



GLOBAL HEALTH & WELLBEING SURVEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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On average, men die five years younger than women, live with worse health and carry the greater burden of chronic disease. Around the world, we lose a man to suicide every minute of every day. This is a health crisis that demands urgent action in order to give men back their missing years and protect their health and wellbeing throughout their life.

The Global Health & Wellbeing Survey is a pilot study, commissioned by The Movember Foundation, to help the health charity better understand the men they're serving and take action to protect men's health. The survey explored the health beliefs, perceptions and health behaviours of 10,765 people (40% males, 60% females) aged 16 years and older in the five countries where The Movember Foundation is active—Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom (UK), and United States (US).

The Global Health & Wellbeing Survey explores the complexities of how people's behaviours, attitudes, life courses and social contexts can influence their health. The survey reveals that the risks to men's mental health is not well understood by men or women. The survey results point to the impact of the vulnerable times in a man's life, revealing men's helpful and harmful responses to tough times, and how different life events that are perceived by many as stressful are associated with suicidal thoughts and behaviours for men of different ages. It also emphasises the importance of social connection for good health and wellbeing.

The Global Health & Wellbeing Survey report provides insights into the health and wellbeing of men (and women) and helps to paint a picture of what it is to be a healthy man in the 21st century.

The survey was conducted by the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre (Young and Well CRC) and The University of Sydney's Brain and Mind Centre online between 1 July and 11 December 2015. The study design was based on learnings from the Young and Well CRC's First and Second National Surveys that focused on young people's mental health and wellbeing as well as current technology use.

The Global Health & Wellbeing Survey utilised an online approach using social media promotion and snowball sampling as the main form of recruitment.

Although targeted recruitment across gender and age was undertaken, this survey is a non-epidemiological convenience sample. This research does not claim to report population prevalence rates. For example, the use of online surveying and recruitment through social media can result in sampling bias and non-response bias. Avidity bias may also be present whereby individuals with a greater interest in, or experience with, a survey topic may be more likely to respond.

The principal aims of the Global Health & Wellbeing Survey were to:

- assess perceptions of the health and wellbeing (including mental health) of men in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and US;
- gain insights into those personal and social factors associated with men's health and wellbeing, with a specific focus on mental health;
- identify areas where there is a significant difference between the perceptions and experiences reported by men compared with women; and,
- better understand men's health behaviours in modern times, including those related to physical activity, alcohol and/or other substance use, eating behaviours, body image, health information seeking, and help-seeking.

The study included modules exploring:

- people's perceptions of the major health problems and the major mental health problems facing younger men (aged 16 to 39 years old), and older men (aged 40 years and older);
- people's perceptions of their current general health, mental health, happiness, wellbeing, and resilience;
- people's emotional empathy, their social connectedness, and their conformity to masculine norms, and how these factors might influence health and wellbeing;
- people's responses and coping strategies during major life events;
- lifestyle habits and their influence on health and wellbeing;

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- perceptions and experiences of stigma and discrimination due to health, mental health and alcohol and/or other substance use problems; and,
- people's help and information seeking confidence, perceptions, and behaviours.

THE RISKS OF POOR MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE THROUGHOUT A MAN'S LIFE WERE NOT WELL UNDERSTOOD

The survey highlighted that many people don't realise that mental health problems and the risk of non-accidental injury, such as suicide, continue throughout men's lives.

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows suicide is the top cause of death in Australian men aged 25 to 44 years, and the third highest killer of men aged 45 to 54 years.

Overall, male and female survey respondents perceived mental health as an issue for younger men, and physical health as an issue for older men.

When men aged 40 years and over were asked to identify the major health problems facing their age category, they mentioned heart disease or cancer at a far greater rate than mental health related problems. Importantly, less than 10 percent identified non-accidental injury, such as suicide and self-harm, which is in stark contrast with suicide statistics.

The survey did reveal an awareness of alcohol related issues, with many respondents identifying alcohol misuse and addiction as a major mental health problem for younger and older men.

HELPFUL AND HARMFUL RESPONSES TO TOUGH TIMES

The seven major life events asked about included suddenly or unexpectedly becoming unemployed, becoming a parent for the first time, experiencing a relationship breakdown, retiring, starting a new job, finishing school or starting university or college.

Alarmingly, almost half (46 percent) of the men surveyed who had experienced at least one of these major life events in the last 12 months which they found stressful reported having had suicidal thoughts. For comparison, 22 percent of men who did not report experiencing a major life event in the last 12 months reported suicidal ideation,

as did 17 percent that did experience a major life event but did not find it stressful.

Compared to women, more men facing major life events that they found to be stressful reported responding with behaviours and coping strategies that are ultimately harmful for health and wellbeing. These harmful behaviours included increasing alcohol, tobacco and/or drug consumption (35 percent); becoming aggressive (21 percent); and taking more risks (27 percent). Like women, many men also reported isolating themselves socially (58 percent). More than one third (35 percent) of men who had experienced a stressful life event did not report that they would talk about their feelings and 28 percent would do nothing.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CONNECTION

Men who identified as more socially connected trended towards responses which indicated they had good health and wellbeing. Worryingly, men who identified more closely with social isolation reported higher psychological distress, higher self-stigma, and lower personal wellbeing (measured through responses to questions about personal health, achievement, relationships, safety, community connectedness, standard of living, and future security). They also reported lower confidence relating to seeking help for physical health, mental health, and alcohol and/or other substance use problems.

LIFE-AFFECTING LIFESTYLES

The survey results also illustrated connections between healthy living habits and good physical and mental health, whilst also identifying that there is room for improvement.

More than half of the men surveyed (55 percent) reported that they engaged in less physical activity than recommended for a healthy lifestyle. Men reporting healthy levels of physical activity was associated with them also reporting higher personal wellbeing and greater happiness, although the relationship between these variables was not strong.

Based on reported height and weight, 68 percent of men reported a body mass index outside the range considered healthy; with one percent underweight, 37 percent overweight and 30 percent obese.



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With regard to eating habits, 65 percent of men surveyed reported they do not eat enough fruit and vegetables daily, and 27 percent eat fast food a few times a week or more.

Women were more likely to consider themselves non-drinkers or occasional alcohol drinkers, while men were more likely to consider themselves social drinkers, heavy drinkers, or binge drinkers.

Of the men who had consumed alcohol, tobacco and/or other drugs at some point during their lifetime, 38 percent had thought recently that they should cut down.

Male respondents reported a higher frequency of late night Internet use than females. For men, late night Internet use was associated, albeit weakly, with poorer sleep quality and mental health and suicidal ideation, as well as lower happiness, resilience, and personal wellbeing.

Men also reported higher levels of gambling than women.

HELP AND INFORMATION SEEKING

Overall, about six out of 10 men expressed confidence that they would be able to find information if they experienced a challenging health problem.

More men (71 percent) were confident about finding information regarding a physical health problem, compared with 61 percent for a mental health problem, and 70 percent for alcohol and/or other substance use problem.

GROUPS AT RISK

For men, there were some groups that experienced significantly higher psychological distress and lower

personal wellbeing. These included men who identified as gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or asexual; those who were more socially isolated; and those who had experienced a stressful major life event. Men who were younger were more likely to have worse mental health, and men who had poorer overall health were more likely to report worse mental health and personal wellbeing.

All these groups also reported significantly less confidence in help-seeking overall. Additionally, those who were not in employment, education, or training were significantly more likely to have worse mental health and self-rated overall health and reported less confidence in help-seeking for physical health conditions.

PAINTING A PICTURE OF A HEALTHY MAN

The Global Health & Wellbeing Survey paints a picture of a healthy man as someone who is not just physically fit, but someone who can respond to tough times in ways that are healthy and helpful in the long run, someone who knows to seek help and how to seek that help when things aren't right, and someone who has strong, supportive social connections. Understanding and addressing lifestyle behaviours is also important, given the role of exercise and diet in preventing poor physical and mental health, and the associations between alcohol and/or other substance use and gambling, and mental health problems.

The Global Health & Wellbeing Survey provides insights that can help organisations design more effective and better targeted men's health and wellbeing programs and inform future population research projects.

SUGGESTED REFERENCE

Burns JM, Davenport TA, Milton AC, Hickie IB et al. Men's health and wellbeing in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and United States: findings from an international online pilot survey. The Movember Foundation, Melbourne, 2016.

