

UNMASKING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

How Toxic Masculinities Drive Men's Abuse in the US, UK, and Mexico
and What We Can Do to End It

**A PROMUNDO RESEARCH BRIEF PRODUCED FOR
WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM ANNUAL MEETING 2018**

CONTACT: Gary Barker, President and CEO, Promundo-US, g.barker@promundo.org.br

ABOUT THE STUDY

In a pioneering recent study, Promundo explored young men's views about manhood through a new research tool called the "Man Box," a scale composed of 17 attitude statements on toxic masculinity. The original study included representative samples of more than 1,000 young men each in the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), and Mexico, across rural and urban areas and all educational and income levels. The survey was carried out in September and October 2016. For the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2018, Promundo carried out additional data analysis, focusing specifically on learning more about young men and sexual harassment.¹

HARASSMENT STARTS YOUNG AND TAKES MANY FORMS

Much of the discussion about harassment has been about the behavior of men in power: Harvey Weinstein, Matt Lauer, prominent legislators, and business leaders. However, recent research from Promundo finds that harassing and abusive behaviors start young and are pervasive among men of all backgrounds:

¹See the original report: <http://www.promundoglobal.org/man-box>
www.promundoglobal.org

- 1 in 5 young men in Mexico and nearly 1 in 3 young men in the US and the UK had made **sexually harassing comments to a woman or girl** they didn't know, in a public place – like the street, their workplace, their school/university, or an internet or social media space – in the previous month.
- 42% to 48% of young men aged 18 to 30 in the three countries studied (US, UK, and Mexico) had **teased someone**, either male or female, or called them names, in the previous month.
- 1 in 5 young men in Mexico, and nearly 1 in 3 young men in the US and the UK, had **posted photos or messages to embarrass or harass someone**, either male or female, in the previous month.
- 1 in 5 young men in Mexico, and 1 in 3 young men in the US and the UK, reported **hurting someone physically**, with their fist or a weapon, in the previous month.

Far from the behavior of only rich and powerful men, abuse and harassment of various kinds are commonly and routinely carried out every day by young men in all three countries, at rates from 1/5 to 1/3 of young men surveyed.

2

WHICH YOUNG MEN HARASS OR USE VIOLENCE?

A majority of young men don't harass, don't bully, and don't approve of this violence, but many – from 1/5 to 1/3 – do. What makes the harassers different from the non-harassers? Which young men are more likely to harass?

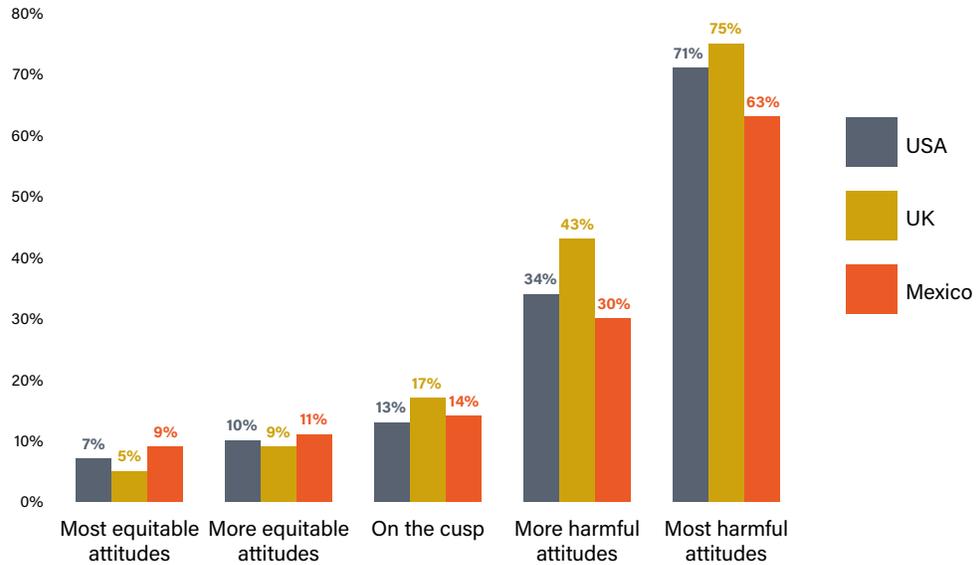
Across all three countries, when we compared young men who had harassed to those who had not harassed, the strongest factor was their attitudes about what it means to be a man. These were measured using the Man Box scale of 17 attitude statements, including: “Guys should act strong even when they feel scared or nervous inside,” “A real man would never say no sex,” and others. **Young men who believed in these toxic ideas of manhood most strongly were the most likely to have ever perpetrated sexual harassment.**

As seen in the figure on page 3, young men who held the strongest belief in toxic norms of manhood were nearly 10 times as likely to have harassed as young men who least believed in these norms. This association was significant even when controlling for age, income, and education. In other words, **young men who harass come from all income levels, all educational backgrounds, and all ages.** Harassment is not perpetrated only by men in power, although it is clearly an attempt to exert power over women, girls, and/or other men. What seems to drive young men's harassment, more than any other factor surveyed, is how much they believe in, or have internalized, toxic ideas about masculinity.

THE MORE TOXIC THE MASCULINITY, THE MORE YOUNG MEN HARASS*

PERPETRATION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT, BY MAN BOX SCALE QUINTILES

Percent who report perpetration



* Figures represent the proportion of young men within this quintile group who reported perpetrating sexual harassment in the month prior to research. The attitude groups are quintiles based on responses to the 17-item Man Box scale of gender attitudes. All differences are statistically significant.

3

WE'RE ALL RESPONSIBLE FOR ENDING HARASSMENT BY MEN

If it's their attitudes that are in large part driving men's harassing behaviors, how often are these toxic ideas about manhood communicated to boys? The survey also included asking young men about whether they had been exposed to these ideas:

- Across all three countries, nearly 2/3 of respondents had been told, at some point in their lives, that a "real man" behaves a certain way.
- More than half of the young men surveyed in all three countries agreed, "Society as a whole tells me that a real man would never say no to sex."
- 1 in 5 young men in Mexico to 1 in 3 young men in the US and the UK said that his partner (primarily women) expects him to use violence to defend his reputation.

Parents, teachers, the media, colleagues, intimate partners, and male and female peers too often repeat and pass on these messages that "real manhood" is about domination, using violence, and never taking "no" for an answer when it comes to sex. **The bottom line is that we spend a lot of time and energy raising boys into a toxic version of manhood.**



WHAT CAN WE DO TO END TOXIC MASCULINITY AND HARASSMENT?

The encouraging news is that there are programs, with evidence to back them up, that have been shown to change young men's views about manhood, and to reduce sexual harassment and other forms of violence.

Promundo's Manhood 2.0 group education initiative is currently being evaluated by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as a promising practice in sexual assault prevention. Manhood 2.0 is based on Promundo's Program H approach, which has been used in more than 20 settings globally and has been found to change attitudes related to toxic masculinities and to reduce violence by young men in multiple impact evaluations, from Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa to South Asia and Europe. Many other programs using similar methodologies around the world have also shown evidence, in rigorous impact evaluations, of reducing young men's violence. The lessons learned in such programs are:

1. **Start early**, engaging youth in reflection and discussion about respect and equality, in schools and in after-school programs.
2. **Reach children and adolescents where they are**, whether at home or at school, online, in sports programs, and beyond.
3. **Directly discuss "what it means to be a man,"** using critical conversations about gender norms to show how young men can shape their definition of masculinity around respect, care, generosity, and rejection of violence, rather than the toxic alternatives.
4. **Listen to women** and include their voices at all levels of programming and outreach, and elevate the voices of women of color, disabled women, immigrant women, and lesbian, transgender, and bisexual women, who may be disproportionately affected by violence.
5. **Involve caregivers**, particularly fathers and other male caregivers, in teaching and modeling equality, respect, and nonviolence at home.
6. Work alongside and follow the lead of **women's rights activists**.
7. **Target all men:** sexual harassment and assault is pervasive across men's ages and backgrounds.
8. **Work with celebrities and key gatekeepers** (such as religious leaders) as visible role models for positive behavior.
9. **Implement bystander approaches**, teaching young men to speak out in nonviolent ways when they see the abusive behavior of their peers.