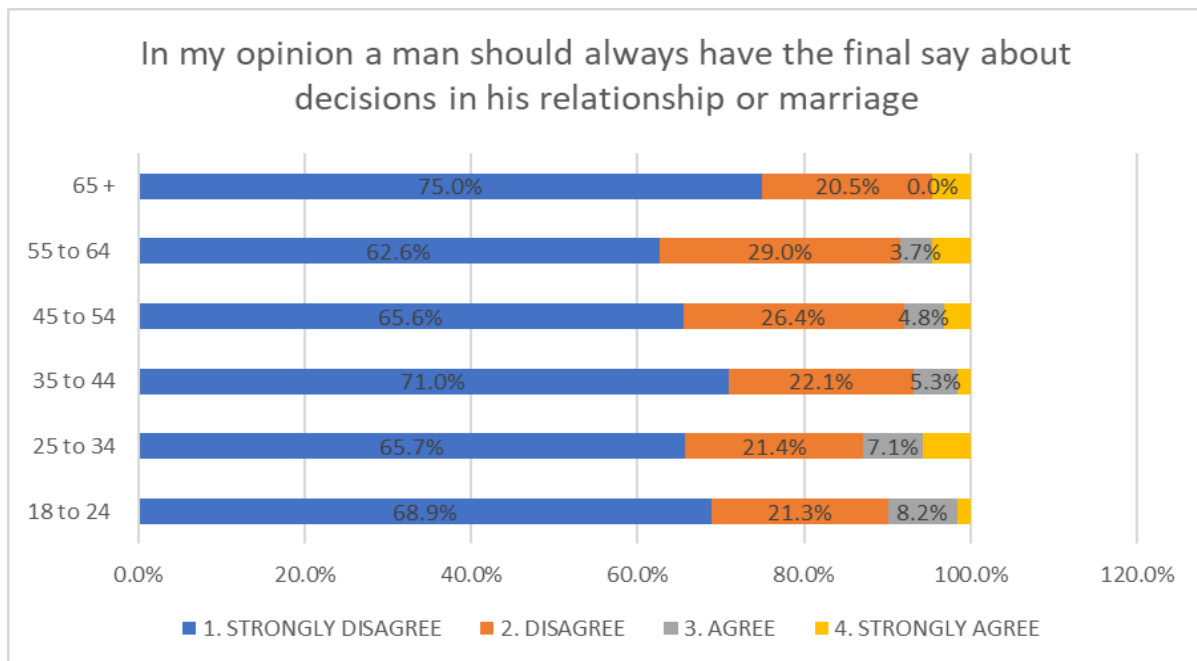
The sample gathered for this research is predominantly well educated with over 75% of respondents having some type of third level qualification. Of this, almost 30% of respondents reported having a postgraduate qualification, a further 32.9% having a primary degree and a further 13.5% reported having a non- degree third level qualification. The remaining 24.2% of respondents reported having a secondary, vocational, or primary school education.



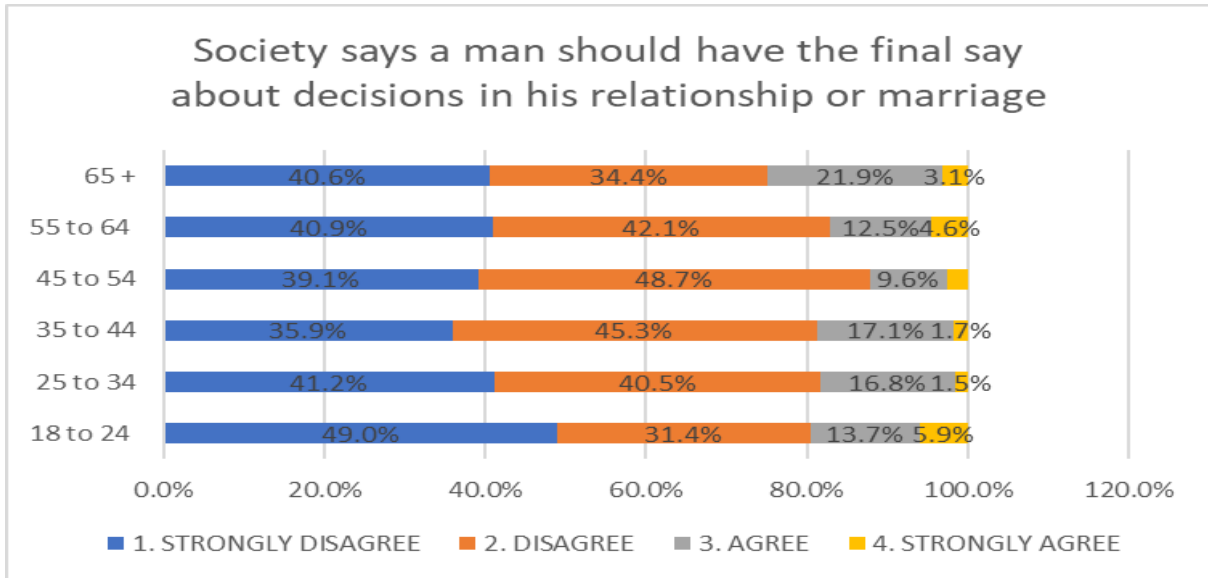
The sample is also predominantly wealthier than the average; figures reported by the Central Statistics Office put average weekly earnings for quarter 1 of 2022 at €880.37 which corresponds to an annual wage of €45,779.24. The amount of people in our sample who earn €50,000 or more is 56% with 21.6% of our participants reporting a household income of €90,000 or more.

Relationships

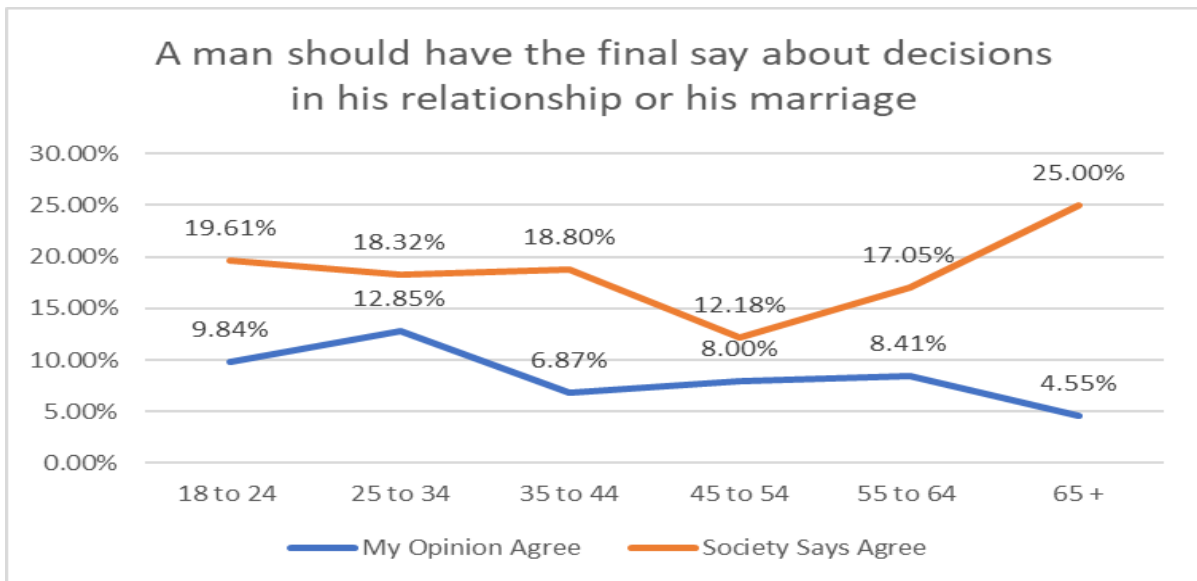
There were a number of questions asked which aimed to examine respondents' opinions to do with their intimate relationships. Traditional masculine roles see men as the main breadwinner in the household - and as such, being in charge and having the final say about all matters in the home. These beliefs were explicitly tested by asking participants to agree or disagree with the statements '*a man should always have the final say about decisions in his relationship or marriage*' and '*men should really be the ones to bring home money to provide for their families, not women*'.



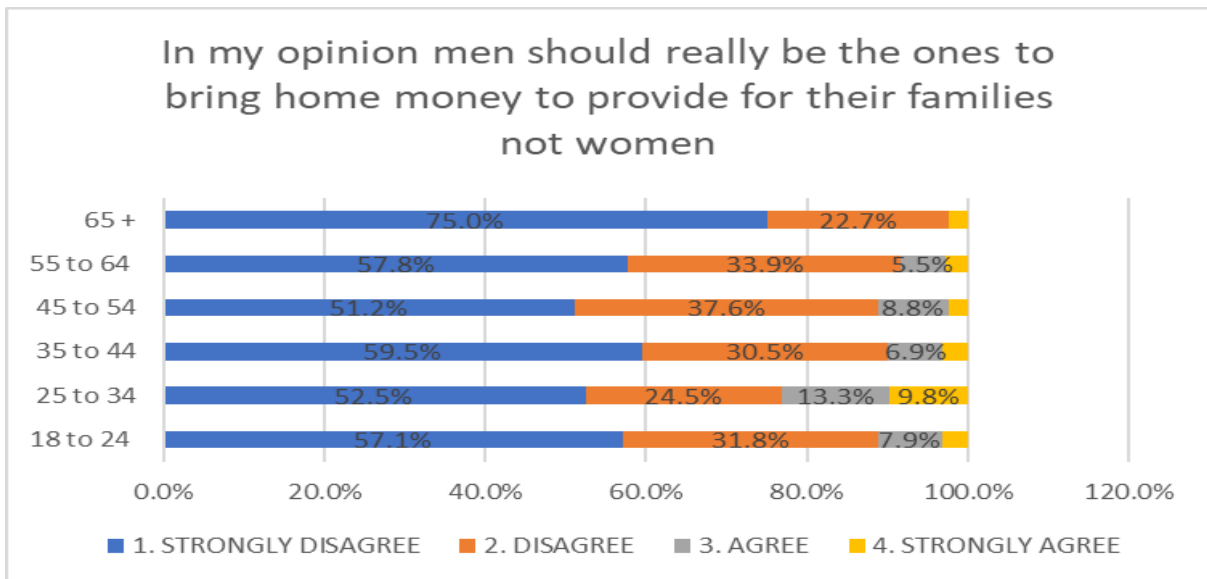
There was an overall rejection of this statement with mean values of 68.1% for strongly disagree and 23.5% for disagree. The age groups most likely to agree with this statement when it is asked in an 'In my opinion' format are the two youngest which means that the highest prevalence of agreement with this statement is found in those aged between 18 and 34. These figures however are still quite low with mean figures for agree/strongly agree being 9.8% of 18 to 24 year olds and 12.9% for 25 to 34 year olds.



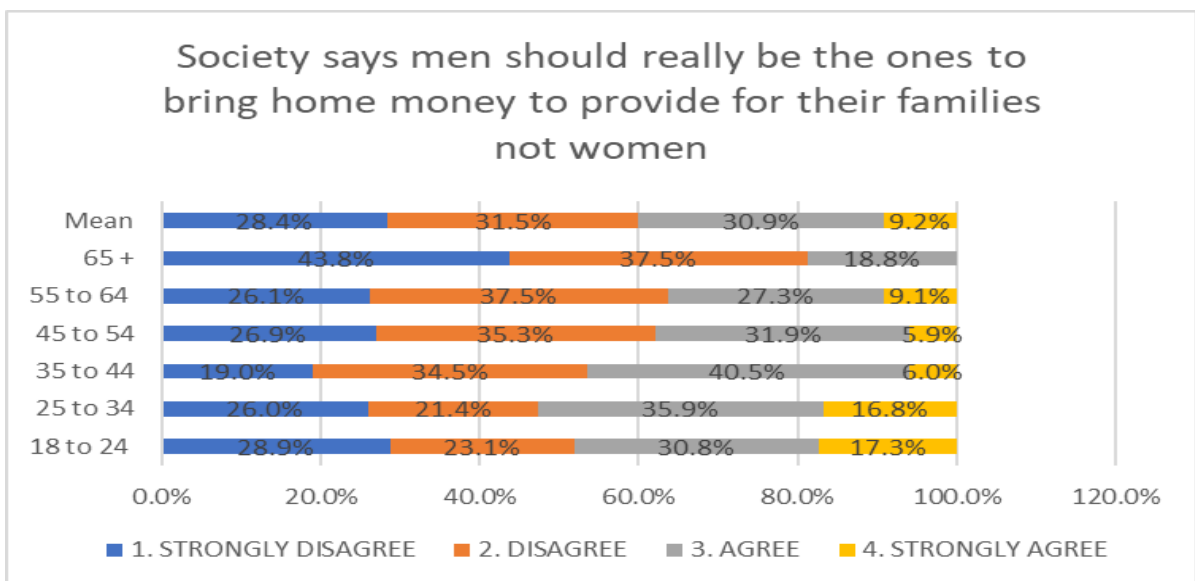
When the question was asked in a 'society says' format participants were far more likely to agree with the statement. The majority of respondents disagreed strongly with this statement with the mean score for strongly disagree at 41% and the score for disagree at 40%. These figures however are far lower than they were when asked in the 'in my opinion' format.



The next question which examined gender roles within relationships was concerned directly with breadwinning and masculinity. The statement put to respondents was 'men should be the ones to bring home money to provide for their families, not women'.



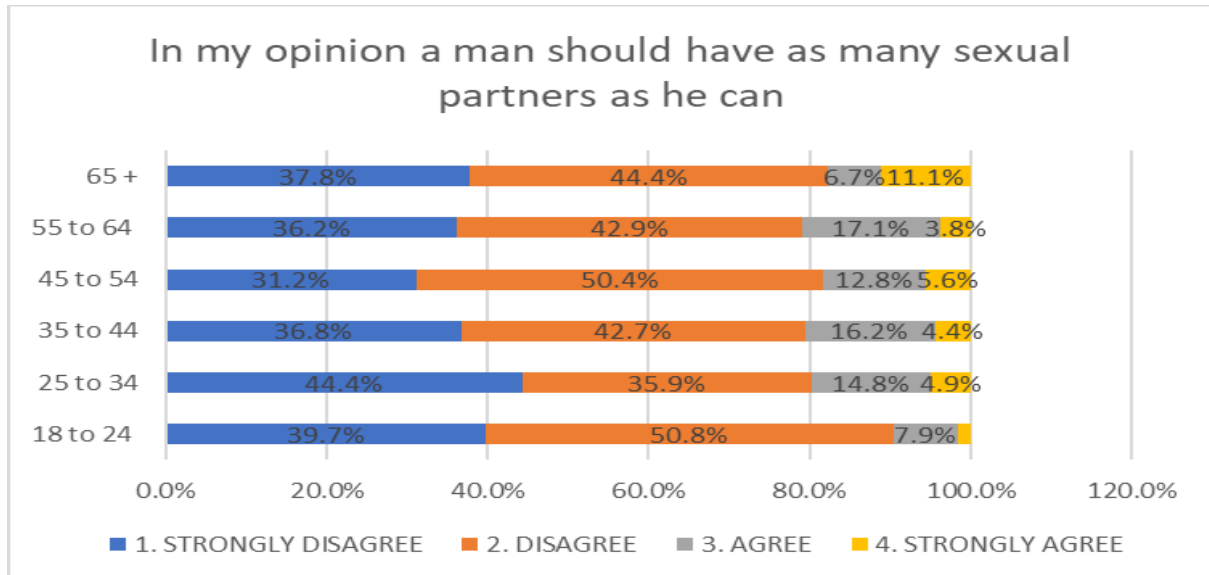
Perhaps, surprisingly, the largest cohorts to agree with this statement are the two youngest with 11.1% of 18 to 24 year olds and 23.1% of 25 to 34 year olds agreeing or strongly agreeing. This is surprising as most people in these age groups will have lived through a period of labour market transformation which saw a large increase in female participation. Overall, the majority strongly disagreed with this statement with a mean value of 58.9% strongly disagreeing and a further 30.17% disagreeing.



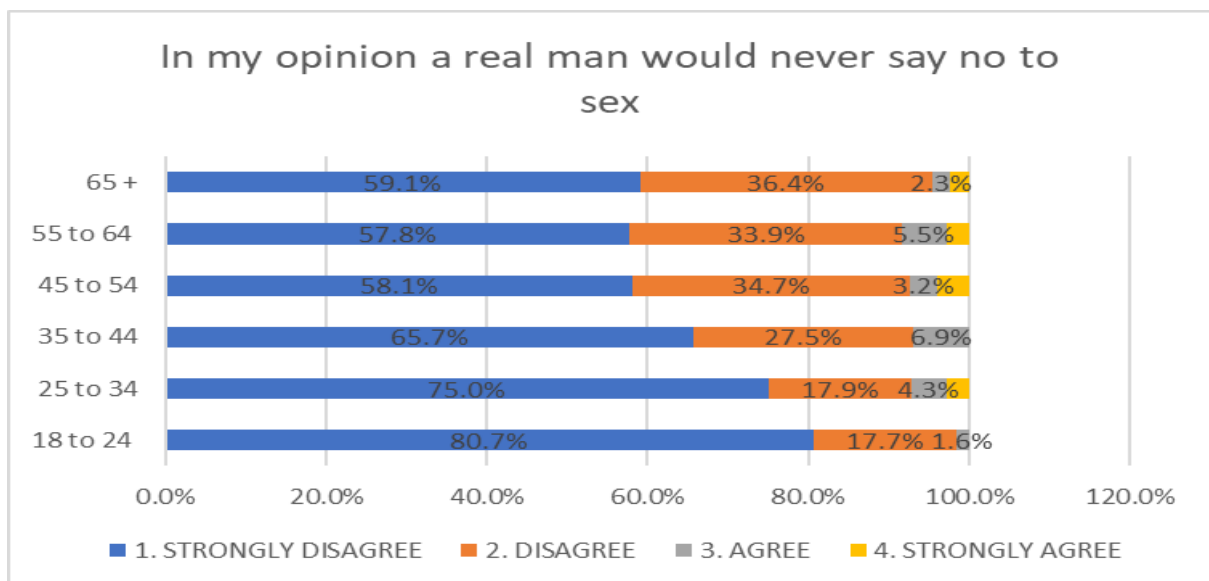
Once again, there is a noticeable difference between 'I think' and what 'Society says' in relation to pressures among men to be the main family provider; with the latter tending towards more conservative views. The mean scores for agreeing with what 'society says' are 30.9% agree and 9.2% strongly agree. It is again perhaps surprising that younger participants were more likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement yet according to our sample of respondents the most conservative and traditional beliefs with regard to breadwinning and relationships are found among the younger participants.

Sexuality

The survey asked two core questions which related to sexuality, the first question asked participants to agree or disagree with the statement *'in my opinion a man should have as many sexual partners as he can'*.

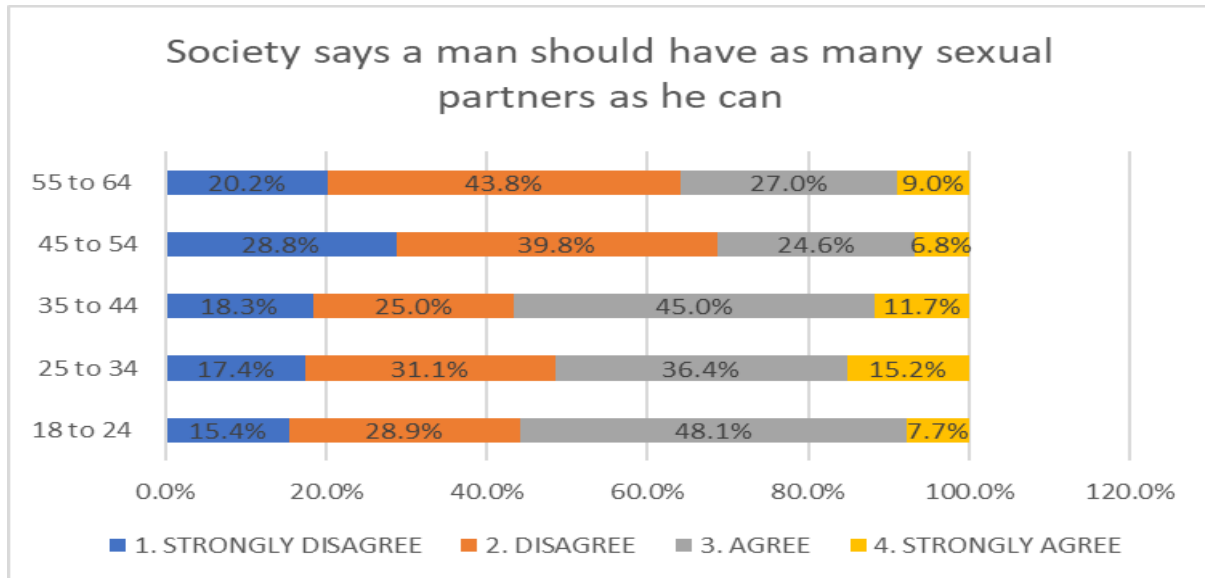


As is evident from the above graph, overall, analysis delivered a mean disagree/strongly disagree score of over 82% across all age groups. Similarly, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement *'in my opinion a real man would never say no to sex'*. Overall, the mean response of disagree or strongly disagree is 94.1% with the strongly disagree number at 66%; this demonstrates a view which was firmly, and almost unanimously rejected by participants.

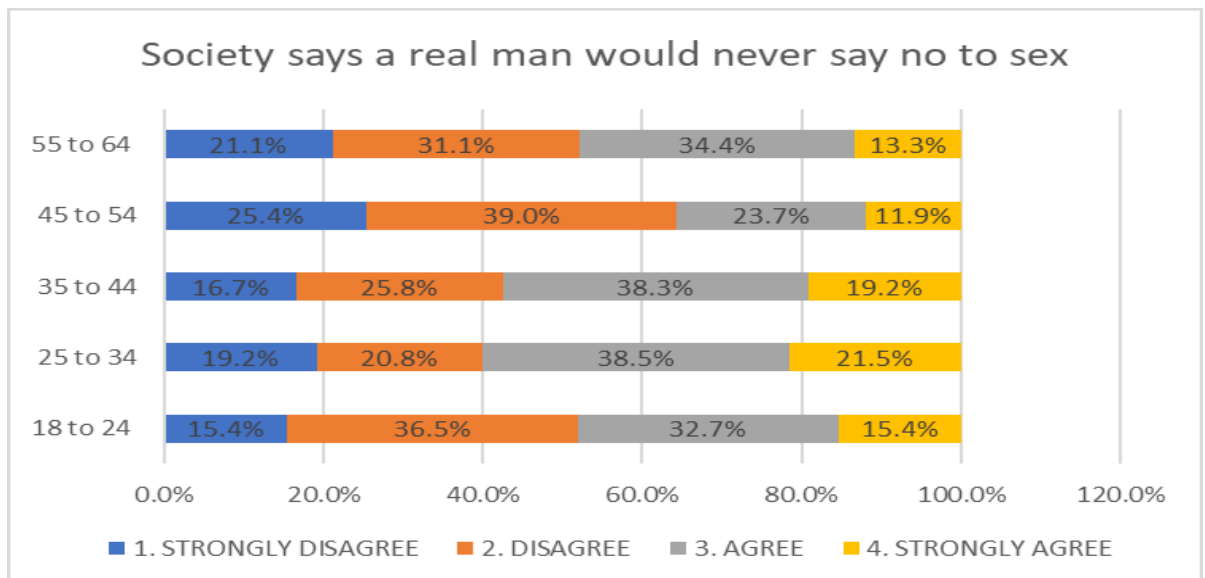


Both of these figures strongly suggest a firm rejection of the idea of sex as a conquest, or as a score to be run up. This rejection is uniform across the different age groups. It is interesting, however, to note

the difference between the ‘in my opinion’ statements and the answers given when respondents were asked the same questions in relation to the ‘society says’ statements.



When participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘society says a man should have as many sexual partners as he can’ the mean score for disagree and strongly disagree was at 55.3% which is down from 82% when the question was asked in the context of an ‘I think’ statement. Similarly, the statement ‘society says’ a real man would never say no to sex had a mean disagree and strongly disagree score of 53.6% which is down from 94.1% when the question was asked as an ‘I think’ statement.

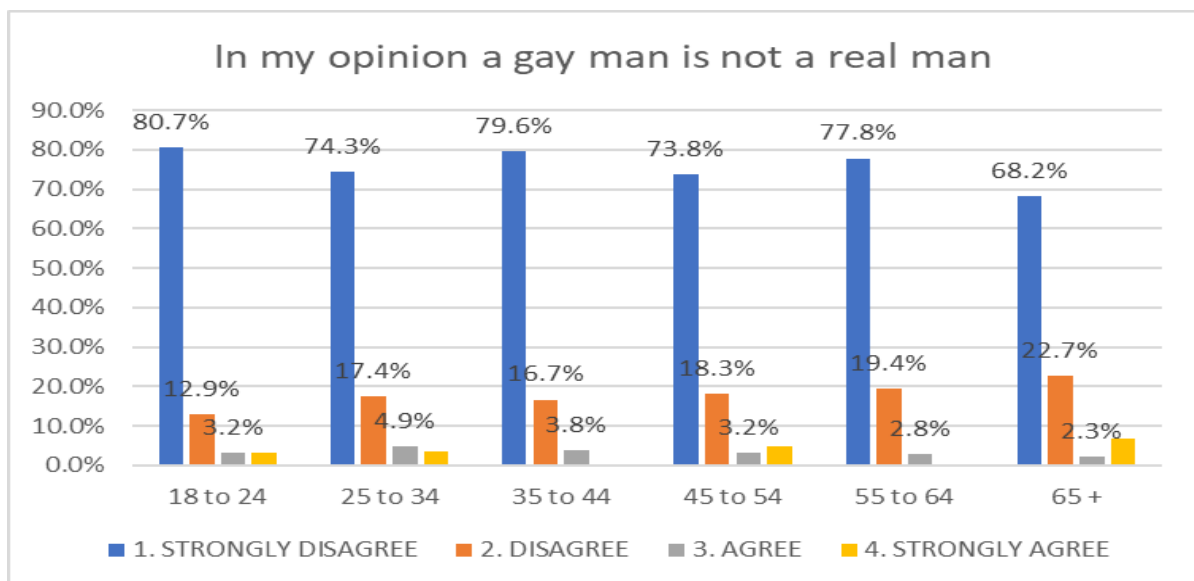


These figures show that when discussing sexuality in terms of their own opinion men expressed views which run counter to many traditional forms of masculinities which see sex as a conquest and something that should be chased down as much as possible as a means of reinforcing and displaying masculinity.

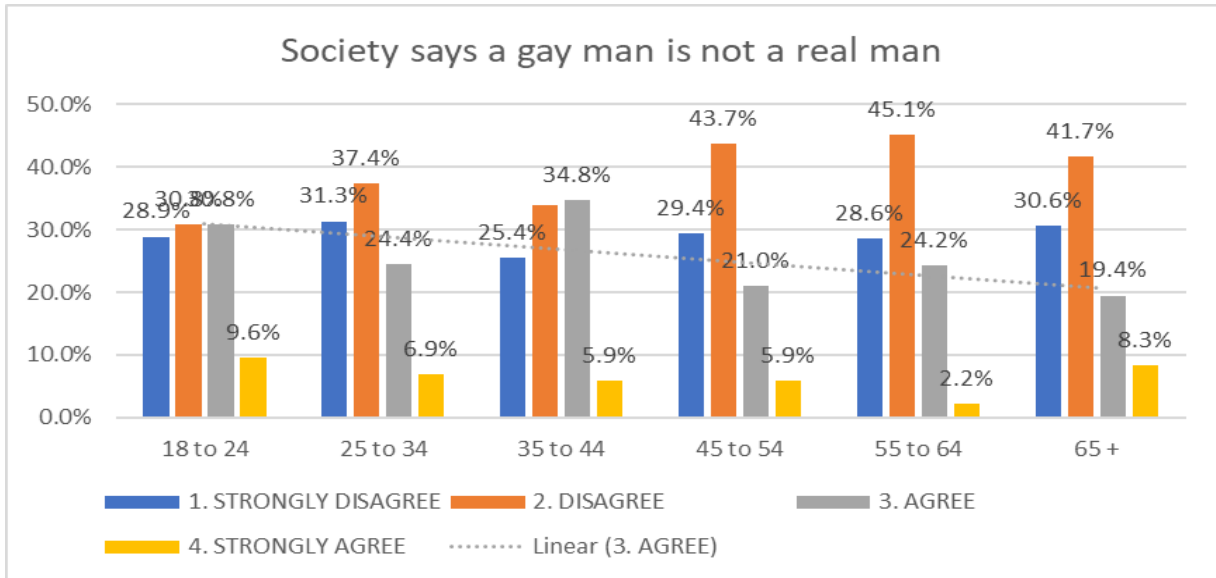
This changed, however, when participants were asked about societal norms concerning men’s responses to sex, with large increases evident in sex as conquest style opinions which were attributed to wider societal norms.

Homophobia

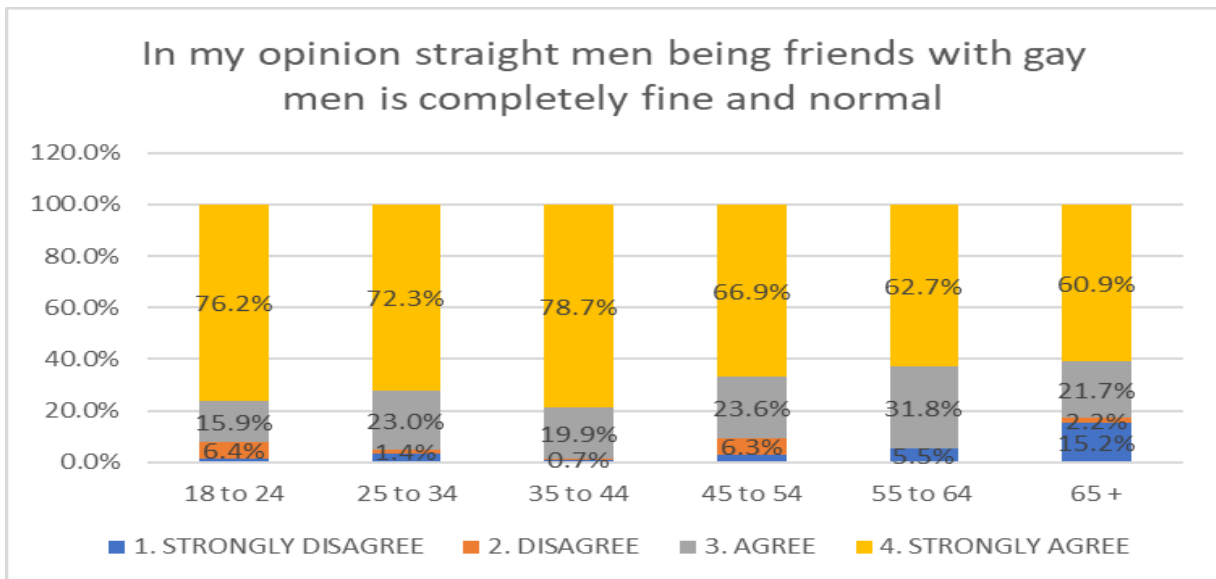
There were six questions which examined attitudes towards homosexuality. The following statements were presented to participants who were asked if they agreed or disagreed with them: ‘a gay man is not a real man,’ ‘straight men being friends with gay men is completely fine and normal,’ ‘my friends would give me a hard time if they saw me hanging out with someone who is gay’, ‘my friends would give me a hard time if they saw me hanging out with someone who is or looked transgender’.



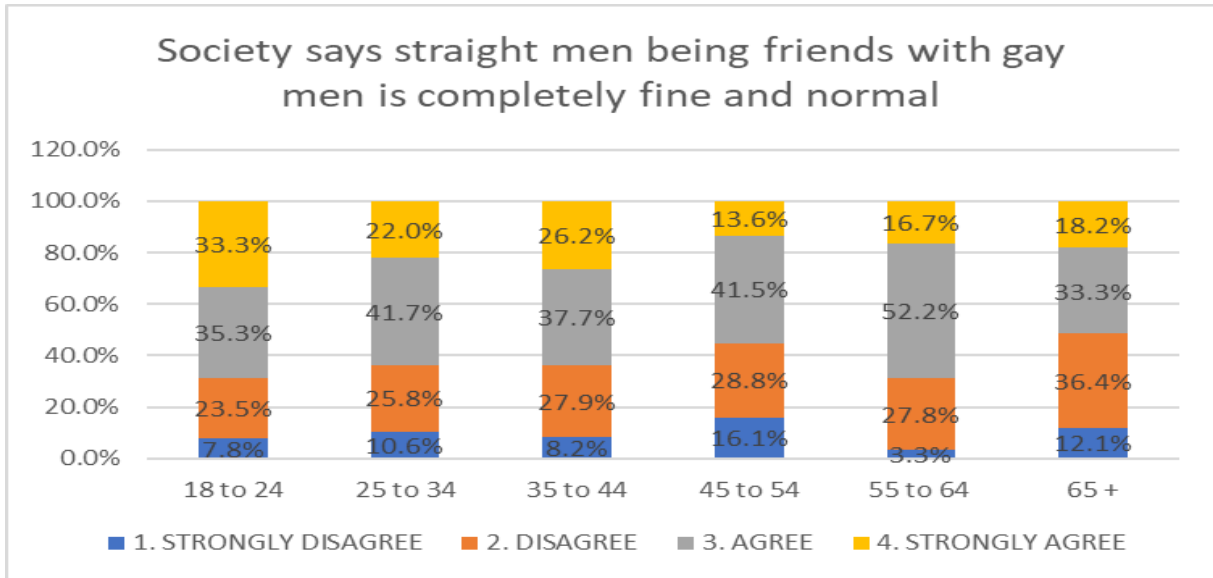
This statement is one which was resoundingly rejected, the mean figure for combined disagree and strongly disagree across all age groups is 93.6% with the mean strongly disagree figure being 75.7%. While this is a clear rejection of a homophobic statement it is not as straightforward when participants were asked to respond to the same question in the ‘society says’ format.



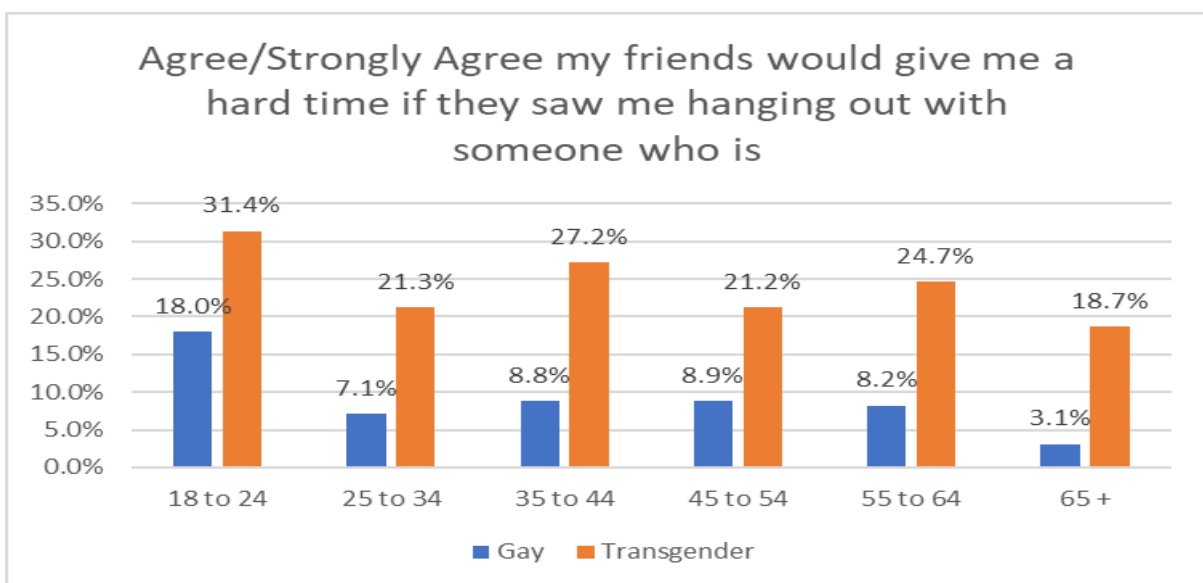
The mean figure for strongly disagree/agree with the statement society says a gay man is not a real man is 67.8% which differs significantly from the 'I think' figure. This reflects the idea that participants believe society to be significantly more homophobic than they themselves are. This belief was also found in the data taken from the other questions which followed the same pattern.



The statement 'I think straight men being friends with gay men is completely fine and normal' gives a mean figure for agree and strongly agree of 92.3%, yet for the 'society says' figure this drops to just under 62%.



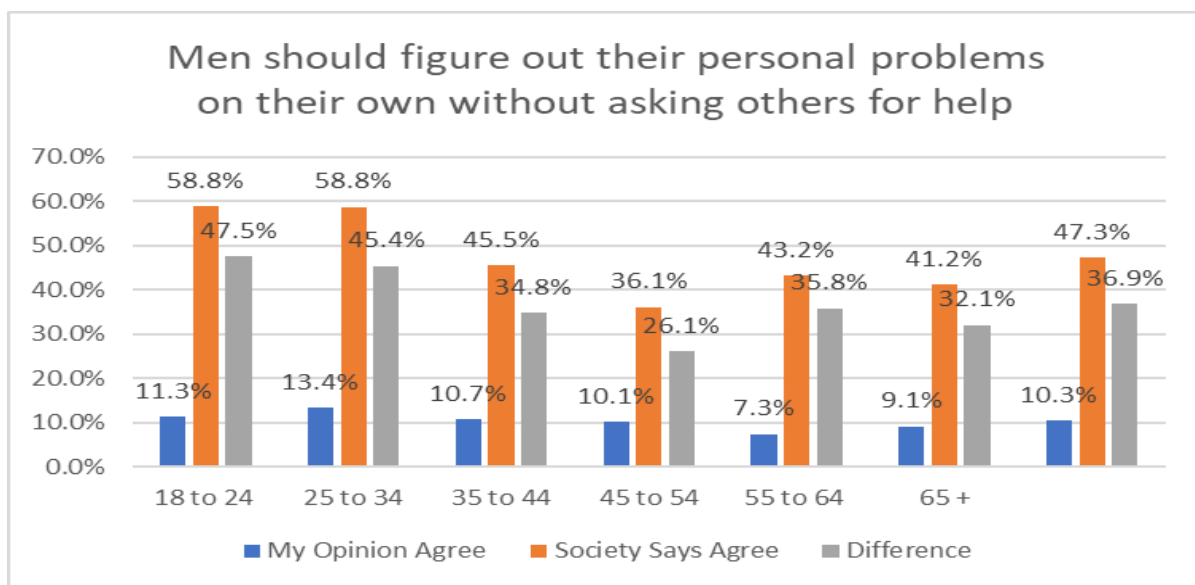
The final questions on this topic asked participants to respond to the question ‘my friends would give me a hard time if they saw me hanging out with someone who is gay or looked gay’, and ‘my friends would give me a hard time if they saw me hanging out with someone who is transgender or looked transgender’. The rationale behind these questions is that of presenting respondents with a real world applied example which they could consider and give their opinion on. These questions aimed to measure the social acceptability within their own peer groups of both gay and transgender people. It is firstly important to note that the majority of participants rejected both statements with mean numbers of 71.6% strongly disagreeing and 19.4% disagreeing with the statement with regard to a gay person and a mean figure of 51.7% strongly disagreed and 24.1% disagreed with the statement with regard to a transgender person. This shows that in broad terms the vast majority of respondents displayed social and peer group acceptance of both gay and transgender people.



It is apparent however that there is significantly less peer group acceptability of transgender people with participants being two to three times more likely to express agreement with the statement when it was applied to them. As well as this 18 to 24 year olds were significantly more likely to agree with this statement and to express peer group reservations about socialising with both gay and transgender people.

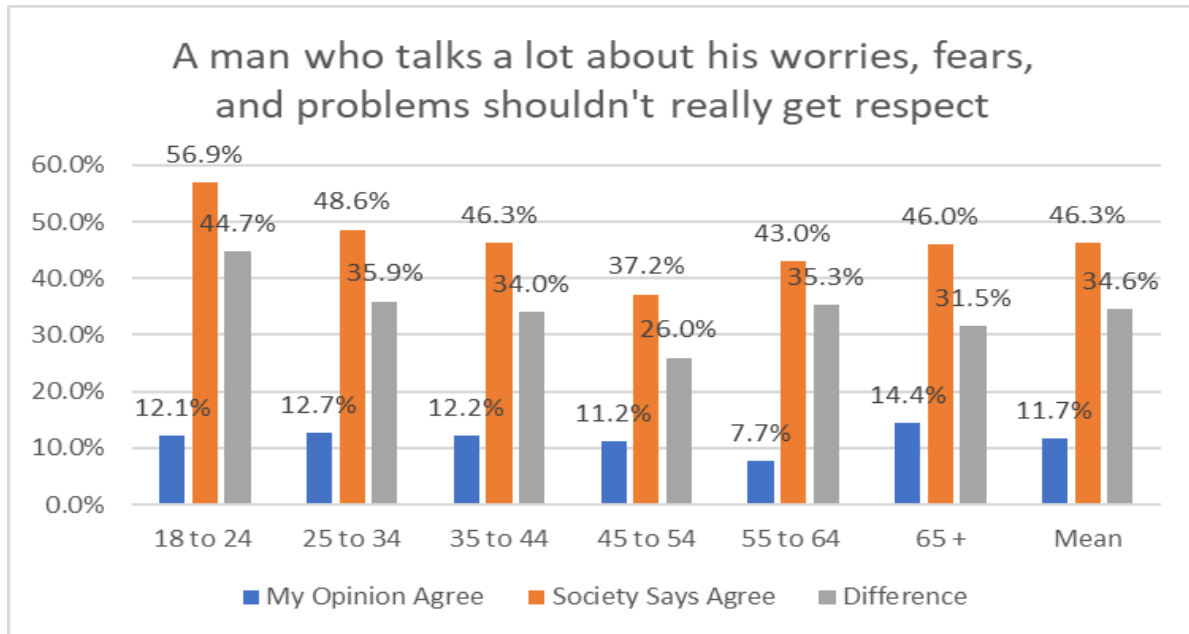
Stoicism and Self-Sufficiency

One of the key markers of traditional masculinities is embodying stoic traits; remaining strong, self-sufficient and removed from help-seeking. Ideals of stoic masculinity can be particularly harmful as they foster beliefs that men should avoid turning to others for help when they need it. This was explicitly tested in a number of questions in the survey, the first was the statement that *'men should figure out their personal problems on their own without asking others for help'*. This statement was presented in both the 'in my opinion' and 'society says' format and as with many of the other questions there was a significant difference between the two. The graph below clusters the 'agree' and 'strongly agree' answers and presents them according to age.



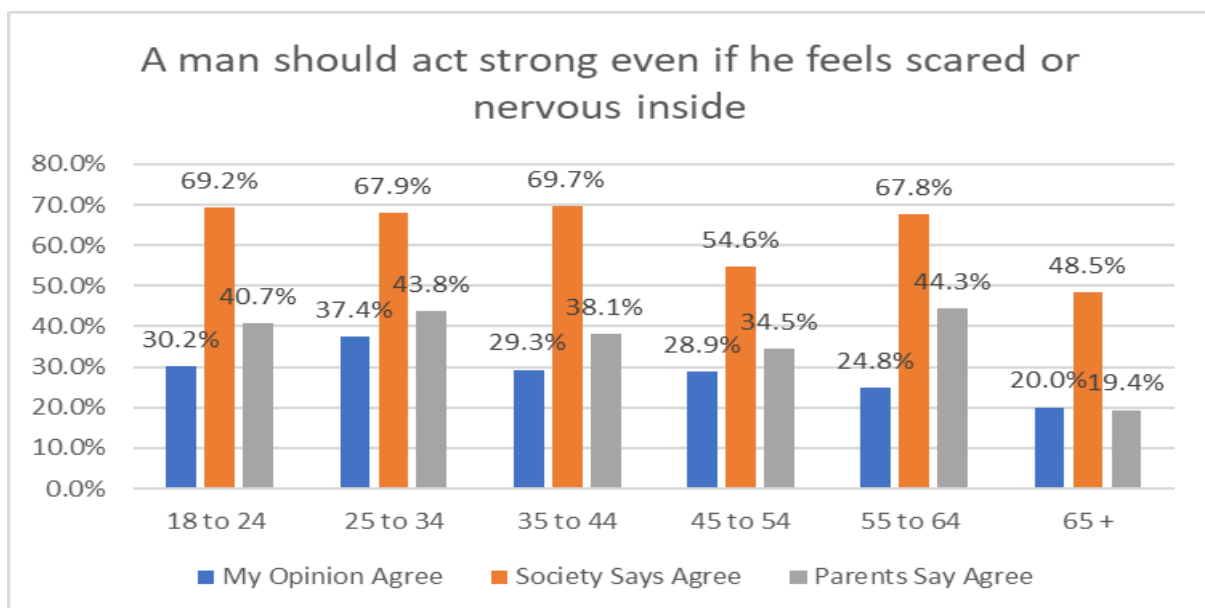
There are significant differences between the 'I think' and 'society says' answers with the largest differences found in the two youngest age groups. 18 to 24 year olds were more than five times more likely to think that society says they should figure out problems on their own and 25 to 34 year olds were over four times more likely. The mean difference between 'I think' and 'society says' statements is 36.9%. This tells us a number of things, firstly when respondents answered the question in as an 'I think' statement they strongly rejected it with a mean 'strongly disagree' score of 58.8% and a mean 'disagree' score of 30.9%. This means that at the level of their own opinions they firmly reject the idea that men should figure out problems on their own and should not seek out help if they need it. At the same time, however, they did not see such beliefs as being held by everyone around them. There was a

similar dynamic at play in the responses to the statement ‘a man who talks about his worries, fears and problems shouldn’t get respect. In fact, the responses were almost identical between the two questions.



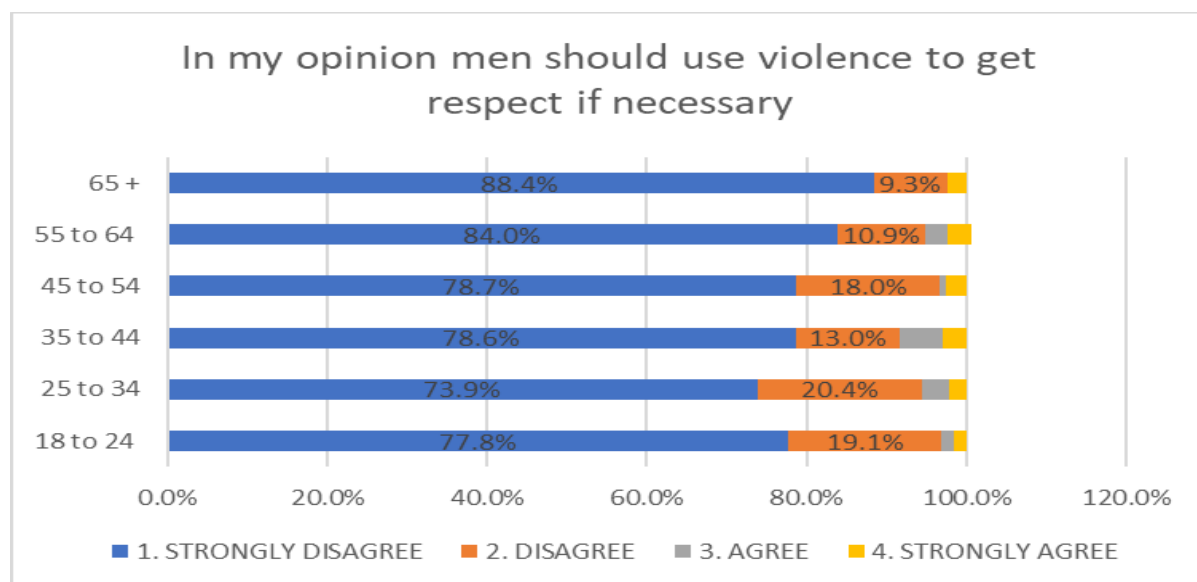
The youngest age group were, by some distance, most likely to think that wider societal attitudes would tend towards a lack of respect for a man who seeks out help. The numbers for the ‘I think’ statement strongly rejected this with a mean of 59.3% who strongly disagreed and 28.6% who disagreed. In terms of agreeing with the in my opinion statement these were similar across the age ranges with a mean of 11.7%.

The final question which aimed to elicit responses relating to stoicism made the statement ‘a man should act strong even if he feels scared or nervous inside’. This question was asked in three ways, namely the usual format of ‘I think’ and ‘society tells me’ but also in the form of ‘my parents taught me’.



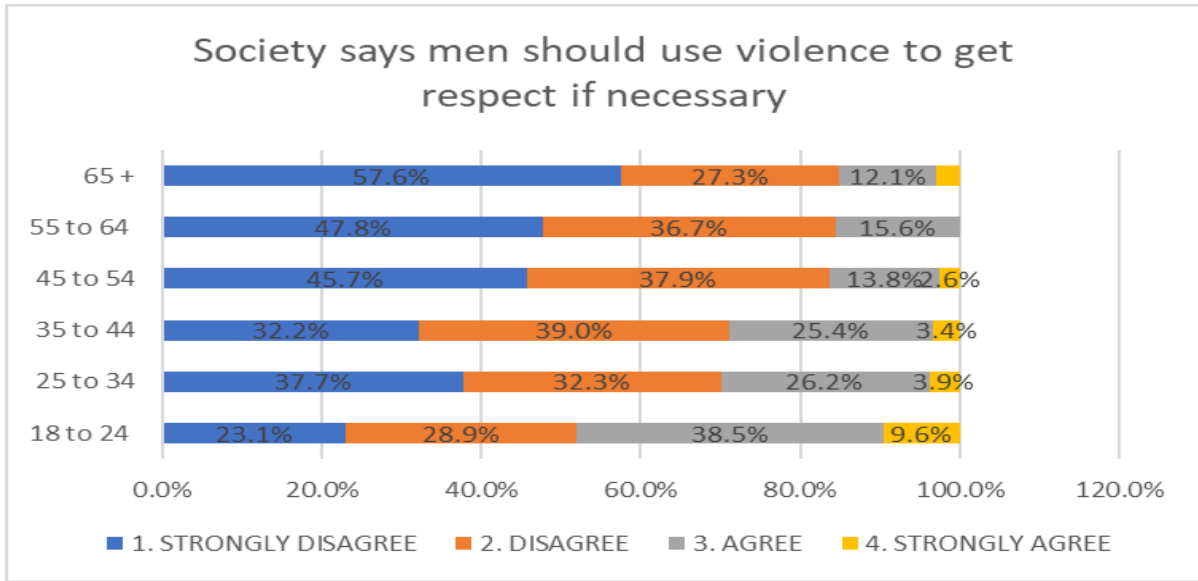
Violence

There were three questions in the survey which aimed to measure attitudes towards the acceptability of violence. The statement ‘a man should use violence to get respect if necessary’ was asked as both an ‘I think’ and as a ‘society says’ statement. In a similar vein a question was asked ‘my partner definitely expects me to use violence to defend my reputation if I have to’. This was a way of asking the same question but of anchoring it within the context of an intimate relationship.

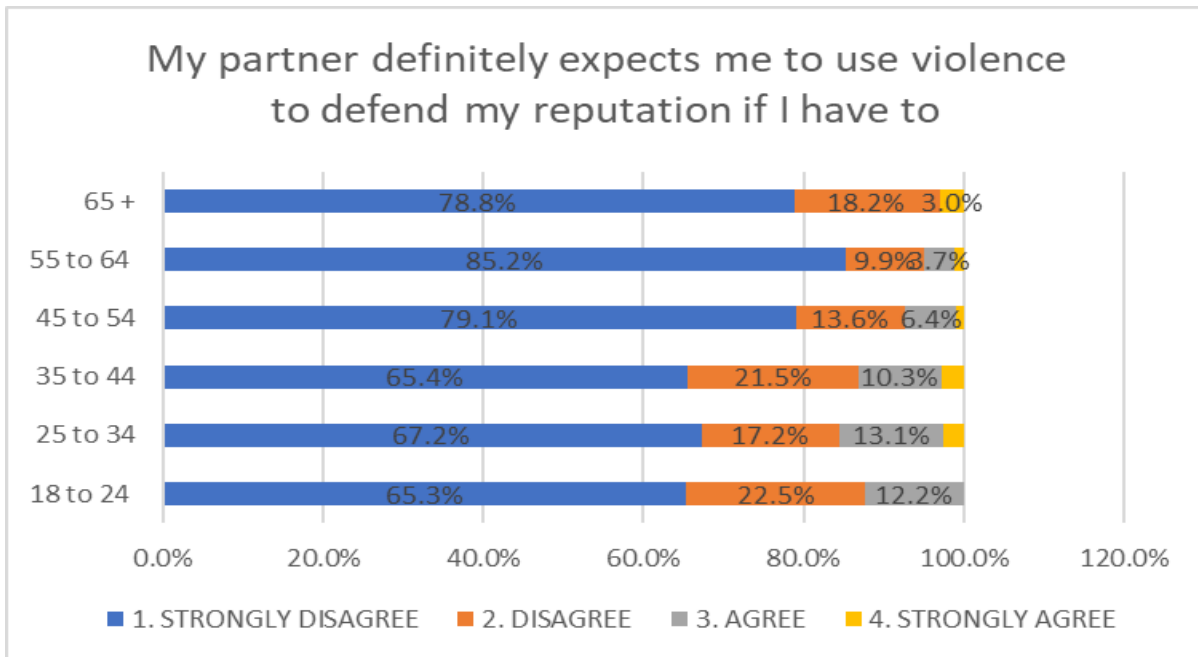


On average less than 5% of respondents agreed with this statement with a mean of over 80% of responses strongly disagreeing. If the strongly disagree and agree statements are merged the mean score is over 95% which shows that not only is there is very low level of acceptability with regard to the use of violence but that there is strong sentiment against it.

As with most other topics there is a strong change of sentiment when the question is asked on the basis of ‘society thinks’ as opposed to ‘in my opinion’. In this instance there are marked increases in the younger age groups of people who believe societal norms around violent masculinity are still in place. The percentage of 18 to 24 year olds who strongly agree/agree with the statement when it is presented on ‘in my opinion’ basis is 3% yet this increases to 48% when it is presented on a ‘society says’ basis. Similarly the mean percentage for agreeing with this statement is 4.7% when presented as an ‘I think’ statement, yet this rises to 25.7% when presented as ‘society says’. This means that on average participants were five times more likely to think that comparative to their own beliefs, wider societal norms would expect them to use violence to get respect if required.

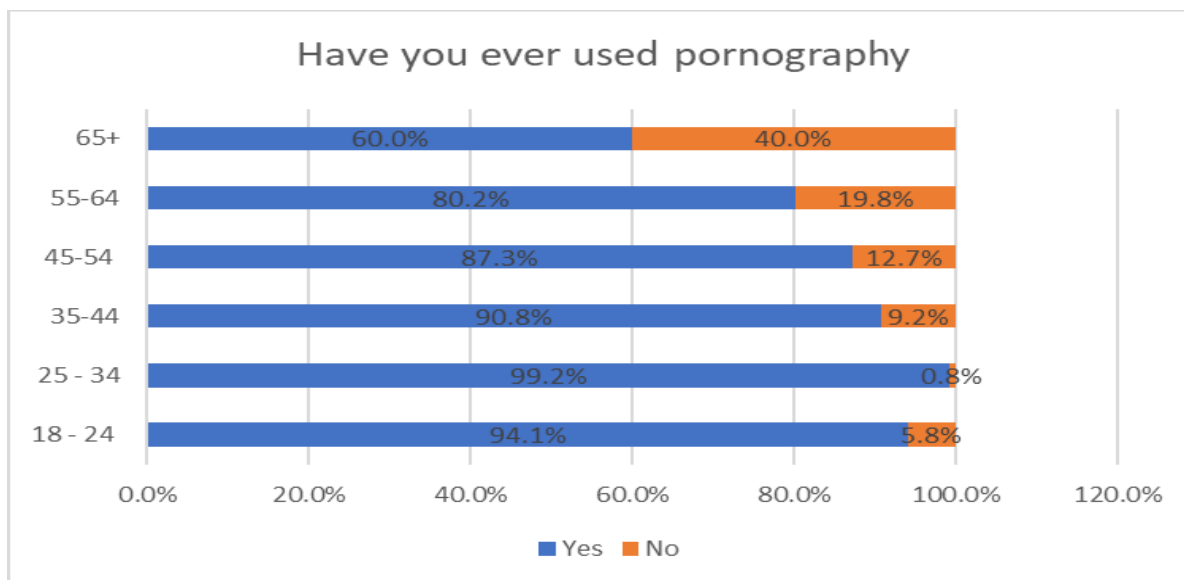


The final question on violence was purposefully nested within a specified social relationship. This was presented as a statement *'my partner definitely expects me to use violence to defend my reputation if I have to'*. This statement was significantly rejected by participants with a mean disagree and strongly disagree figure of 90.4%; yet, there were small but significant pockets within the sample which agreed or strongly agreed with it. The three youngest age categories have a mean agree and strongly agree figure of 13.6% with the 25 to 34 age category. While the number of participants who agreed with this statement was significantly higher than the 'I think' answers, it was still significantly less than those of the 'society tells me' answers.

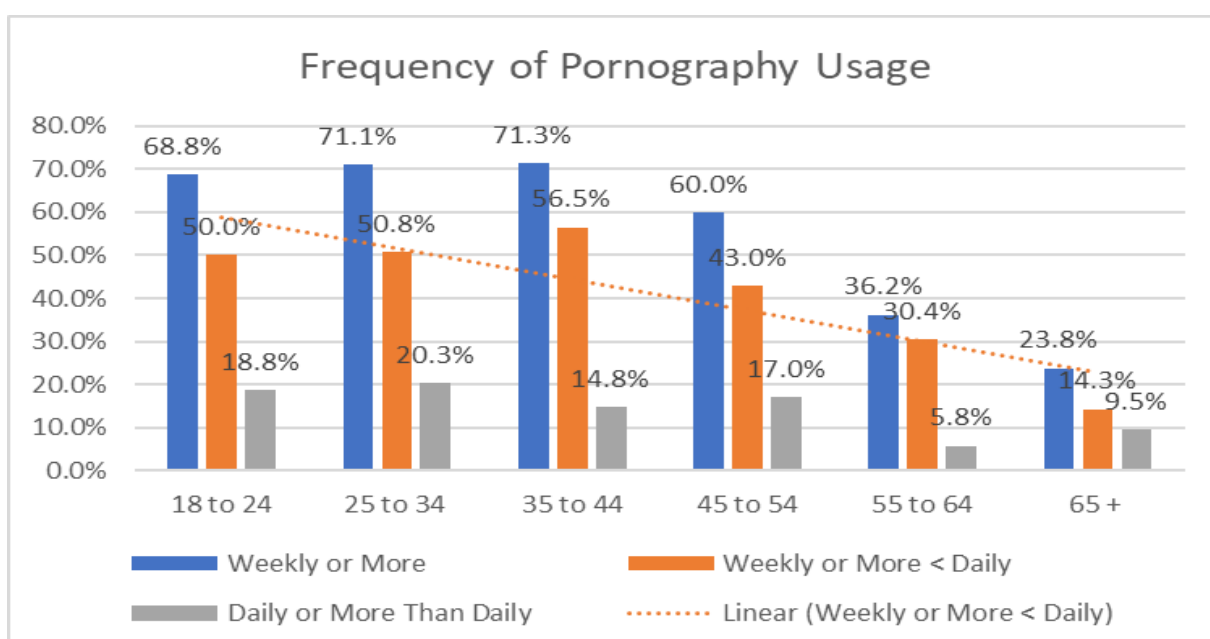


Pornography

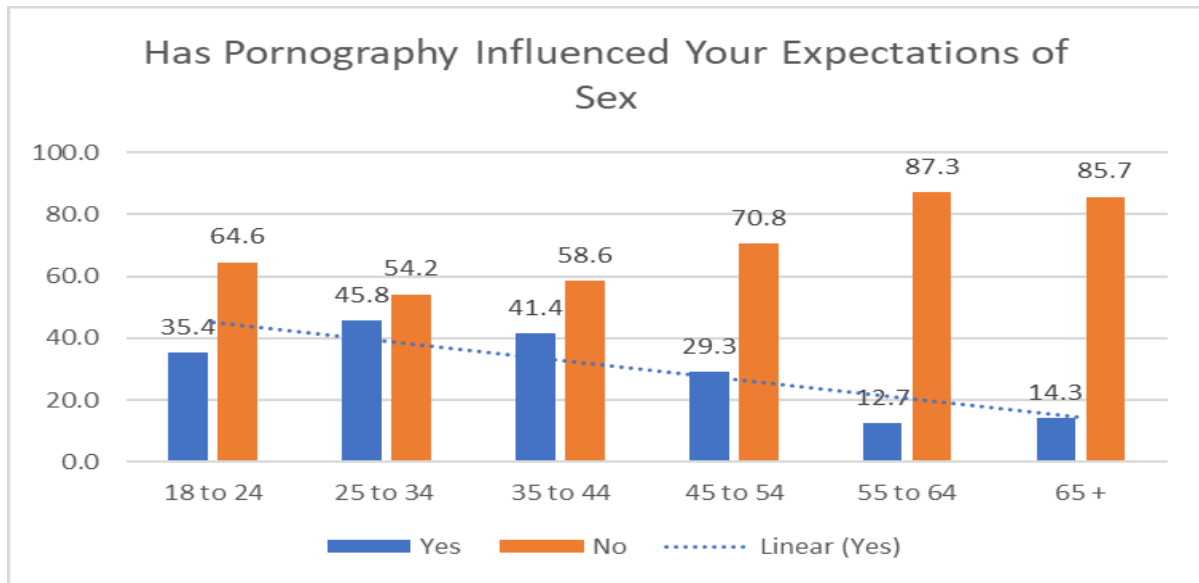
The Survey asked respondents up to 5 questions regarding their use of pornography. *Have you ever used pornography, what age were you when you first saw pornographic material, how frequently do you use pornography, has pornography influenced your expectations of sex, if yes how?*



11.3% of respondents answered that they had never used pornography with most of these non-users found in the older age categories. It is perhaps unsurprising to see that the prevalence of usage is lowest among older respondents with those aged 65 or over being more than twice as likely to report having never used pornography than the 55 to 64 age group and four times as likely to report having never used it than the 35 to 44 age group. The age group with the lowest number of non-users was the 25 to 34 group who had a mere .08%.



Perhaps the most striking data from these questions relates to the reported frequency of usage of pornography. The three youngest age groups have a mean figure of 70.4% of participants who reported using pornography weekly or more and a mean figure just under 18% of participants who reported using pornography on a daily or more than daily basis. If the 45 to 54 age group are included in this the mean figure for daily or more than daily usage rates rises to 21.9% of respondents. This means that from the sample taken for this survey on average over a fifth of all respondents under the age of 55 reported using pornography on a daily or more than daily basis.



The next questions related to whether or not pornography influenced expectations of sex. Across all age groups the majority of respondents reported that it did not influence their expectations of sex although as is evident above there were high numbers who reported that pornography did influence their expectations of sex. For those aged 44 or younger the mean number of those who stated that pornography influenced their expectations of sex was 40.88%. As is evident in all the questions about pornography usage the numbers go lower as we go up through the age ranges. 30. The final question in this section asked how pornography had influenced their expectations of sex. This section was an open text box which gave participants the chance to type in whatever they wished. The picture below is a word cloud which was generated using the text input by participants. The table below shows selected responses.



<p>Unrealistic ideas about what girls want from sex. Makes you believe you have to be clean shaven in the private area. Also influences men into wanting to try anal sex</p> <p>It created false expectations that I wasn't aware of and poorly influenced my early sex life</p> <p>The way a woman should look, hyper unrealistic, focuses on the wrong side of sex,</p> <p>It has objectified sexual partners ... expect more 'kinky' sex, oral sex etc</p> <p>Expect Porn to mirror real life which it doesn't</p> <p>the body expectation especially for men are unrealistic and the way they have sex is completely dissatisfying for the men and women involved and also the sex industry as a whole turns what should be an act of love, passion and connection into a tradable commodity and teaches young men to view women as objects they can use for sexual gratification in return for money which is every bit as harmful for them as women</p> <p>By putting women in a sexual service role</p>	<p>Broadened my idea of what sex can be beyond penis in hole</p> <p>I expect my partner to want to try (and enjoy) what I've watched</p> <p>Putting pressure on my partner to try new things in the bedroom</p> <p>Expect more than standard "boring"</p> <p>Ideas, fantasies</p> <p>has influenced positions I've tried and wanted to try; has made me conscious of how I look whilst having sex and the noises I make</p> <p>Showed more methods and ways to provide pleasure to your partner</p> <p>Broadened my horizons</p> <p>How you would like your partner to dress for sex</p>
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Makes me feel ashamed when realistic sexual things occur because it's so picture perfect and easy in pornography	It taught me that sex can be creative and humorous, and fun; it taught me that it's dirty only when you're doing it right, that prudence about it is over rated, and that conditional inhibitions are done away with once you dare to experiment
I should last longer and be able to get an erection again very fast	
Puts pressure on to perform	It influenced me to not seek out, and to actively reject potential partners who don't share similar expectations with me. In general it helped me lose the conditioning to be ashamed of it, and to turn myself into a more sex positive person
Size, length of performance	
Makes it difficult to ejaculate	More open to trying different things
Made me feel I'll never be able to satisfy a partner	Technique
It essentially makes real sex a disappointment	Experimentation and Exploration
Makes me feel inadequate when it comes to the real thing. I feel if I never used porn would probably be more confident.	

Discussion

What does it mean to be a man in Ireland today? Do these expectations matter – and are they different among different cohorts in society? In this interim report we explore these variables with particular considerations for core issues such as gender roles, sex, sexuality, social inclusion (and exclusion), individualisation and marginalisation. All of which were analysed through a microcosm of more pressing contemporary elements such as stoicism, homophobia, pornography, relationships and sense of self. Over the decades there has been drastic change in Irish society – with watershed moments of social change for members of all genders – indeed, some of the topics raised in this interim report may seem outdated. While good progress has been made in freeing people from gender-based judgements around what are acceptable roles and behaviours for men and women, there remains much to do to reach a situation of true equality.

Do men resist or internalize these social pressures? This study shows that many men may distance themselves somewhat from traditional notions of masculinity, or patriarchal order - but they don't reject them outright, particularly in the context of how they perceived society at large to internalise notions of masculine expression. Thus, throughout our analysis there was very often a distinct difference between the 'I think' and 'society says' statements. This was distinctly expressed in the context of stoicism, when prompted with the question that 'should men figure out problems on their own' - the mean difference between 'I think' and 'society says' was 36.9%. Across the board, men were less likely to report personal agreement with stoic values that might isolate them personally in relation to difficulties. However, overwhelmingly, men felt societal pressure to be self-sufficient in relation to their problems. Indeed, while men in this study have come a long way toward accepting more feminine norms

of behaviour in terms of seeking support – our interim findings suggest they still have a long way to go to break free of norms that hold them in emotionally straightjacketed forms of manhood.

When participants were asked to reflect on their own sense of self, in the context of body image, there was a distinct dissatisfaction in how they viewed themselves, with varying responses between the age cohorts. In the psychiatric and social science literature body image dissatisfaction has a host of negative manifestations, not least a strong association with eating disorders and substance abuse (Drummond, 2002). Such data poses significant concerns in particular among the younger cohorts studied, with just under 70% of respondents between the ages of 18 to 24 stating they have either a moderate or strong desire to change their physical appearance. Body dissatisfaction has typically been highlighted amongst females and interpreted as reflections of some of ‘the central ills’ of contemporary western culture, especially its obsession with the shape, media (print and social), and its attachment to rigid ideals of physical features (Bordo, 1997: 139). Our findings suggest a rise in social pressure, particularly among younger males to fit certain physical characteristics. Likewise, previous research has highlighted unrealistic stereotypical male images (male body as a machine) which they considered extreme and unattainable, and inappropriate cultural representations of the ‘normal bloke’s’ body. Thus, our initial analysis contends that masculine gender body-image endorsement has the potential to be associated with body dysmorphic eating disorders.

Attitudes towards homosexuality in this report would suggest a positive progressive trend – and is in line with a social drift over the past 30 years demonstrating increasingly positive attitudes toward homosexuality internationally (Keleher & Smith, 2012). As homophobia is best conceptualized as prejudice against sexual minorities (McCormack & Anderson, 2014) – our findings highlight, at an individual level, that is emphatically rejected, the mean figure for combined disagree and strongly disagree across all age groups is 93.6% with the mean strongly disagree figure being 75.7%. However, this is not resoundingly reflected in regard to the ‘society says’ statements. The mean figure for strongly disagree/disagree with the statement society says a gay man is not a real man is 67.8% which differs significantly from the ‘I think’ figure. Indeed, this would suggest stronger perceptions of homophobia are still ingrained in the cultural psyche. Similar patterns were observed from other questions which followed the same pattern around what ‘society says’, this represents a paradox of sorts in relation to how Irish men, and the cultural (and indeed, cult) of masculinity, relate to sexual minorities. On the part of the individual – there is evidence to suggest Homophobia at play (or rising) – in that, there is a fear of being thought homosexual because of behaviour that is typically considered gender atypical. The ways in which the social and cultural norms of contemporary masculinity in Ireland relate to sexual minorities requires further investigation.

Pornography use was a key point of interest stemming from the results of this interim report. Strikingly, the three youngest age groups have a mean figure of 70.4% of participants who reported using

pornography weekly or more and a mean figure of 18% of participants who reported using pornography on a daily or more than daily basis. Over a fifth of all participants under the age of 55 reported using pornography on a daily or more than daily basis. It is important to note that there is conflicting international evidence towards the harmful use of pornography, and whether it can play a part in a healthy sexual exploration and development for men (particularly young men) or is damaging to their conceptualisations of sex and relationships, is indeed a contested space (Setty, 2022). However, Heterosexual men's engagement with pornography is more often seen as problematized, due to the unequal and exploitative gender dynamics at play and the sexual practices that entitle the male and reinforce dominance-based cultures. This is noted as being particularly harmful in how young men are socialized towards sex (Flood, 2009). As Ging (2009) rightly points out - in the context pornography's overt commodification of women's bodies - there has been a significant reassertion of patriarchy; in that, Irish women are not as bound by traditional patriarchal norms, as they once were, but now must negotiate the dual forces of bio-determinism and commodification of '*fast capitalism*' (Ferguson, 2002) which have equally high stakes in the regulation and objectification of their bodies. This indeed speaks to the paradoxes of 21st century liberalism and reinforces Connell's (2005) point about hegemonic masculinity adapting itself to maintain cultural dominance. Indeed, research (Ging, 2005) indicates that many men are blind to the invisible gaze of popular culture, which dictates that the female body is to be objectified, and so it is important to educate men of all ages around sex and harms associated with the objectification of females – and indeed, the harmful nature of pornography.

Why is this important

Men's relationships with the norms and patterns of manhood are often complex and confusing, and the process of finding one's own sense of self, and empowering men to be the best of themselves is not a straightforward one. Our study reveals some contradictory trends, particularly concerning what '*I think*' and what '*society says*'. These are real contradictions, which need further investigation. We believe, however, that they are accurate and logical representations of the dilemmas men face in navigating society's paradoxes of manhood in Ireland today.

Limitations

While some of the more positive aspects of our findings represent more progressive attitudes as a whole it is possible that our survey research reflects social desirability – in that, to be seen to be associated with what society desires one to think – and how this is played out in reality needs a more qualitative focus that can more congruently capture the nuances at play.

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Men's Development Network

Better Lives for Men, Better Lives for All

MEN'S ATTITUDES NOW

Part of our 25th Anniversary Programme

Men's Development Network CEO Seán Cooke says:

"This survey, which is the first of its kind to be undertaken in this country, is a key part of our 25th-anniversary events calendar. We believe that by gathering good data, the findings from Men's Attitudes Now can influence the policy, practice, and processes of engaging men, as well as in advocating for social change and greater gender equality."

The Men's Development Network is a non-profit organisation headquartered in Waterford, Ireland, with the key focus on being leaders in promoting change and equality within society.

Approaching our work from a transforming masculinities and gender-justice perspective, we are marking 25 years of positive engagement with men, boys, women's organisations, and other like-minded partners in 2022.

Under the mission statement "Better Lives for Men; Better Lives for All," the Men's Development Network interacts with men on various levels including one-to-one, developmental, parenting, behaviour change group work, training, phonline support and awareness raising.

Our funded projects include the White Ribbon Campaign, Men's Health & Development Programme, the MEND Domestic Violence Intervention Programme, the national Male Advice Line, FarmConnect, and a Men's Counselling Service. We also run many sub-programmes at local, regional and national level.

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