

## Research reveals more than half of UK men feel pressure and anxiety due to societal expectations

**YouGov poll from charity Future Men reveals a crisis of masculinity as more than a third of young men feel unfairly treated and forgotten by society, with social media identified as a key source of negative behavioural role models.**

- 37% of young men feels society still expects them to “be the breadwinner”.
- 49% of UK adults believe that ‘not being able to provide financially’ would cause a man to feel emasculated.
- 51% of young men believe that society expects them to “man up” when faced with challenges.
- A third (34%) of men under 35 feel that struggling with mental health makes them less masculine.
- Over half (51%) felt that “crying in front of others” would make them feel ‘less masculine’
- 29% of UK men feel forgotten/left behind due to society’s expectations of them.

**London, UK, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2022** – [Future Men](#), an award-winning UK charity supporting positive male activity and engagement, today released the results of its Future Men Survey 2023. The survey reveals that over half (52%) of men in the UK feel pressured by society’s expectations of them, and that 40% suffer from anxiety as a result.

The research, conducted by YouGov, polled a nationally representative sample of 2,168 British adults to take the pulse of the country’s perception of what it means “to be a man” in the UK in 2022. The survey highlights changing attitudes towards masculinity, the role that social media plays in teaching “hyper-masculine” behaviour and the impact that the cost-of-living crisis is having on masculine identity, especially for young men.

### Financial pressures taking a toll

Results showed that men are feeling under significant pressure from what they perceive as society’s expectations of them. Much of this pressure is derived from outdated stereotypes of what ‘being a man’ means in modern society. A particular cause for concern is the focus on financial expectations that young men are feeling.

The results reveal that nearly 40% of young men believe that society still expects them to “be the breadwinner” and 50% of UK adults believe that ‘not being able to provide financially’ would cause a man to feel emasculated.

In parallel, many male respondents also show trends towards hiding their emotions from others with 51% of young men believing that society expects them to “man up” when faced with challenges and more than a third (34%) of men under 35 feel that struggling with mental health makes them less masculine. Additionally, over half (51%) also said “crying in front of others” was something that would make them feel ‘less masculine’.

“As we head deeper into a cost-of-living crisis, these results are deeply concerning,” said Owen Thomas, Managing Director of Future Men. “These results highlight the urgent need to address negative archaic stereotypes and provide greater support for young men struggling with emotional or mental health problems,” he continued.

## **Where men learn ‘how to be a man’**

The survey also sheds light on where men are learning ‘how to be a man’ in the modern world. Most respondents believe that family is the most significant influence at 62%, followed by peers/social group (44%) and cultural community (37%). Only 20% of respondents selected social media as a place where they believe men learn how to be a man in the modern world.

However, when asked where men learn ‘hyper-masculine’ behaviours such as an emphasis on physical strength, aggression and sexuality, 60% of respondents believe that social media plays a role. This number rises to 65% amongst young men (under 35) making it the most influential source of these behaviours. When asked ‘what it means to be a man?’ 22% of men under 35 highlighted ‘being successful’, a third (32%) ‘being physically strong’ and more than a quarter (27%) said ‘being powerful’. This further indicates a concerning number of young men believing what many now see as an outdated and harmful vision of hyper-masculinity.

“How, and what boys learn about being a man affects how they manage their lives and relationships. It also affects how they feel about themselves,” said Owen Thomas, Managing Director of Future Men. “At a time when many young men are feeling increased pressure and feel unable to express this, it is not an overstatement to suggest that many young men in the UK are suffering from a crisis of masculinity during particularly important transitional periods in life. This is increasingly dangerous as young men bottle up their emotions and retreat to social media where more troubling attitudes are pervasive and may be influenced by negative behavioural role models/attitudes.”

## **Attitudes moving backwards?**

The survey not only highlights challenges in perceptions of masculinity amongst some young men but also suggests that over the past few years social attitudes across the board seem to be going backward. When compared to the inaugural Future Men Survey 2018, many of the more positive responses towards ‘what it means to be a man’ have dropped significantly. For example, ‘being sensitive’ was cited by only 22% of respondents, down from 44% in 2018. ‘Being loyal’ was down from 62% to 37%, and ‘not showing emotion’ was up 10% from 2018.

However, the trends we are seeing are not a one-way street. When asked what behaviours and attributes were important to being a good father, the top responses from the UK public focused on attributes such as ‘affectionate’, ‘care’, ‘gentle’ and ‘nurturing’ (44%), emphasising the importance of men as emotionally supportive role models in the context of parenthood. The research also found that over half of UK adults now believe that being a man is not defined by their anatomy or genetic make-up. This suggests that while we are seeing some social attitudes sliding back to what many believe are outdated perspectives of masculinity, other social attitudes and beliefs have evolved, the implications of which need to be carefully considered.

The results of this research suggests that far more needs to be done to support men to challenge stereotypes about masculinity and re-evaluate what defines them as men. By investing in development at an early age and encouraging young men to explore, celebrate and build on more positive characteristics we can mitigate against some of the more dangerous consequences of hyper-masculinity and help to build a more dynamic and healthy vision of masculinity in society and a better future for all.

Founded in 1988 as Working With Men, [Future Men](#) is a multi-award-winning specialist charity that supports boys and men along the path to becoming dynamic future men, whilst addressing the stereotypes around masculinity and engaging in the wider conversation of what it means to be a man. Through a front-line delivery of practice-led services, we work with boys and men to help them become dynamic and healthy future men. From structured school programmes and youth hubs to individual one-to-one sessions and outreach work, we provide the vital support and advocacy that changes boys and men's lives for the better.

## **Survey Methodology**

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,168 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+) unless otherwise stated.