

# Summary

Our remit was to survey and analyse issues concerning men and gender equality in Sweden.

Under our terms of reference, we were to examine how the circumstances in which men live have changed in recent years and how this relates to gender equality and shortcomings in terms of gender equality. We have now done this.

Under our terms of reference, we were not to present proposals for measures, but instead describe and analyse the circumstances in which men live in Sweden. We have therefore presented our views in the form of conclusions.

In Chapters 1 and 2 we discuss our remit and why we consider it important to highlight issues concerning men in gender equality policy and in the public debate.

We also point out that a whole host of changes are taking place in society concerning issues such as demography, economy and the labour market, families, home and fatherhood, individualisation, nation, class and ethnicity, and sexuality. Men and women are confronted with these changes, whether they like it or not. Directly and indirectly, they affect gender equality and the possibilities of living a life based on gender equality.

Men's self-image is therefore currently being challenged in a number of areas of society. At the same time, many traditional norms still survive and are embraced in other areas, despite social changes and political action.

Gender equality as a social issue has mainly been driven – successfully – by women, although the goal of gender equality has not actually been achieved. Many men have welcomed the change, but many have observed, remained passive or resisted. It is high time for more men to take greater responsibility for a society based on gender

equality and become more active in gender equality efforts. In this report we explain why.

Gender equality is actually a simple issue. It is based on the value that people, regardless of gender, are to have the same opportunities in life. If one accepts this value, the changes in society that then must take place seem rather natural.

The gender equality debate quite rightly focuses on men's greater power and greater resources. Men are favoured by the gender order in society. The gender norms and behaviour patterns that restrict women's life opportunities can also have a negative impact on men's life opportunities. It is therefore important that men's rolls, actions and conditions are highlighted in gender equality policy work.

Boys' opportunities at school, how men balances between work and family, share of parental leave taken, custody disputes, men's health, men's ill health, social vulnerability and risk behaviour, men's violence against others and men's exposure to violence, attitudes towards gender equality and perceptions of gender equality – these are questions we have examined.

There is a large disparity between the conditions of different men. Men's different resources and opportunities have consequences for men's and women's lives, and affect men's self-image and behaviour. Men are overrepresented at the top level of society but at the same time also when it comes to suicide, substance abuse and crime. Changing the norms of masculinity is important to achieve gender equality in general as well as with regard to the difficulties that can affect men.

The view of men can at times be one-sided and undifferentiated, when it comes to questions about gender equality. As a result, many men and women may not be able to identify with the discussion and so do not get involved or simply reject it. It has been our desire to provide a more in-depth view of men that takes account of both the general lack of gender equality in society and the diversity that characterises men's lives.

We want to believe that all parents and grandparents want their children and grandchildren to have the same opportunities in life regardless of whether the child or grandchild happens to be born a boy or a girl. With that belief comes a commitment.

## Men, forms of masculinity and men's norms undergoing change

There are many positive signs indicating that society point is moving towards more gender equality. Many men assume responsibility for both gainful employment and work in the home. Women are increasingly breaking into areas traditionally dominated by men. But we feel that the pace of change is too slow. It is not enough to simply wait for change to come; instead, there are many areas that need social – at times structural – measures to move towards greater gender equality.

In Chapter 3, *Changing forms of masculinity*, we explain what is meant by the term 'masculinity'; a term we use when we discuss the social conceptions that affect men's lives.

In the chapter we discuss how analyses of men and gender equality can balance questions concerning men and power, men and vulnerability and hierarchies between different groups of men.

Altered masculinity norms challenge patriarchal patterns and so attention must be given to the different ways in which men and boys express intimacy, care and change. However, it is vital for change that society places the same demands and expectations on men and women, boys and girls regarding work, education, responsibilities as a care provider, rejecting violence, etc. We have also considered the need for a LGBT perspective and norm-critical methods in the process of change concerning men in both school and society. The chapter concludes by considering men and gender equality in relation to issues regarding welfare policy, globalisation, migration, xenophobia and demographic changes in society.

The title we have chosen for Chapter 4 is *Differing conditions for men*. This refers to the fact that in many respects, there is a difference in the conditions for men and women, but also that there is a difference in the conditions for various groups of men in society. We point out that, although changes have occurred and are occurring, men hold an overwhelmingly large share of the positions of power and of economic power). At the same time, the differences in conditions for men are apparent in issues of class, life expectancy, geography, ethnicity, age, sexuality, etc. Different positions, resources and degrees of social inclusion affect the way masculinity is expressed and the situation concerning men's life opportunities.

It is our opinion that more attention must be given to issues concerning segregation, inequality and ethnic discrimination to

provide better conditions for gender equality. It is therefore important to examine the social norms that reward certain groups of men and exclude others. For example, men in rural areas, working class men, or immigrants are often stereotyped or considered to be 'other' men.

At the same time, attention must be given to various specific conditions. This concerns matters such as how men in rural areas deal with unemployment and conceptions of 'rural men'. Another concern is how immigrant men may experience loss of status after migrating, and how they react to shifts of power in the family.

## Men and education

In Chapter 5 we discuss how gender norms, 'anti-study' cultures, boys' lack of motivation, interaction between pupils and teachers, and institutional factors affect boys' opportunities in school. The discussion covers boys and men in preschool, compulsory school, upper secondary school and higher education. Regarding preschool, we highlight the need for gender pedagogy and the issue of increasing the proportion of men in the preschool environment.

The chapter considers various hypotheses presented in recent years as to why boys as a group generally perform worse in school than girls as a group, and what could change and increase boys' motivation and investment in school work.

Here we emphasise how boys can be affected by the patterns in the labour market signalling that it is still possible for men to do better in working life even though their school results are generally poorer. These patterns change, for example through restructuring and the inroads made by women into higher education programmes and professional categories that are traditionally male-dominated. Many boys therefore need to be clearly prepared more for a future working life under transformation and for the requirement of a good education continuing to increase in the future. We highlight issues regarding boys' and girls' gender-specific educational choices, focusing on the importance of greater opportunities for boys to apply to educational programmes that are traditionally female dominated.

Boys are more often guilty of harassment than girls. We make clear that there is to be zero tolerance regarding sexism, harassment and play fighting in school and that this is important for both boys' and girls' study environment.

In addition, we spotlight schools that have received attention in the media due to improved school environment and performance. The work at these schools represents positive examples and can act as a source of inspiration for continued gender equality efforts in schools. We also highlight the need to discuss the effects of segregation and the lack of equivalence between schools in the discussion on how to improve pupil performance.

## **Work and responsibility in working life and the family**

In Chapter 6 we focus on men's gainful employment, work in the home and use of time. We show that traditional patterns for men and women still exist but that the differences are decreasing.

The problem from a gender point of view is that there is a significant difference between men's and women's gainful employment. Men spend about 25 per cent more actual time in gainful employment than women. This is reflected in the gender gap in part-time work, with consequences for men's and women's economic dependence or independence.

Women are making many inroads into areas traditionally dominated by men, but men are not making corresponding inroads into areas traditionally dominated by women.

A traditional pattern also still exists regarding men's and women's work in the home. Men in the age group 20–64 spend 45 minutes less per day working in the home than women, based on all 7 days of the week.

Compared with women, men devote about half as much time to caring for their own children. On weekdays, men spend two hours less on this compared with women. One in six cohabiting men feel that they do too little when it comes to work in the home. One in four women feel that they do too much.

In broad terms, achieving true gender equality in fact requires that men and women spend an equal number of hours in gainful employment and that they fully share responsibilities in the home, etc.

We also discuss issues concerning men in caring professions and how future demographic changes will increase the need for staff in health and social care. Having more men working in these sectors is important both from a gender equality perspective and to broaden and increase recruitment of staff to health services.

Chapter 7 deals with men, families and parenthood. The amount of parental leave taken by men is increasing, but this development is slow. Responsibility for care of small children has traditionally been – and still remains – largely the responsibility of women, but many men are in favour of changing this. In the chapter, we discuss men's attitudes to parenthood, the history of the Swedish fatherhood policy, men who take parental leave and men's experiences of separations and custody disputes.

Fathers take 9 per cent of the parents' total allocation of parental benefit days up until the child's first birthday and 17 per cent of the days up until the child's second birthday. There are large differences in men's parental benefit claims and over 20 per cent of men still take hardly any parental leave at all before the child begins preschool. An individualised parental insurance system is necessary to significantly increase men's share. This is partly to give the child a good opportunity to bond with both the father and mother, and partly to create more gender-equal relations that also give the mother the same equal opportunities in the labour market as the father. This, we believe, supported by our research reports, would be very beneficial for gender equality. Flexibility in the parental insurance system and the possibility of spreading out days – which most parents do – mean that a parent in most cases can still be at home for close to a year, even if the right to transfer days between parents is removed. In light of this, dividing parental insurance into thirds seems like a relatively modest change. An additional 'father's month' alone would probably have a limited effect on the amount of leave men take.

The reason we take a positive approach to reform of parental insurance is that we feel this provides society with a tangible and effective tool for increasing gender equality. This also means that employers would no longer be able to take the attitude that – taking account of attendance at work – it is 'safer' to employ a man aged 25–30 than a woman of the same age.

We also emphasise that men's parental leave must be seen as a rights issue for men, and that considerable evidence suggests that parental leave has a positive impact on men's lives. It enhances the contact between fathers and their children throughout life, and in particular if the parents separate.

We also point out that most of the men who become parents today are not married but are cohabiting with the child's mother. Fatherhood must then be confirmed by the social services, and these routines should be simplified. The opportunities for LGBT parents and

rainbow families to share parental leave among more than two guardians is also an issue for closer examination.

We have also raised the issue of custody disputes. There is a sharp increase in the proportion of children who currently alternate their residence between their parents following a separation. It is still most common for women to be the resident parent. We point to the fact that certain groups of men have reported experiences of gender-oriented treatment in family courts and that current legislation is felt to be a driver of conflict. Women also often experience problems in family courts, and there appears to be a significant need to provide further support to parents caught up in custody disputes. It seems that social services could facilitate custody processes and reduce conflict situations by reviewing their working methods. New methods are currently developed by social services and this needs to be given public attention together with questions about custody disputes in general. There are high expectations for the Government's coming evaluation of custody legislation, which should consider the entire custody process.

## **Men's health, ill health and social vulnerability**

Chapter 8 deals with men's health, ill health and social vulnerability. Men and health is an extensive research area. We highlight two combined perspectives found in this field of research. One is how norms for masculinity affect men's health behaviour, the other how analyses of socio-economic conditions are crucial for correct descriptions of issues concerning men, physique and health. Health and ill health are clearly linked to matters such as socio-economic conditions.

Women, in general, are more affected by ill health. Norms for masculinity, however, have an unnecessary impact on men's relation to health services. Norms based on the view that men should be tough, invulnerable, robust and not show weakness have consequences for men's health. Many men tend not to seek care in time and to a greater extent devote themselves to unwholesome and risky habits and activities.

Research also points to ways in which health and medical care can contribute to the perception of men as invulnerable and strong by not asking men as many questions or not viewing risky behaviour as a sign of psychological ill health. Improving opportunities for men to

talk about health and ill health is therefore an important measure. For example, it has emerged that young men suffering from depression have fewer relations and environments where they can talk about their situation.

We also address issues concerning men's changed attitudes to the way they look and their physique. Discussions are presented here on the aestheticisation by certain men of their bodies and how this contributes to the view of men's bodies and identities.

Another area is health issues associated with the work. We point to the fact that men are less on sick leave than women. We also point to the fact that men suffer a great proportion of accidents at work compared to women and a significantly larger proportion of the fatal accidents.

We also highlight issues concerning male suicide – which represents 70 per cent of the total number of suicides and issues concerning social vulnerability such as homelessness, criminality and substance abuse, and how these can be related to issues concerning masculinity. Finally, we point out that gender equality appears to entail advantages for men in the form of better health and reduced risk behaviour.

## **Men and violence**

Chapter 9 deals with men's violence. The discussion in the chapter looks at men's violence against women as well as men's violence against other men and men's exposure to violence. Most men do not exercise violence, but men's violence against women and against other men is widespread and the fight against violence should be of concern to all men.

From a gender equality perspective, there are a variety of reasons why it is important to question forms of 'accepted' violence between men. It is reasonable to assume there is a risk that violence against women will increase in contexts where violence between men is normalised. In addition, violence between men is not something that should be accepted, just as violence against women should not be accepted. The fact that violence between men in certain contexts can be seen as normal elements of young men's ordinary lives comes at the expense of a reduced status for health care and gender equality,

which can affect the opportunities for young men to identify with gender-equal life patterns.

Further attention must be given to men's violence against women, both generally and with focus on particularly vulnerable groups of women. We emphasise that 'gender-equal' men who exercise violence often have difficulty accepting a self-image as an abusive man, and that this can lead to violence being covered up or to their avoiding seeking treatment.

Highlighting men's violence against women is not contradictory to calling attention to men exposed to relation-based violence, something that has occurred in recent years. But these phenomena have different forms and cannot be equated. Violence against women in close relationships is more serious, more vicious and much more dangerous. The work against violence includes issues regarding sexual violence, harassment, hate crimes and honour-related violence.

Research on men and violence stands out as a field that requires greater attention. It is a matter of both violence in close relationships and collective violence exercised by men in groups, for example hooligan disturbances. In addition, we present various preventive measures to reduce men's violence, and we look at how gender equality affects the way men exercise violence; strong evidence suggests that enhanced gender equality in society reduces men's violence.

## **Men and sexuality**

In Chapter 10 we discuss men's view of sexuality and issues concerning men's sexual health. Today there is a growing awareness of the needs men have in terms of care and counselling regarding sexual health. Increased focus on men's sexual health issues can be seen as a part of gender equality efforts that benefit men and change stereotypical ideas of men's sexuality.

Also discussed in the chapter are heteronormativity and LGBT issues, including HIV. In addition, we discuss issues regarding pornography and the internet, and how sexual abuse of women on the internet appears to be a growing social problem. In order to include boys in sex education and to problematise norms and gender inequality in a way that not only highlights problems but also provides examples of positive approaches, we describe respect techniques that

can be used in sex education. The concept of ‘respect techniques’ can be used as a tool to discuss masculinity norms and gender equality.

In addition, we discuss men’s role in prostitution and the purchase of sexual services. We highlight the significance of the Swedish legislation on the prohibition of the purchase of sexual services and of companies clearly signalling their opposition to prostitution and the sex trade in their codes of conduct in connection with business trips. We also call attention to clinics that work with men who purchase sexual services and the fact that it is important to highlight the situation of young men who sell sex.

In the debate, it has been pointed out that that in Sweden, there is neither enough of andrology in medical education, nor knowledge of andrology in the health care system in Sweden. It has been argued that this contributes to men’s sexual health risks being neglected and an underutilization of existing treatment options to improve men’s quality of life. This is confirmed in our study where we discuss the needs of clinics for men and better andrological knowledge in health care.

## **Men’s attitudes towards and perceptions of gender equality**

Chapter 11 deals with men’s attitudes towards gender equality and other social issues that in various ways are related to gender equality.

We point out that men vote for conservative parties more often than women and are less interested in ‘soft’ issues.

The attitude towards gender equality appears to be increasingly positive among the majority of men and there is a positive link between men’s attitudes towards gender equality and gender equal actions. At the same time, it still holds true that many men – and to a certain degree even women – have an ‘in principle’ attitude towards gender equality when discussing concrete gender equality policy measures. In this context, there is reason to ask whether the gender equality aspects of attitude-changing measures – aimed at breaking norms and structures – are limited compared with concrete measures such as reformed parental insurance.

There are men who are actively involved in gender equality issues and feminism. There is also a more visible, although not necessarily larger, resistance – not least in digital media – against the move towards gender equality, and in particular against feminism. Resistance may be based on principles, but also a lack of knowledge

or an unwillingness to have to problematise gender-unequal structures in society and men's traditional positions.

Men are overrepresented among people with xenophobic views. Issues concerning xenophobia and opposition to immigration are often related to opposition to gender equality and feminism. Hatred of women, refugees and homosexuals is cultivated in certain xenophobic subgroups. These attitudes can be linked to the defence of traditional forms of dominant masculinity, which some men feel they have the right to express. There are also groups – not least among young men – that can express both opposition to immigration and criticism of gender equality as a way of dealing with a perceived marginalisation in society.

Regarding the issue of men's attitudes towards gender equality, attention is given to both change and opposition, and to the need to link attitudes to broader societal changes.

## Research and organisations

In Chapter 12 we describe research on men, organisations and activities that work with issues concerning men and gender equality.

Research on men, gender and masculinity is at present an extensive and well-established scientific field. Within the framework of masculinity research, a number of fields concerning men and society have been analysed and continuously explored. The research is conducted globally, and Sweden and the Nordic countries have a strong position in the field. Research on men and masculinity also receives attention in international political contexts. Extensive investigative work on issues concerning men and gender equality has been produced by the European Commission in cooperation with a large number of European researchers in the field of masculinity research.

There are a number of organisations and groups in Sweden and internationally working on gender equality issues and men. In particular, there are many activities that focus on issues concerning men and violence. The chapter contains an inventory of these. It is primarily the organisation *Män för jämställdhet* (Men for gender equality) that conducts long-term work in Sweden and that cooperates with several other organisations in the international arena, including the organisation *MenEngage*. These activities are gaining increasing attention in national gender equality work and international

development work. One problem for non-profit organisations is that work to bring about change is often conducted in project form and can be difficult to evaluate. Non-profit organisations whose work focuses on men and gender equality and that achieve good results should therefore be provided with the right conditions to conduct positive, continuous activities.

We also discuss the need to strengthen and develop father and parent education and the need to support activities in which men and younger men work together to combat men's violence.

## **Men, gender equality and social change**

We present our concluding perspectives and overall conclusions in Chapter 13. Conceptions of a current masculine identity crisis and the beginning of female dominance in society are discussed here. We believe that these conceptions in many ways are off mark. If anything, women's progress in many areas of society is a democratic and social victory. A development that can – hopefully – strengthen gender equality as the norm would alter the perception of men and women for the better.

At the same time, we problematise the issue of developments concerning gender equality and raise the question of whether there is a risk of an increasing gender equality gap emerging in Sweden. There are signs that a gender-equal lifestyle exists and will continue to exist primarily in groups with good levels of education and good incomes, while the opportunities to live a gender-equal life may actually be decreasing for those whose position in working life is weak and increasingly insecure. This applies to future opportunities for women in service and health care professions as well as to large groups of men at risk of being affected by restructuring or who fail at school and have problems establishing themselves in working life.

At the same time, we see that also in high-income families, rather frequent gender unequal patterns exist, for example when it comes to parental leave.

Issues concerning globalisation, sustainable growth, the ageing population, migration and integration, democracy and social cohesion have been identified as key future issues for Sweden. We consider that work on gender equality issues in a broad sense, and in particular issues concerning men and men's norms, lay the foundation for tackling these challenges.

We stress the need to highlight how men's norms affect individuals and society, the importance of giving visibility to issues concerning men in gender equality efforts and men's responsibility for gender equality. In addition, gender equality issues must be put in relation to broad social policy perspectives. Good welfare, child and elderly care, an inclusive labour market and an equivalent educational system are needed for men and women to have equal power and equal opportunities to shape society and their own lives.