

Toxic masculinity

Explain dangers

Toxic masculinity is a term that describes a set of cultural norms and expectations that put pressure on men to behave in a certain way—often based on outdated and unrealistic stereotypes of “manliness.” **This does not mean that men are toxic.** However, the pressures we place on men to live up to masculine ideals have been shown to be harmful to both men and women.

According to some researchers, toxic masculinity has three core components*:

- 1. Toughness:** The notion that men should be physically strong, behaviourally aggressive, and unemotional.
- 2. Anti-femininity:** The idea that men should reject anything considered to be feminine, such as showing emotion or accepting help.
- 3. Power:** The assumption that men must work toward obtaining power and social and financial status to gain the respect of others.

A man’s race and ethnicity may play a role in how he views masculinity, as well as how others perceive him. Likewise, men who identify as LGBTQ+, or who do not conform to traditional gender norms, are at greater risk of experiencing physical and psychological harms due to toxic masculinity.

Toxic masculinity can have many effects on men’s health, including:

- **Glorification of unhealthy habits:** The notion that “self-care is for women” can cause men to treat their bodies like machines. They skimp on sleep, work out even if injured, and push themselves to their physical limits. They may also be less likely to seek preventive healthcare, which can lead to chronic problems down the road.
- **Mental health stigma:** Toxic masculinity views depression, anxiety, substance abuse issues, and mental health problems as weaknesses. It also discourages men from talking about their feelings or seeking mental health treatment. This avoidance may further increase feelings of isolation and loneliness.
- **Failure to help:** Men who view themselves

as more masculine are less likely to engage in “helping behaviours,” such as consoling a victim, calling for aid, or otherwise standing up to those who engage in bullying and other harmful acts. However, studies have found men *will* intervene if they think that not doing so will compromise their masculine reputation.

As a result of these and other effects†:

- Men are less likely than women to access mental health services.
- Men are far more likely than women to die by suicide.
- Significantly more men than women die from opioid overdoses. This is particularly true of men who work in the construction industry.

Identify controls

Challenge your thinking: We all must think critically about what it really means to “be a man” in today’s society. Ask yourself: Am I brave enough to be vulnerable? Am I strong enough to help others—and to seek help for myself?

Practise self-care: Men who embrace physical, emotional, mental, and social self-care can have a positive “ripple effect” on those around them‡. Some easy ways to practise self-care are to eat healthy, regular meals and stay hydrated, stick to a consistent sleep schedule, if possible, and stay connected with friends and family.

Demonstrate

Supervisors have the opportunity to be role models for developing a healthier culture of masculinity in the workplace:

- Educate yourself and others about toxic masculinity and its outdated assumptions.
- Challenge social norms and stand up for others in need.
- Share the ways that you practise self-care to maintain your physical and mental health.

*[verywellmind.com/what-is-toxic-masculinity-5075107](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-toxic-masculinity-5075107)

†[verywellmind.com/the-dangerous-mental-health-effects-of-toxic-masculinity-5073957](https://www.verywellmind.com/the-dangerous-mental-health-effects-of-toxic-masculinity-5073957)

‡Benjamin Harris, *Toxic Masculinity: An Exploration of Traditional Masculine Norms* (University of South Carolina—Columbia, 2021)