

Men's and Father's Health Summit 2009

Family Voice Australia

FATHERLESSNESS

Boys growing up without a father are twice as likely to have psychosomatic health symptoms such as pains, headaches and stomach aches¹, to have had intercourse before 16² and to smoke at 16³; more likely to have circulatory problems (70%) and to show signs of mental illness (56%)⁴; more likely to be incarcerated⁵ increasing the risk of death by 4 times with extra deaths from suicide, drug and alcohol abuse and homicide.⁶

Health prevention for men requires consistent support for the importance of fathers for boys' wellbeing. The presumption of equal shared parental responsibility incorporated in the Family Law Act 1975 (s61DA) must be more consistently applied in such a way that boys spend equal, or at least significant and substantial time, with their fathers (s65DAA).

BOYS' EDUCATION

Boys' school experiences may have adverse impacts on their development and social integration. Major problems include learning difficulties, delinquent behaviours, alcohol and substance abuse, depression and suicide, auditory processing problems, poor literacy, disengagement with schooling, academic underachievement and failure to complete secondary schooling. Alienation from learning for many boys will have flow-on effects on their economic, social and emotional well-being for life.⁷

By 2006 only one out of five primary school teachers were male. Many boys may graduate from primary school without ever having a male teacher.⁸

In order to allow schools to redress the lack of male teachers, the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 should be amended to exempt the offering of scholarships for this purpose.

MARRIAGE

Marriage socialises men in ways which impact favourably on men's health. Married men drink less, fight less, are less likely to engage in criminal activity; and are significantly more involved and affectionate with their wives and children than men in cohabiting relationships.⁹ Males aged between 20 and 69 who have never married experience death rates two to four times higher than those who are married.¹⁰

All public policy needs to be evaluated in terms of its impact on encouraging marriage. Relationships education in primary and secondary school should positively promote marriage as beneficial to the wellbeing of men, women, children and society.

DIVORCE

Separated (compared with married) males were six times more likely to suicide.¹¹

Divorced men are nearly ten times as likely to kill themselves as divorced women. There is an assumption that the bond between a woman and her children is stronger than that between a man and his children. Custody of children is more likely to be given to the wife. The father loses not only his marriage, but his children. Events spiral into anxiety, and depression, reduced self esteem, and a sense of 'life not worth living'.¹²

Divorced men having increased risk of a range of cancers: esophageal (2.49), anal (2.13), upper aerodigestive tract (1.69), lung (1.35), liver (1.27), and pancreas (1.20).¹³

Most divorces are initiated by women.¹⁴ **The Family Law Act 1975 leaves men vulnerable to unilateral divorce in the absence of any fault. It is time to seriously review the fundamental injustice of this system.**

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