



Masculinity and the gender-equal school

TOWARDS A MORE SECURE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND BETTER SCHOOL RESULTS



Swedish Association
of Local Authorities
and Regions

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Foreword

The quest for gender equality is founded on women's battle for equal rights and opportunities. However, gender equality work must necessarily also involve boys and men, and challenge the notions of masculinity that are a barrier to equality.

A gender equality strategy for changing restrictive and harmful masculinity norms can be of tremendous benefit to both women and men, and to society as a whole. It can bring about increased security, improved health, greater equality in relationships and less violence, as well as improved quality in education, healthcare, and social care. It can help to break up gender-segregation in the labour market and broaden the public service recruitment base.

This was the rationale for the agreement between SALAR and the Swedish government which led to an initiative on men and gender equality in 2016–2017.

The initiative started with a comprehensive survey of gender equality initiatives including men and masculinity norms in municipalities, county councils and regions, and has been conducted through extensive partnerships with representatives from public sector, research and civil society. In 2016 the deliverables included a number of films and regional conferences.

During 2017 the initiative has focused on gender equality in education, healthcare and parenting, as well as violence prevention. In each of these areas SALAR has produced films, reports and papers to outline possible routes to change.

This publication describes possible strategies to improve how school works, based on an understanding of gender inequality and norms relating to masculinity.

It is aimed at politicians, managers and strategists responsible for operational development, but also at other municipal and county council employees.

Our hope is that this material will reinforce ongoing gender equality efforts and inspire new initiatives, with the ultimate aim of women and men having equal power to shape society and their own lives.

Stockholm, March 2018

Vesna Jovic
Managing Director

Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions

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Introduction

Challenging norms can result in many benefits

Schools have a wide-ranging mission to promote gender equality, which amounts to giving girls and boys the same opportunities to learn the knowledge and skills they will need in life, and to freely develop their potential. Gender equality is also one of the fundamental democratic values that schools are to communicate to their students.

This publication briefly describes how gender-related norms affect the way schools work particularly with male students in various areas. The following sections present some key areas of gender equality efforts in schools that need to be improved with respect to challenging and changing norms relating to masculinity, working with a critical view of norms, which can contribute to better school results, gender-sensitive study and career guidance that broadens the range of options available to students, school healthcare that meets the needs of boys, and violence-prevention work that includes all students.

The way that adults in a school approach the subject of gender-related norms, the expectations they communicate to boys and girls, and the way gender, sexuality and gender equality are handled within the context of instruction are crucial. Systematic and long-range efforts to change masculinity norms are therefore an important factor in quality improvement efforts at school.

When destructive and restrictive masculinity norms no longer impede the schoolwork of boys, the boys achieve better results, and more boys meet the knowledge requirements. In the long run, this can lead to lowered incidences of poor health, to less unemployment, and less social vulnerability. Boys and girls also have more options in a school that systematically offers study and occupational guidance without gender barriers. This can contri-

bute to reducing gender-based segregation on the labour market, providing more boys and girls with the opportunity to realise their potential, and at the same time helping the public sector meet future skills supply requirements.

A school that actively opposes all forms of violence, whether physical, psychological or sexual, is a calmer place for everyone, whether boy, girl or adult, with greater security, improved study environment and better school results.

An important aspect of efforts to achieve gender equality is the cooperation between the teachers and student health services. This must also include providing boys with the opportunity to reflect over and talk about difficulties, vulnerabilities, and the fear of not being able to live up to the often narrow expectations to which boys are subjected. If boys, for example, are taught to take responsibility for their mental health, this may eventually also contribute to more men seeking help when they are feeling down.

Instruction in Comprehensive Sexuality Education can provide boys with an alternative to strict masculinity norms and can thereby help them learn to take responsibility for their own sexual health and that of their partner. Reflection about expectations regarding male sexuality can also help to prevent sexual assault and harassment.

The gender equality mission of schools

Gender equality between women and men is one of the fundamental values that schools are required to communicate. The curriculum for preschool (Lpfö 98), as well as those for compulsory school, preschool class and after-school care centre (Lgr 11), states that these entities are required to counteract traditional gender patterns and gender roles. Girls and boys should have the opportunities to try out and develop abilities and interests without being restricted by stereotypical gender roles. The curriculum for upper secondary school (Curriculum, graduation goals and subjects common to all courses of study at upper secondary school 2011) indicates that the students must be encouraged to develop their interests without prejudices regarding what is deemed to be feminine or masculine. Lgr 11 names gender equality as one of the multi-disciplinary areas of knowledge that must be integrated into different subjects.

Since 2016, gender-equal education is a new partial objective for the national gender equality policy: women and men, girls and boys must be given the same opportunities and terms regarding education, educational choices and personal development.

Source: Power, goals and authorities: a feminist policy for a gender-equal future: Skr. 2016/17:10.

Schools need to know more about gender norms

Norm-critical efforts strive to make visible those notions and expectations that form children, students and adults, discuss what they lead to, and challenge norms that promote gender inequality and discrimination. One vital

factor for the success of these efforts is that the adults reflect about the norms they themselves communicate or maintain, and any differences in expectations they may have on students based on gender, ethnicity, skin colour, functional disability and other aspects. Challenging masculinity-related norms is an essential part of these efforts.

In 2016, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) performed an inventory survey of municipal gender equality efforts directed towards men, boys and masculinity issues.¹ One-third of all school administrations answered that over the course of the past six years they had engaged in some form of gender pedagogical work with the purpose of changing masculinity norms in preschool, compulsory school or upper secondary school. Almost as many reported that they engaged in violence-prevention activities that were focused on boys, men and masculinity.

In comparison with other municipal functions, school appears to be one of the places where the most attention has been paid to issues regarding sex, gender and norms. At the same time, the survey showed that there was a great demand for knowledge and support in the context of work with boys, men and masculinity norms. The majority of the measures taken have noted gender differences between girls and boys but have not come far enough so as to challenge and change the norms that are behind these differences.

Masculinity and gender inequality

Gender equality is fundamentally an issue about power. Gender inequality is about men as a group being in a superior position to women as a group. This power structure is maintained, *inter alia*, by norms for women and men, masculinity and femininity, which we create and recreate together. These norms contain notions that men and women are different. They also contribute to certain traits associated with men and masculinity being valued higher than those associated with women and femininity.

This does not mean that every man is always in a superior position to every woman, nor does it mean that every man is richer or more influential than every woman. But the power structure and those norms that support it are something we all must relate to, whether consciously or subconsciously. How this affects us depends on whether we are women, men, or non-binary (i.e. someone who identifies neither as a woman nor a man), but also on other factors such as age, sexual preference, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic position and gender expression.

The power structure between the sexes means that men predominate in the top layers of society as part of the political, cultural and economic elite.

Note. 1. SALAR (2016).

Men, however, also predominate at the bottom of society in areas such as substance abuse and criminality. Three times as many men as women die of alcohol-related illnesses. Seven of ten suicides are men, while at the same time, many more women than men seek treatment for depression. Women also predominate among patients in primary care, while men predominate in seeking specialist care, which is more costly.

Different expectations regarding girls and boys

Norms for appearance and behaviour establish differences between girls and boys in compulsory school as well as in upper secondary school, and the students realise that these norms are supported by the adults. This is borne out by the large interview survey undertaken by the National Agency for Education in 2009*. As early as in preschool, children understand that girls and boys are expected to play different games, wear different clothing and behave differently. The National Agency for Education comes to the following conclusions:

"Judging from the interviews with students, a rather harsh social climate and a restricted gender repertoire prevail for boys in primary and secondary school. They are expected to act in a certain way and have certain interests that are classified as masculine. This applies particularly to the social relationships that boys develop amongst themselves, especially when it comes to handling conflicts."

*National Agency for Education (2009).

The list is a lengthy one. The same norms that favour men (i.e. that they need to be brave, strong and perhaps a little ruthless) can also contribute to men's health problems and the failure and social marginalisation of certain men.

Different meanings for different boys and men

Masculinity norms have different meanings for different individual men or boys, depending on the conditions they live under and factors other than gender. One example of this is how these norms affect attitudes towards school and schoolwork. One often accepted model used to explain boys' poorer school results is that norms for what is considered manly generate a kind of "anti-studying culture" in which it is considered cool for a boy not to study.² In certain groups of boys, not spending time studying is linked to higher status.

This model was proposed by the *Delegation for gender equality in school*, in 2010, and since then has been both criticised and given greater nuance. The researcher Ann-Sofie Nyström showed in her dissertation, for example, that school results can certainly be deemed desirable by many boys, but the efforts they had to devote in order to achieve them should not be noticeable.³ The

Note. 2. Wernersson (2010).

Note. 3. Nyström (2012).

anti-study culture can also have other implications, for instance, the number of boys who actively reject school and see it as a place where they are not welcome. Various socioeconomic conditions give these norms different meanings for different groups of boys.

Masculinity is not something determined by nature or by someone's "manly" essence. Instead, it's about traits, characteristics and expressions that all people can have, regardless of gender, that have come to be associated with men and manliness. In other words, it is not just men who must relate to masculinity norms. These norms are also connected with the notion that men and women are each other's opposites, and that men must be "masculine" and women must be "feminine," with all that stems from these terms. Women, however, also have what according to the norm are masculine traits and attributes, and in the same way, men have feminine characteristics and attributes. Violating these gender norms often leads to undesirable consequences for an individual in the form of loss of status, challenges from one's surroundings, discrimination, harassment or violence. This is clearly the case for transpersons, a group that suffers greatly from notions about gender, and as a result are especially vulnerable to emotional and mental health problems.⁴

This publication focuses on how masculinity norms affect men and boys in school. It also highlights strategies to change these norms and thereby increase gender equality between women and men and boys and girls. Although this publication is neither an exhaustive study, nor contains a detailed discussion of how cispersons and transpersons can be affected by masculinity norms in different ways, there is every reason to acquire knowledge about this area, as well, in municipalities, counties and regions, in order to promote health equality and better conditions for both binary and non-binary transpersons.⁵

Glossary

- Cisperson: A person whose body, legal gender, gender identity and gender expression agrees with the gender ze was assigned at birth. Another word for someone who is not a transperson.
- Transperson: An umbrella concept for persons whose gender identity and/or gender expression does not agree with the gender they were assigned at birth.
- Binary: A parameter that can have two distinct values, an example is the division of people according to sex as either woman or man.
- Non-binary: An umbrella concept for various gender identities that do not follow the two-gender norm. A description of a person who identifies in between or outside the binary division of gender into either woman or man.

Source: Public Health Agency of Sweden (2016).

Note. 4. Public Health Agency of Sweden (2015).

Note. 5. Transpersoner i Sverige. Swedish government official reports 2017:92.



Boys' poorer school results

School researcher Mia Heikkilä has described how the significant disparities in educational achievement between boys and girls are increasingly beginning to be presented as a “boy crisis” problem. Boys, as a group, have lower average grades than those of girls. A larger percentage of boys fail to meet the knowledge requirements and do not qualify for upper secondary school. In addition, there are many boys who leave upper secondary school without a diploma.⁶

The expectations of adults are an important factor in how norms relating to masculinity develop in school. If the teachers, consciously or subconsciously, send out signals that they have lower expectations for boys than for girls, this would most likely have a negative effect on boys' educational achievement.

Research emphasises the importance of students encountering socially supportive instruction and a climate where high expectations are combined with a motivational message.⁷ Feedback that lets the students understand that mistakes are only natural, and that the amount of effort expended is important in itself, helps them improve their learning.

Girls and boys handle demands in different ways

Studies also show that there are differences between boys and girls regarding the expectations of those around them. Both girls and boys face their own demands to achieve, as well as those of others, but they respond to these demands in different ways.⁸

Note. 6. Heikkilä at www.genus.se.

Note. 7. SALAR (2013b).

Note. 8. Wernersson (2010).

One theory holds that boys more often reject the demands and simply don't try to meet them, while girls choose to work hard, and therefore experience stress. Girls are more often motivated to learn something for the sake of learning because of interest or a sense of duty. Boys more often are motivated by a desire to perform well, which means that they want confirmation and wish to show the world that they are smart and competent. Competition and rivalry are important to many boys and can spur them on to achievement, but this can sometimes also cause failure to be experienced as socially costly, and as something that therefore needs to be avoided.

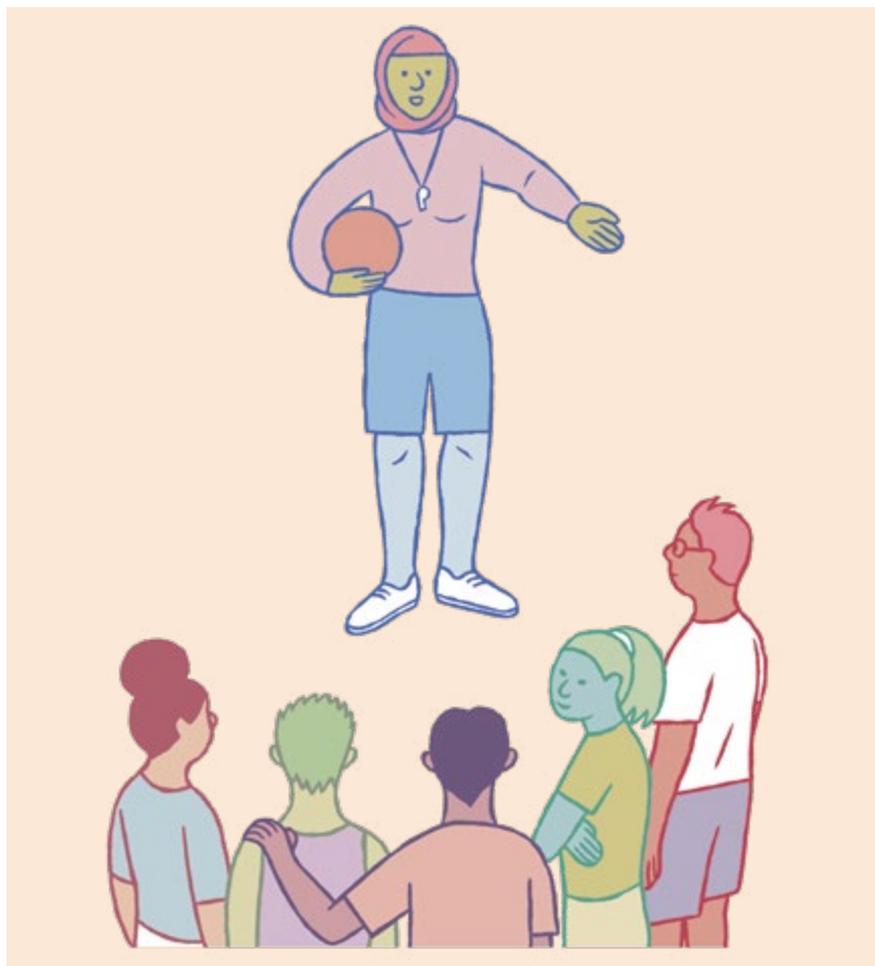
Many factors affect boys' poorer school results

In the case of students graduating their ninth school year, boys had more than 30 fewer merit points than girls.⁹ These school results not only differ according to gender, but there is also a strong correlation between school results and socioeconomic indicators such as the educational level of the parents and foreign origin. Regardless of the other parameters included in the comparison, the gap between boys and girls continues to hold true. The difference between girls and boys, for example, is greater amongst the children of parents with post-secondary education than amongst those whose parents only have completed compulsory education. Boys with both parents born in Sweden have lower merit point scores than girls who have foreign origins but were born in Sweden (i.e. both parents were born abroad), and compared to girls who were born abroad but arrived in Sweden before beginning school.

Not only are boys lagging behind girls with respect to grades, but according to the Pisa study in 2015, boys had significantly more difficulty in cooperating to solve problems than did girls.¹⁰ The survey also showed that girls have more favourable attitudes to cooperation that does not primarily benefit themselves, whilst boys primarily favour cooperation that primarily brings them benefits. The ability to cooperate is related to a student's knowledge of the subject studied. Students with more knowledge are also better at cooperating, and this applies to both girls and boys. Another factor is a student's socio-economic background, and here Sweden stands out as one of the countries where socio-economic background is the most important factor in successful cooperative problem solving.

Note. 9. The merit point score is calculated by totalling the grade scores of the 16 best grades on a student's final transcript. National Agency for Education (2018).

Note. 10. Pisa (Programme for International Student Assessment) is an evaluation of knowledge based on evaluating the extent to which 15-year-old students in various countries are equipped for the future when leaving school. The project is conducted by the OECD, and the evaluation is primarily performed through tests in the following areas: mathematics, natural sciences, reading comprehension and problem solving.



Fewer boys complete upper secondary school

The difference between the educational achievement of girls and boys can also be seen from the drop-out rates for students in upper secondary school. Every year, more than 30,000 young people drop out of upper secondary school without completing it. This represents about eight per cent of all those who begin an upper secondary school course of study in Sweden. For some of the students, this interruption of studies is only something temporary so that the student can switch a course of study or begin at a new school. For others, however, dropping out probably represents a decision not to resume their education.

Of the students that started in upper secondary school in 2011, 74.3 per cent of the girls completed the course of study within five years, as compared to only 66.7 per cent of the boys. Although the percentage of those who complete a course of study at an upper secondary school is higher among students with a Swedish background than among those with a foreign background, the gender disparity is clearly seen in all groups. A higher percentage of girls complete an upper secondary school education than do boys.¹¹

Poorer grades and fewer years of education have consequences

Low or incomplete grades limit the choices available to boys and make labour market entry more difficult. Many are unable to be accepted to the university or university college courses of study they wish to pursue. This is not only a problem for these students, but also for society as these boys do not have sufficient merits to be accepted to continued education at the academic level.

SALAR's study, *Utbildning – nyckeln till arbete* [Education – the key to employment] (2015), shows that education is important not only as a means of entering the labour market, but also for remaining employed.¹² Persons who fail to complete their upper secondary school education within four years run a greater risk of becoming unemployed, becoming unemployed more than once, and remaining unemployed for long periods of time. This risk is especially high for men, as women to a significantly greater extent supplement their studies with adult education.

There is a strong correlation between weak school results, social problems and poor health. An analysis by the Board of Health and Welfare shows that low or incomplete grades from the ninth year of school increase the risk of future psycho-social problems such as suicidal behaviour, criminality, and substance abuse.¹³ This pattern can be found across all socio-economic groups.

The correlation between health and educational level is also emphasised in a partial report from the Commission for Equal Health.¹⁴ Persons with less education tend to assess their health as poorer and have higher mortality rates than persons with more advanced education. Amongst men having only compulsory school education, mortality is 48 per cent for ages up to 80 years, compared to 22 per cent amongst women with post-upper secondary education.

Note. 11. National Agency for Education (2018b).

Note. 12. SALAR (2015).

Note. 13. Board of Health and Welfare (2010).

Note. 14. Det handlar om jämlik hälsa [It's about equal health]. Swedish government official reports 2016:55.

The commission highlights school as a key actor promoting equal health amongst the population, and emphasises the mission of school to promote learning and development in each child, regardless of their individual situation, their parents' background, or educational level:

“Acquired knowledge and skills derived through education provide opportunities for better jobs and higher salaries, as well as enhancing psychological and social resources and providing a true opportunity to affect a person’s own situation, which thereby can reduce physical and psycho-social risks.”



Areas for improvement at school

At the start of the 2014/15 school year, Järven School in Tallås, Katrineholm was a lower secondary school that suffered from fighting and commotion in the halls, and lacked a calm study environment during class time. The anti-studying culture that prevailed amongst the boys contributed to their getting lower grades than the girls did, and degrading treatment and harassment was a part of the school day for many students. Neither had there been any actual discussion as to whether teachers and other adults at the school approached girls and boys in different ways.

A few short examples of the successful efforts toward change at Järven School in Tallås will act as an introduction to this chapter regarding areas for improvement at school.

At the initiative of two of the teachers, the school administration started efforts to change the gender norms that permeated work at the school. As this was deemed to be largely a pedagogical effort, the initiative began with the personnel. One teacher was appointed as head teacher of gender-sensitive guidance in the classroom, and was given the mission of initiating discussions regarding norms and gender equality within teams, subject groups and at workplace meetings. The teachers held short, intensive discussions about current issues, and used video clips or news articles to stimulate reflections of how they themselves approached the students based on gender.

The school adopted a zero-tolerance policy for play-fighting amongst the students. This literally means that adults will step in as soon as a student starts pushing or wrestling in the halls or on the schoolyard. Another measure was work towards integrating Comprehensive Sexuality Education in various school subjects, so that students would be given additional opportunities to reflect over sexuality and relationships from different perspectives.

Putting gender equality on the agenda

In addition to structural changes, Järven School in Tallås also introduced activities that deal particularly with gender norms and gender equality. Nowadays, each term is commenced with a kick-off, where students and teachers can work together with issues regarding norms and gender equality. In addition, the school holds a special theme day every academic year for norm-critical efforts.

In a safety and security questionnaire, students commented on which locations they feel secure or insecure in. The survey resulted in many practical steps being taken, such as changing the locks on all toilets so the doors can be properly locked. The student council also goes to the various classes and presents a norm-critical method material in order to start a discussion about norms and values.

After only a few years of systematic work, the school is seeing results. The corridors have become calmer, there is a more study-conducive atmosphere in the classrooms, and the boys, especially, have improved their educational performance. The students state that they feel more secure, and the teachers see clearly how instruction is related to the school's gender equality mission.

The improvement at Järven School Tallås demonstrates clearly how deliberate work with norms can lead to major improvements. In the following section, we note some key areas where improvement in gender equality efforts at school are needed, with an emphasis on challenging and changing masculinity norms:

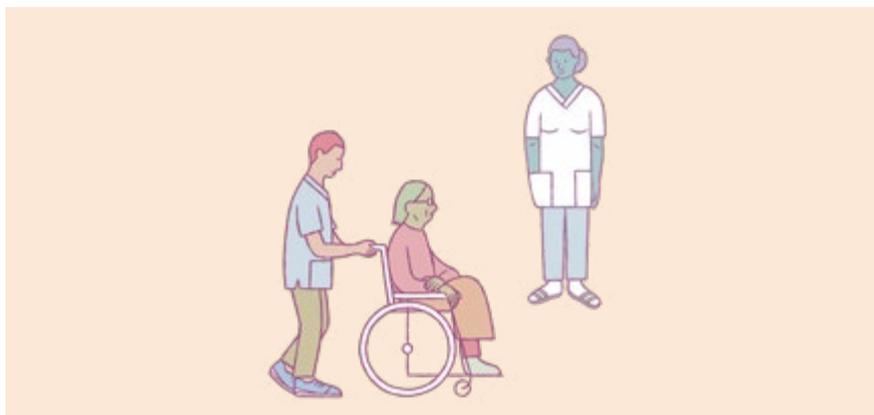
- › Gender-sensitive study and careers counselling that provides students with a greater number of choices.
- › Student healthcare that meet the needs of boys
- › Efforts to prevent violence that include all students.

Study and careers counselling that challenges traditional gender patterns

The Swedish labour market has a clear division along gender lines. Of the country's 30 largest occupations, only four have relatively even gender representation¹⁵. Upper secondary school exhibits the same clear division along gender lines as the labour market for which school is preparing its students. Norms and structures that characterise the larger society also affect schools.

Both boys' and girls' choices are strongly influenced by gender. In the case of programmes preparing students for higher education, the boys predomi-

Note. 15. Occupations where neither of the genders accounts for more than 60 per cent. SCB (2016).



nate amongst applicants to the engineering program, while almost no boys apply to the humanistic program. Among the vocational programmes, boys predominate amongst applicants to the electrical and energy programmes, building and construction, and vehicle and transport programmes, while girls predominate amongst applicants to the care and nursing, hotel and tourism, and crafts programmes.

Yet in the municipality of Katrineholm, which is also where Järven School Tallås is located, 40 per cent of the applicants to the care and nursing programme are boys. This is double the national average. This success is due to active efforts to show the various opportunities that this education can provide.

At open houses and other activities, schools cooperate with the police and emergency services, for example, to present various career paths after upper secondary school. Schools work actively with their students so that boys will take note of jobs in nursing and care that are currently dominated by women.

This is something that both the boys and society in general benefit from. More men are needed for work in the nursing and care sector, if municipalities and counties are to be able to meet their recruitment needs. For the boys, this also means a greater choice.

Socialising into a profession means becoming part of a community and assimilating the norms and values that form this community. Many occupational and professional identities are still associated with one gender, which makes notions of “feminine” and “masculine” important parts of this occupational socialisation.

Belonging to the under-represented gender in an educational program or a workplace, however, can mean different things to women and men. A study by the Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy (IFAU)

demonstrates that men in the nursing and care sector find it difficult to feel included in the workplace community. As men, however, they are both eagerly awaited and held in high esteem compared to their female colleagues. This can be evidenced by their being ascribed a higher status, receiving a higher salary, and finding it easier to advance in their sector. Women in male-dominated industries are instead often confronted by a glass ceiling that allows them only to advance to a certain level.¹⁶

One conclusion is that in order for vocational programmes to be able to attract new groups of students and encourage educational choices that are less bound by gender stereotypes, schools must actively examine basic values and norms in a critical manner so as to prevent harassment and degrading treatment.

Educational guidance counsellors can show various opportunities

No student's choice of education or occupation should be hindered by factors such as gender or any other ground of discrimination. It is therefore important for schools to be informed about how these factors can affect a student's choices. One important component is training to increase awareness of stereotypical educational and occupational choices, and to find methods that can increase students' freedom of action.¹⁷ Several municipalities have identified a number of key challenges regarding gender equality aspects in educational and occupational counselling, including gender-bound educational and occupational choices, gender disparity in school results, and the association between education and work for girls and boys, as well as how girls and boys perceive school efforts regarding study and career.¹⁸

One way to expand students' field of vision regarding paths for the future is to let them meet men in female-dominated careers and women in male-dominated careers, such as a male nurse and a female firefighter.

Another approach can be cooperating with the entities in the municipality that offer young people school holiday jobs. In SALAR's report *Feriejobb – en chans att bryta könsmönster* [Holiday jobs – an opportunity to disrupt gender-bound patterns] (2015), municipal administrators responsible for finding holiday jobs emphasised cooperation with study and career counsellors that would, inter alia, attract more boys to choose to work in preschool. One challenge that would counter the slanted gender representation among preschool teachers would be to attract men with high enough grades. Here,

Note. 16. Choosing an occupation. Swedish government official reports 2015:97.

Note. 17. Välja Yrke. Slutbetänkande av Yrkesprogramsutredningen (SOU 2015:97). Choosing Career. Final Report from the Vocational Education Commission.

Note. 18. SKL: Framtidsval och arbetsliv. Exempel från kommuners studie- och yrkesvägledning (2013). SALAR: Choice of Future and Career. Examples from Municipal Study and Career Guidance.

educational and occupational counsellors play a key role in showing the great range of possibilities, and not allowing gender to be a determinative factor in the choice of career.

Several municipalities maintain that the potential of study and career counsellors can be utilised in a better way in efforts to break down gender patterns. Jönköping municipality, for example, in its gender equality plan for 2015–2017 clarified the role of study and career counsellors in breaking down patterns based on gender stereotypes, and associated this function to the municipality's gender equality policy goals.¹⁹

Gender-sensitive instruction and student health services

There is a clear correlation between health and learning. The primary purpose of student health services is to promote the health of students and act to prevent impairment of that health. This means both contributing to making learning environments in school healthier and removing obstacles to an individual student's learning and development. It is in the way adults and students relate to each other that the fundamental values school is to impart, such as gender equality and every individual's equal value and rights, are most clearly expressed. The adults in school, especially teachers and the professionals working in student health services, are those responsible for these health-promoting and preventive efforts.

The cooperation between student health services and teachers is important for efforts to achieve gender-equality. These efforts require an understanding of gender norms that influence the behaviour, relationship formation, and performance of girls and boys. It is important to realise that the patterns of boys' attitudes and behaviour are not an individual issue, but rather a structural one.

Gender is a factor in the mental and emotional health

The researcher Linda Hiltunen has studied the everyday experience of poor health by young people in a study based on almost 500 essays written by students in upper secondary school, a survey and in-depth interviews with students.²⁰ Social life in school is described almost as a stage-play in which the students have various roles. High social status is desirable, and is obtained through a vivacious personality with a high level of self-confidence, a slim and athletic body, clothing with a fashionable label, a large social network, and ample financial resources.

Note. 19. Ibid.

Note. 20. Hiltunen (2017).

The study shows clear differences between how girls and boys experience poor health. Girls more frequently express mental and emotional health problems. Regarding social status, boys focus more on visible competition, whilst competition amongst girls is more concealed, and this leads to anxiety and feelings of discomfort. Amongst girls, there is the ideal of offering each other closeness and sharing intimate thoughts, which can sometimes feel draining but can also provide an opportunity to discuss health issues with other girls. Masculinity norms do not contain a similar ideal that would encourage boys to turn to close friends for emotional support. Boys simply don't talk about poor health, and therefore keep their feelings to themselves to a greater extent.

Boys use more special support measures and more boys have action programmes. In its analysis, *The delegation for gender equality in schools*²¹ finds reason to examine these differences from a gender perspective. There is no reason to believe that a higher percentage of boys should be in need of special support. On the contrary, research shows that there is a relatively even distribution between the needs of girls and boys.²² Boys with ADHD, for example, show more symptoms involving acting out than do girls with ADHD, who to a greater extent internalise their problems and blame themselves.²³ These patterns are not specifically linked to ADHD, but are rather general gender patterns.

Gender norms also affect sexual health

In the area of sexual health, as well, gender role related expectations and norms for boys and men, as well as for girls and women, have a significant effect on mental and emotional health.

The National Agency for Education notes that sexuality, relationships, gender, gender equality and norms are included in many of the course and subject curricula. This means that the responsibility for this area of knowledge is shared by many teachers, and is required to be addressed as part of many courses and subjects:

“Instruction regarding Comprehensive Sexuality Education can relate to several different perspectives, which together provide the students with a comprehensive understanding of what human sexuality and relationships can include. The teachers can bring up an historical perspective on human sexuality and relationships and can show how

Note. 21. Flickor, pojkar, individer - om betydelsen av jämställdhet för kunskap och utveckling. Swedish government official reports 2010:99.

Note. 22. Heikkilä (2017).

Note. 23. The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (2016).

*various religions relate to this subject, what we can learn from literary works, how gender and sexuality-related norms manifest themselves in commercial images, or the current state of Swedish law relating to these issues.*²⁴

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) works best when it is coupled with a comprehensive approach to the subject, taught by teachers with different fields of expertise, and based on the needs of the students

*“The instruction should take place in safe, secure settings, be adapted to the age, interests and experience of the students, include varied methods, and examine the notions and norms that affect our attitudes and our sexual behaviour. The personnel must be well informed and skilled, and the school administration must support these efforts.”*²⁵

Many boys come into contact with pornography as early as 12 years old. The picture of sexuality described there is not one of mutuality and tenderness, but rather one of sexual practices where men are expected to “go and get it”. Films, books, games and news media disseminate notions of “the potent and sexually self-assured man”. An interview study of young men show that they generally feel that anything goes unless the woman expressly refuses. The study also shows that having an opportunity to reflect caused men to question their own sexual behaviour.²⁶ Talking about norms relating to sexual practices and behaviours can most likely contribute to preventing sexual assaults and violations.²⁷

Violence prevention in school

Although not all boys engage in violence, there is a culture of violence that boys, in particular, must deal with. Reports to the Swedish School Inspectorate indicate that the most common form of degrading behaviour against boys consists of physical violations, such as shoves, punches or kicks.²⁸ The National Agency for Education’s 2009 interview study depicts physical violence as part of the formation of masculinity in boys.²⁹ Girls’ conflicts are expressed through backbiting, gossiping, spreading rumours and verbally harassing

Note. 24. National Agency for Education (2017 b).

Note. 25. Ibid.

Note. 26. Berg (2016).

Note. 27. The Swedish School Inspectorate (2017).

Note. 28. The Swedish School Inspectorate (2017).

Note. 29. National Agency for Education (2009).

other students, while boys use physical violence or threats of violence. This pattern is apparent as early as in preschool but becomes more prominent in the case of certain boys in compulsory school and upper secondary school. Boys account for most of the violence, but more often than girls are also the victims of violence.

Research provides a rather consistent view of violence as a part of the socialising process in becoming a man. Threats of violence and actual physical fights can be viewed as a part of how masculinity forms through a power game in which boys monitor and protect each other. This power game contains elements of verbal and physical violence, sexual harassment of girls and women, homophobia and racism.

The MVP programme can prevent violence

The Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme is based on three concepts: violence, gender and bystander approach. The programme deals with a broad definition of violence, as it perceives a connection between slight and severe violence, as well as between verbal and physical assault. It is also based on violence being an expression of how boys form their masculinity, in other words, that violence is a result of notions about how men and boys should be. Bystander approach means that a person witnessing some form of violence has an opportunity to intervene before, during or after the incident. Everyone can do something to prevent violence.

Mentors in Violence Prevention – a violence-prevention programme

The way this programme is used varies in different schools, but the basic idea is the same: to examine various forms of violence and discuss gender norms and the role of the bystander. One exercise, for example, has the students first coming up with as many forms of violence as possible, then sorting them into categories – emotional, physical or sexual, and then placing each form on a scale from slight to severe. This exercise shows the students how slight violence, such as insulting remarks or play fighting can quickly turn into kicking and punching.

Experiences from the United States, where this programme was developed, shows that the negative reactions of persons in the vicinity have a great effect. When friends object to slight violence, the incidence of severe violence also decreases.

One of the projects that uses MVP is A Municipality Free From Violence (EKFFV), in which a number of municipalities develop cooperation between relevant actors in order to prevent violence, using a municipality-wide approach.³⁰ The basis for this is that violence is an issue that concerns the entire society. Therefore, schools, youth recreational centres, municipal housing companies and other municipal activities, as well as actors from the State sector, such as the police, and civil society must act together in preventing it.

One municipality that works according to a municipality-wide approach is Botkyrka, where the Social Services Administration coordinates violence-prevention efforts, using school as a hub. This work is done in cooperation with the local education administration, the police and emergency services. Municipal parenting support is also involved in this project.

Administrators from preschool, primary school, middle school, lower secondary school and Social Services, together with the two municipal parenting support coordinators, serve on the steering committee. A joint control document for parenting support activities ensures that the functions involved prioritise this project and set aside sufficient time and resources.

Violence prevention efforts mean, *inter alia*, that every staff member in the 50 preschools of the municipality is required to take part in training programmes about violence prevention, domestic violence, and children at risk. At ten of the municipality's primary and middle schools, every staff member is given monthly training in the form of coaching meetings. They learn to identify violence and learn how they can be a part of preventive efforts. After each learning session, they take back a lesson plan that they implement with their students.

Parents are an important resource. The schools invite parents to interactive meetings once each term, for discussions accompanied by food and coffee. Here they can learn about what the children have done and discuss their own role in preventing violence.

Of special importance is the fact that the parents can rest assured that the children have a good situation at school. Each of the children in school are therefore asked to choose a "safe person". This is an adult whom the child trusts and can turn to if s/he has a conflict or has been a victim of violence.

The municipality also uses the MVP programme. Students in their ninth school year are trained as MVP leaders, and then hold MVP lessons for students in their sixth school year.

One consistent message to personnel and parents is to use the knowledge they have learned about violence prevention in other sectors of society, such as their workplaces, associations and social activities. School is an important actor in violence prevention, but school can't do everything.

Note. 30. The Swedish Inheritance Fund (2017).

Additional resources about boys, men and masculinity norms

In 2016 and 2017, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), with the support of the national government, conducted a special programme directed towards men, boys and masculinity issues.

This campaign has compiled and disseminated instructive examples, arranged conferences, seminars and workshops, and has produced a number of publications, reports and films – in consultation with politicians, high-level civil servants and employees of local authorities and regions, as well as with researchers and representatives of government agencies and civil society.

All this material is accessible on the SALAR website skl.se/jamstalldhet.

Publications

- › Maskulinitet och jämställdhet – En introduktion till att förändra mansnormer [Masculinity and gender equality – An introduction to transforming male norms].
- › Förändringsarbete med våldsutövande män – Strategier för kvalitetsutveckling [Changing violent men – Improving the quality of batterer interventions].
- › Maskulinitet och psykisk hälsa – Strategier för förbättringsarbete i vård och omsorg [Masculinity and mental health – Strategies for improving health and social care].
- › Maskulinitet och jämställd skola – Arbete för ökad trygghet och bättre studieresultat [Masculinity and the gender-equal school – Towards increased security and better school results].

- Maskulinitet och jämställt föräldraskap – Arbete för pappors ökade delaktighet [Masculinity and gender-equal parenting – Towards more active parenting for fathers].

Film series - Voices about masculinity

- En film om normer för killar och män. Maskulinitet – så funkar det [Masculinity – how it works].
- Män i förskolan. Förskolläraren Per Håkan Taavo i Luleå om ett yrke som passar alla oavsett kön [Men in preschool – Preschool teacher Per Håkan Taavo of Luleå about a profession that fits everyone, regardless of gender].
- Jämställt på vårdprogrammet. Om genusmedveten studie- och yrkesvägledning i Katrineholm [Gender-sensitive study and career guidance in Katrineholm].
- Arbete för ökad trygghet och bättre studieresultat. Om normkritiskt arbete på Järvenskolan Tallås i Katrineholm [Norm critical work for increased security and better school results].
- Män och våld. Om våldsförebyggande arbete på Hahrskas gymnasiet i Västerås [Men and violence – violence-prevention efforts at the Hahrskas Upper Secondary School in Västerås].
- Män och normer. Om projektet Normstorm i Jönköping [Men and norms – a film on the Norm Storm project in Jönköping].
- Vårt vatten har gått. Om pappor i förlossningsvården [Our water broke – fathers in labour and delivery care].
- Män och barn. En film om att bli pappa [Men and children – a film about becoming a father].
- Jämställt föräldraskap. Om Region Skånes pappasamtal med nyblivna fäder [Gender-equal parenting – about the Skåne Region’s counselling with new fathers].
- Män och hälsa. Hur vården kan nå unga män med psykisk ohälsa [Men and health – how healthcare can reach mentally ill young men].
- Att ha rätt till sina egna känslor. Hur vården kan nå unga män med psykisk ohälsa (lång version) [The right to your own feelings – how healthcare can reach mentally ill young men (long version)].
- Män och självmord. En film om suicidrisk, mansnormer och att söka hjälp [Men and suicide – a film about suicide risks, masculinity norms and seeking help].
- Killsamtal om sex och samlevnad. Om sex- och samlevnadsundervisning med killgrupper i Lund [Talking about sexuality and norms with young men – a film about Comprehensive Sexuality Education with the participation of a group of young men in Lund].

Articles on instructive examples at Jämställ.nu

- › Sex- och samlevnadssamtal med unga nyanlända i Värmland [Discussions about sex and living together, with newly arrived immigrants in Värmland].
- › Jämställt föräldraskap i Region Skåne [Gender-equal parenting in Skåne Region].
- › Kriscentrum i mellersta Skåne, behandling för män i kris [Crisis centre in mid-Skåne, treatment for men in crisis].
- › Normkritiskt arbete på Järvenskolan Tallås i Katrineholm [Efforts to critically examine norms at Järven School Tallås in Katrineholm].
- › Malmö stad har flest manliga förskollärare i landet [The City of Malmö has the highest share of male preschool teachers in Sweden].

Conferences and seminars, documentation at skl.se

- › Män och jämställdhet – konferens i december 2016 [Men and gender equality – Conference in December 2016].
- › Fördel flicka? Seminarium om pojkar i skolan [Seminar about boys in school].
- › Vårt vatten har gått! Seminarium om pappor som resurs i förlossningsvården [Seminar about fathers as a resource during labour and delivery].
- › Normer som dödar. Seminarium om män och suicidprevention [Seminar on men and suicide prevention].

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Masculinity and the gender-equal school

TOWARDS A MORE SECURE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND BETTER SCHOOL RESULTS

The notions both adults and students have about how boys should be affect the work of schools in many areas. The poorer school results of boys, and the violence and insecurity in their school environment, are related to masculinity norms.

This publication outlines strategies for developing the work of schools in confronting gender inequality and masculinity norms. It is primarily directed to elected representatives, higher civil servants, and strategists responsible for improving operations in the school sector.

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