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## Dominance-Oriented Views of Masculinity Widespread Among Young Men

**Half of young men in Switzerland are concerned that “real men” are increasingly being marginalized in society. A large-scale study by the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development at the University of Zurich (UZH) in collaboration with männer.ch shows how prevalent restrictive and dominance-based concepts of masculinity are. These ideas go hand in hand with misogyny, a propensity for violence, and opposition to gender equality. Prevention efforts should start in schools.**

The manosphere, a network of online forums and social media channels that promote various forms of extreme masculinity, sexism and strategies for maintaining male dominance, has attracted growing media attention. But what does masculinity mean to people in Switzerland?

A study by the University of Zurich in collaboration with mencare – the umbrella organization of Swiss men’s and fathers’ organizations – has examined this question. The study is based on a representative sample of more than 6,000 people aged 18 to 64 from across Switzerland who were surveyed about their attitudes toward masculinity and gender, and how these attitudes relate to views on family, relationships, sexuality and experiences of violence. This is the first study to provide and systematically analyze such data for Switzerland.

### Major gender divide among young people

Overall, the findings show that men aged between 18 and 24 recorded the highest scores on attitudes associated with a restrictive and dominance-based view of masculinity, and half of them are concerned that “real men are increasingly being marginalized in society.”

In contrast, young women are much more likely to have egalitarian and open-minded attitudes toward gender – resulting in a significant divide between young men and women. Although the attitudes of men and women become more similar with age, women consistently score lower on restrictive and dominance-based masculinity across all age groups.

### The M factor: a syndrome of dominance and exclusion

A key finding of the study is the identification of the “M factor”. The researchers use this term to describe a broad pattern of attitudes that combines various restrictive views of masculinity and gender relations. “The M factor reflects an attitude that sees ‘true masculinity’ as under threat. It is associated with notions of male supremacy, a propensity for violence, misogyny, contempt for sexual minorities and opposition to gender equality,” says study leader Denis Ribeaud, a criminologist and sociologist at the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development at UZH. “Our data show that all these views are closely linked and can be traced back to a common underlying attitude. This is a significant new finding.”

Overall, 20% of men and 7% of women surveyed fall into the group with high M factor scores. Individuals in this group are more likely to exhibit problematic or violent behavior. The factor is widespread in the youngest age group – almost one in three men aged between 18 and 24 (31%) belong to the group with the highest

scores. M-factor scores are higher in German-speaking Switzerland than in the French- and Italian-speaking parts of the country. High M-factor scores are also more common in suburban and rural areas than in cities.

### **Education and background shape M factor**

Men with a low level of education, low professional status and low income are overrepresented in the group with high M-factor scores. Among men aged 18 to 24 with an apprenticeship qualification, almost one in two falls into this group (47%). The reverse is also true: the higher a person's level of education and the better their prospects in life, the lower their M-factor score.

Men whose fathers were born in countries outside Switzerland that are characterized by more patriarchal social structures have higher M-factor scores. According to the authors of the study, such structures are particularly common in places where rule-of-law institutions are less firmly established. Men from such backgrounds may be less familiar with, or more skeptical of, Western norms of equality. If they also experience exclusion and limited social participation in Switzerland, this can trigger a counter-reaction where a restrictive and dominance-based concept of masculinity becomes a seemingly reliable anchor for their self-esteem.

### **Family roles and domestic violence**

High M-factor scores are linked to a greater likelihood of following "traditional" divisions of labor within families and relationships, in which women are more likely to perform the majority of care work, while men are much more likely to be the sole breadwinners. Such men are also more likely to view the roles of fathers and mothers in child-rearing as fundamentally different, and to believe that boys and girls need to be raised in a very different way. Authoritarian behavior and violence in child-rearing are seen as acceptable by these men.

High M-factor scores are also associated with an increased likelihood of perpetrating or experiencing intimate partner violence. "The M factor is a consistent risk factor for intimate partner violence – in terms of perpetrating and experiencing it, and across both sexes: men and women with high M-factor scores are more likely to report having committed but also experienced violence in their relationships," says Denis Ribeaud. "This is not contradictory. Those who see male supremacy, contempt for women and controlling behavior as normal are at greater risk of being on both sides of this dynamic."

### **Men and women experience violence differently**

Surprisingly, men were much more likely than women to classify lower-level physical violence in relationships recorded in the study – slapping, pushing, throwing things – as experiences of violence. At the same time, other data sources and studies show that women are much more likely to experience severe intimate partner violence, including fatal violence. Due to power structures and dynamics, women experience violence differently and with more serious consequences. They are also much more likely to be affected by extreme forms of dominance-based coercive control.

In addition, men with high M-factor scores are more likely to report identifying as involuntarily celibate ("incel"), consuming hardcore pornography and using sexual services.

### **Prevention starts at school**

The study findings point to the need for a systematic and society-wide debate about ideals of masculinity that promote violence. The debate should start in schools. "The key prevention message is that there is not just one 'right' form of masculinity. Masculinity is malleable. You can be a boy and become a man in any number of ways," says co-author Markus Theunert, co-director of männer.ch. To this end, professionals working in education and social services must be given the skills needed to address the M factor.

The study shows that people with greater educational and career opportunities are less likely to buy into restrictive norms of masculinity. This is why the researchers make the case for prevention-based approaches

that combine social integration, equal opportunities and critical reflection on gender norms – in particular for young men facing difficult circumstances. Crucially, engaged fatherhood helps promote gender equality and prevent violence. “Men who are actively involved in day-to-day family life not only have a positive impact on their children’s emotional and social development, but also on their academic success,” says Theunert.

Further analyses are planned based on the collected data to examine the relationship between M factor and media use (the manosphere), leisure activities, health and worldviews.

### **Literature**

Ribeaud, D., Buzzi, L. & Theunert, M. (2026). Männlichkeit im Wandel: Einstellungen, Lebensformen, Sexualität, Partnerschaft und Gewalt. Ergebnisse einer repräsentativen Befragung in der Schweiz. Zürich: Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development, Universität Zürich. DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-434406>

You can view the summary and the report in German here:  
[www.jacobscenter.uzh.ch/de/research/zproso/miw.html](http://www.jacobscenter.uzh.ch/de/research/zproso/miw.html)

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