

emale

improving male health & wellbeing
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Men & women worry about COVID for different reasons

Research shows that men and women worry about Covid-19 for different reasons.

KEY POINTS

- Men are at a 40 percent greater risk of mortality from Covid-19, yet fear it less than do women.
- Women are more likely to engage in mask-wearing and other preventive measures than are men.
- Men expressed more fear about the effect of Covid-19 on the economy than did women.

A new [study](#) published in *Frontiers in Psychology* examines why women are more worried about Covid-19 than are men, despite health data showing that men are more likely to become seriously ill or die from the disease. For instance, a recent meta-analysis found that men have about a 40 percent greater mortality risk from Covid-19 and are approximately three times more likely to be admitted to hospital intensive care units.

"Despite the empirical fact that men are more likely to experience adverse health consequences from Covid-19, women report greater fear and more negative expectations about health-related consequences of Covid-19 than men," wrote the authors of the research led by Sheryl Ball and Alec Smith of Virginia Tech. "In our survey, we found that nearly 20 percent of women chose the highest available value for fear of the pandemic, compared to around 9 percent of men." To arrive at this conclusion, the researchers invited 1,500 representative adults in the United States to take part in an online survey that measured people's emotions, behaviors, and expectations associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey took place in April 2020.

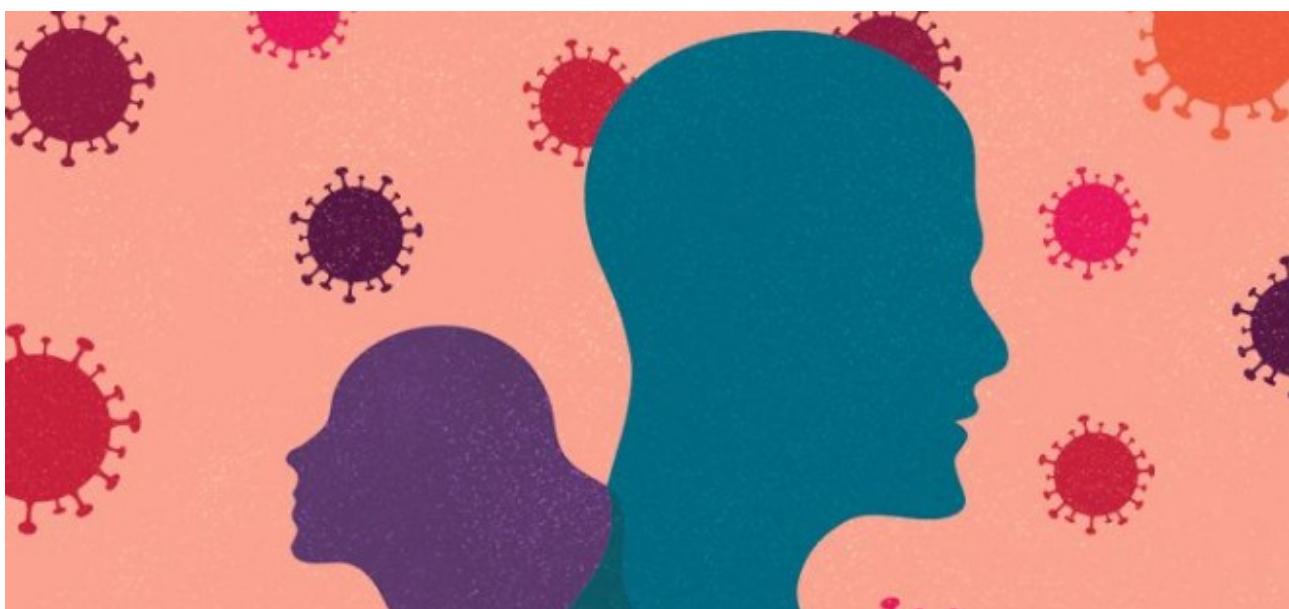
The main takeaways from the study were that women reported more Covid-19 health fear than men. Women were also more likely to engage in preventative measures such as washing one's hands frequently, wearing a mask, and practicing social distancing than men. The gender gap in preventative health behaviors went away when the authors factored out the effect of fear. This, according to the researchers, suggests that "fear of the Covid-19 pandemic, and not gender per se, drives behavioral differences." Men expressed more fear about the economic implications of the Covid-19 pandemic than women.

These results square with other studies. For instance, a Reuters/Ipsos poll fielded around the time of this research found that 54 percent of women said they were "very concerned" about Covid-19. For men, this number was only 45 percent. The poll also found men to be less likely to wash their hands and use hand sanitizers frequently, less committed to avoiding public gatherings, less supportive of the closing of public schools, and more likely to believe people were unnecessarily panicked about Covid-19.

The finding that men exhibit more economic fear has implications for policymakers. "Legislators should keep in mind that people have economic as well as health concerns about Covid-19," wrote Smith. "This suggests that messaging about preventative measures like mask-wearing - which the scientific evidence says is effective - might be more effective if it emphasizes both economic as well as health benefits of these behaviors."

The researchers expect that, despite the emergence of more transmissible variants of Covid-19, fear of the disease has decreased from last year. (Editor's note: in the USA). "The average person is probably less afraid of Covid-19 now than in April 2020," wrote Ball. "The reason we believe this is that we originally collected data at the beginning, middle, and end of April 2020, and we find that fear decreased substantially even during that month. We expect that it has continued to decrease since then."

A full interview with Dr. Sheryl Ball and Dr. Alec Smith discussing this research can be found here: [Anxiety, gender, and Covid-19](#)



6 of the biggest health worries for men in their 20s



While everyone should be diligent about recognising unusual changes to their body, research from Boots has found that men are less likely to follow up on warning symptoms, with men visiting the doctor 20% less than their female partners. That doesn't mean they suffer less with health problems though. The problem may simply be that men are more reluctant to seek help when they need it. We spoke to general practitioner Dr Luke Powles to find out some of the most common health issues that men in their 20s face today, and what they should do about it. Here's what he had to say...

1. Mental Health

"It's important for men in their 20s to begin looking after their mental health. Sadly, suicide is the leading cause of death among young people aged 20-34 years. If you feel anxiety or stress affecting you, talk to your GP. Getting the right help and support can ensure you're well-armed with ways to manage your mental health for the decades to come."

2. Skin cancer

"Evidence shows that extreme sun exposure before the age of 40 can put you at more risk of developing skin cancer. A recent study found that almost three-quarters (73%) of people don't always apply sunscreen and a third (31%) said they are more relaxed about applying it when they are in the garden at home, versus on holiday abroad. "My advice is to avoid sunbeds and wear high factor sunscreen in the summer months and on holiday to keep your future self safe."

3. Smoking

"On average, smoking reduces your life expectancy by 10 years and increases your chances of developing heart disease and cancer. But this is all preventable if you kick the habit sooner rather than later. Your 20s is the age to set good habits and break bad ones. If you want to quit smoking, my advice is to set yourself small, achievable goals. Telling yourself you're going to completely stop smoking can be daunting and you may set yourself up to fail. Try cutting back slowly. Once this feels comfortable, cut back further until you've quit. You'll likely have set-backs, but don't be too harsh on yourself and celebrate your achievements. Some pharmacies and GP clinics offer smoking cessation clinics. They're also a great way to help you kick the habit."

4. Alcohol intake

"Responsible alcohol intake is important throughout every stage of life, however, liver disease is one of the top causes of death for men aged between 20-34 years old. Minimising alcohol intake can help reduce a range of health problems including liver disease, heart disease, obesity and some cancers. Guidelines advise both men and women should keep their consumption under 14 units a week."

5. Testicular cancer

"For men, although testicular cancer is relatively rare, it appears to be rising. It can occur at any age but it is the most common type of cancer for men between the ages of 20 and 35. Testicular cancer is one of the most treatable of all cancers. Most men make a full recovery, particularly if the cancer is diagnosed early. That's why it's important for you to contact your GP as soon as possible if you feel anything unusual in your testicles."

6. Acne

"Acne can also be an issue for men in their 20s. The condition can be provoked by using whey protein, which is a popular nutritional supplement. If you do suffer with acne, use non-pore blocking and oil-free products on your skin to avoid long term scarring or persistent acne."

Loneliness among men in the COVID-19 pandemic



A recent study from the University of York, UK, has taken on an underexplored area regarding the prevalence, and associated factors of loneliness, among men in the context of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The study's findings not only open a window onto this experience, including the long-term ramifications of this type of loneliness after the pandemic restrictions are completely removed, but could also help understand how to deal with such ill-foreseen consequences of severe social restrictions in the future.

Background

Loneliness is thought of to be the perception that one lacks or has lost meaningful social relationships and is associated with poor health. In contrast, social isolation refers to the actual measurable loss of social contact. Loneliness may exist without social isolation and vice versa. If social support is strong, the latter scenario is more probable.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought in an era of restrictions on normal social interactions, such that 'social distancing' became a well-known term even in non-English-speaking countries and communities. While this was widely seen to be necessary to help curtail the spread of the virus, it did increase loneliness, which had necessary adverse impacts on health in other ways, both mental and physical. Women living alone are more likely to feel lonely, with men often being inhibited by their self-perceived need to appear strong from reaching out for help with this problem. However, there is little research in this area.

The current study was built around themes such as seeing and doing new things or meeting new people; a rethinking of the truly important things in life; loneliness as deliberate in a pandemic situation vs. loneliness as the normal (perhaps undesirable) condition of life in the present situation; the anxiety associated with reduced social interactions as well as the fear of social contact spreading the virus; and the recognition of the distinct differences between people with respect to the degree and type of loneliness felt during these restrictions.

How was the study carried out?

The researchers conducted this study during the second lockdown shortly after Christmas 2020 in the UK, which was introduced in the face of increasing cases and hospitalizations. They asked questions to men about their experience of loneliness and how this would affect their lives post-pandemic, as well as their views about relaxing restrictions and dealing with future outbreaks of infectious disease.

The participants were aged 21 to 70 years, with or without a history of loneliness. Many were living alone, while

Loneliness among men in the COVID-19 pandemic

Change in routine

Many men said the restrictions had disrupted their normal routines and social interactions and joked about substituting activities for these, such as cleaning the house or do-it-yourself hobbies. Typically, these were minimized but were nonetheless important in building a sense of unity and social support. Others looked for new activities and routines, and these were methodically built up, especially if they were incorporated into a routine. Many said remote interactions were inferior to direct socializing but were nonetheless worthwhile.

Conversely, some said remote interaction had widened their opportunities to socialize, especially if they were physically disabled and thus had limited chances to interact with the outside world pre-pandemic. If a man had primarily public interactions rather than those with family and neighbors as their priority social sphere, he was likely to feel lonelier. Again, this was more of a problem with those who were interested in dating or sex. In contrast, many actually came to see the restrictions as a blessing in disguise, as they saw their relationships with their significant others in a new light and focused on building them up. Some also saw that their neighborhoods became their public sphere of social support and connection, but raised questions as to whether this would survive once the pandemic faded.

Social responsibility

Many men appreciated the need for the restrictions that brought about their loneliness and felt that in this way, they were contributing to the common good, thus reducing the pain to some extent. Others, who were less concerned with the purpose of the lockdown or other restrictions compared to their personal needs, felt lonelier. Some men found, rather to their surprise, and perhaps guilt, that being alone did not really make them feel bad. This emphasizes that there may be a collective expectation that loneliness is expected during the pandemic, as a normal state, compared to the unacceptable loneliness seen to be mildly pathological before COVID-19 appeared on the scene.

Anxiety

When anxiety was discussed, two contrasting themes came to the forefront. One was that in-person social interactions left them unable to enjoy it due to the fear of infection. The other was that they might enjoy the group so much that they did things that were unacceptable under lockdown regulations. One man also noted his fear that he would forget how to behave around people once lockdowns were removed. Among Black and minority ethnic communities, social interactions were richer because of multi-generational families sharing the same dwelling place. However, the communities where they lived were less supportive, with more violence and criminal behavior. Pandemic-related assistance was also less likely in this setting.

What are the implications?

The study reiterates that while loneliness is an experience that affects public health in its consequences, it is often more important for one sex. In particular, the current pandemic engendered loneliness on a vast scale due to public health policies. Loneliness among men has been little studied so far. In the current paper, the authors demonstrate that the abrupt loss of routines along with a sharp reduction in direct personal interactions led to increased loneliness, most distinctly among men living alone. They also show that men may enjoy and benefit from remote interactions when carried out on schedule and in smaller groups, while offering the chance for each man to speak.

Moreover, the loneliness was both caused and affected by the anxiety related to the risk of contracting the virus, as well as the mechanisms constructed to limit viral transmission. The understanding of loneliness as a need during such times may help to deal with it, though as vaccination rates rise and case rates fall, and as people become more tired of the restrictions, this may fall. People who lack an adequate sense of social responsibility may find this harder to achieve.

Existing social networks are often more helpful in mitigating loneliness than making new friends. Outdoor activities provide both physical exercise and a change from the ‘cooped up at home’ feeling that could be especially welcome. Remote interactions may contribute to lockdown fatigue over the long term.

The study obviously cannot classify the negative effect of loneliness as a rational or pathological response, nor does it purport to guide measures to balance social needs vs. blocking transmission. However, it does suggest that while returning to pre-pandemic life, newly developed social interactions and anxieties must be accounted for, even while allowing some leeway for the inevitable loss of social skills.

*Study: Men and loneliness in the Covid-19 pandemic: insights from an interview study with UK-based men.
Image Credit: Prostock-studio / Shutterstock*

Support for Dads

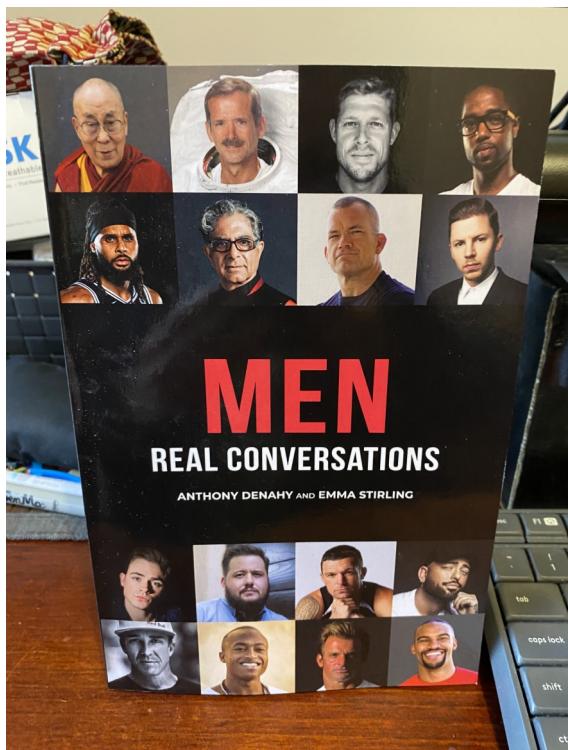


Support for Fathers is providing dads with options and information about fatherhood, the relationship with their partner and connecting with their kids. We are also enabling support services to work with dads and families more thoughtfully by providing a toolkit to engage dads. Our aim is for Dads to:

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Gender norms and the mental health of boys and young men

Over the last half-century, the women's health movement has been a powerful driver in health policy linking gender norms to sex differences in health and wellbeing. Even though gender norms also affect males, there has been little emphasis on gender in health policies for males, especially in relation to the mental health of boys and young men. Gender norms around masculinity commonly confer power and status to boys and young men, which might in part explain why norms around masculinity are difficult to shift. Paradoxically, these dominant masculinities carry risks for poor mental health.

Globally, the rate of male suicide is two to four times that of females, and males fare poorly on indices of substance misuse, risk taking-related injury, conduct problems, violence, aggression, and by extension incarceration. Sex differences in mental health typically emerge across late childhood and adolescence. This time is also when gender norms become entrenched, persisting into later life whereby they continue to shape mental health and help-seeking. Traditional gender norms commonly drive young men to present as strong, competitive, in control, and unburdened by vulnerability. These cultural scripts prize toughness, anger, hostility, and emotional control. Conversely, emotions characterised by vulnerability, including sadness, anxiety, and fear, trigger shame and become a barrier to help-seeking.

Modern social media and marketing might be making things worse. The media have long adopted images of masculinity in the promotion of gambling, alcohol, and tobacco use, but the capacity of the new media to shape peer norms is greater than ever before. A pernicious accentuation of peer norms is perpetuating outdated stereotypes of what it is to be a man. For these reasons there have been growing calls for the inclusion of boys and young men in policies to counter gender inequalities in health and wellbeing outcomes across media and marketing, in education, and in community settings including sport. Such approaches might begin to reshape gender norms for boys and young men by promoting a different kind of social and emotional engagement with male peers as well as with girls and young women. Collective values and competencies might extend to a fuller experience and expression of emotions, especially those self-perceived as unmanly or conveying vulnerability, without fear of a diminished social status. Engaging boys and young men in familiar, safe, digital, school, or sport group-based settings, brings the scope to harness positive aspects of masculine socialisation including friendship and connection through sport. Schools are important settings for the social development of boys. School-based peer group identities develop and strengthen over time, bringing a sense of status and belonging within particular social groups, which might also extend to the adoption of values, behaviours, and attitudes that carry mental health risks.

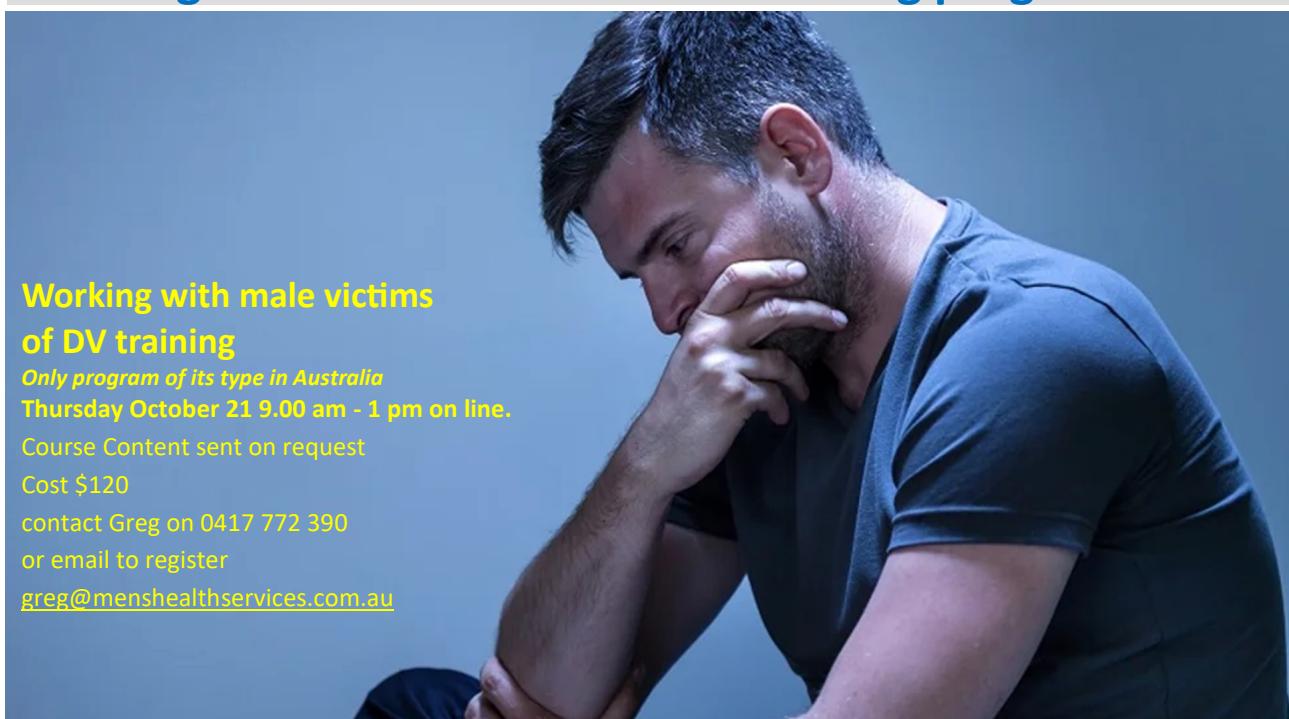
Schools have great scope to shape the culture of male peer groups. Older male students can buddy with younger students, or young facilitators can run school-based workshops promoting positive male identities, perhaps re-establishing a rite of passage to maturity, largely absent from contemporary society. Such mentorship might extend to promoting openness, advice seeking, and constructive action when faced with emotional challenges. Cultivating emotional intelligence might also be coupled with respect for diversity of gender identity, roles, and emotional expression. This approach would improve mental health for peers who do not conform to gender roles and extend the repertoire of accepted emotional expression in the peer group.

Engagement around the value systems of boys and young men should avoid shaming responses such as labelling masculinity as toxic. Engagement should also thread concepts of gender equity to confront positions of assumed privilege and disrespect. Mental health risks to an individual and others arise from traditional male stoicism and dominance, including entitlement to power over women, girls, and other men. Changes in attitude and behaviour can be reinforced by honoring and leveraging the bravery and courage (positive masculine norms) of those boys and young men who reject harmful norms and challenge and change stereotypes such as that men don't cry and that boys will be boys in public and private arenas. Formative work is currently underway testing relevant programmes in Australia. If proven effective, these programs might serve as models, countering depictions of men's toughness in mainstream media (eg, sport, politics, business).

Promoting a different kind of social and emotional development for boys and young men is likely to be an inter-generational agenda. Increasingly, boys and young men will need to become active in sharing power and status with women. There are some encouraging developments. Women's sport professionalisation increasingly exposes boys to female athletes, widening their perspectives on women's capabilities. Ultimately redefining and reshaping the socialisation of boys and young men will promote their better mental health and those of others around them. In a world that needs men with different social and emotional capacities, this approach could promise to lay a foundation for greater productivity and wellbeing across men's life-course.

Source: [Simon Rice](#), [John Oliffe](#), [Zac Seidler](#), [Rohan Borschmann](#). [Jane Pirkis et al.](#)

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The facts



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