



MASCULINITY EXPLORED:

PERCEPTIONS, CHALLENGES,
AND ATTITUDES AMONG
MEN AND WOMEN
WITHIN ARMENIAN
COMMUNITY





Research titled “MASCULINITY EXPLORED: PERCEPTIONS, CHALLENGES, AND ATTITUDES AMONG MEN AND WOMEN WITHIN ARMENIAN COMMUNITY” has been conducted by the Sexual Assault Crisis Center.

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PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

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Expectations and Designated Roles: Studies consistently highlight the substantial influence of societal expectations and designated roles on male perceptions, behaviors, and overall well-being. Men are often expected to embody the provider role, creating stress regarding career success and financial stability¹. Traditional masculinity norms discourage emotional expression and vulnerability, leading men to suppress feelings, impacting mental health and relationships. Additionally, societal values tend to glorify physical strength and risk-taking in men, fostering a culture where vulnerability is discouraged². Importantly, these expectations and roles significantly vary across cultures, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Mental Health: As various studies suggest there are diverse perceptions of masculinity that can differently affect the insights of men and their well-being. This way, some research suggests that traditional masculinity norms often emphasize stoicism, self-reliance, and suppression of emotions, impacting men's willingness to seek help or discuss vulnerabilities³. Studies reveal that adherence to rigid masculine norms can lead to stress, limited emotional expression, and strained relationships⁴. Research highlights the stigma surrounding men's mental health, leading to underreporting of mental health issues and reluctance to seek therapy or support. Traditional masculinity norms often discourage seeking mental health treatment due to perceptions of weakness or failure. Male perceptions are significantly influenced by societal expectations related to success, career, and provider roles. Research indicates that societal pressure to conform to masculine ideals can create mental health challenges and hinder emotional well-being. At the same time men happen to be more reluctant to applying for mental health support, considering it as a less masculine act⁵.

Seeking Support and Health Care: The societal notion of masculinity obstructs men from seeking specialized help, particularly concerning sexual or masculine functionality issues. Men tend to engage less in health-seeking behaviors, delaying medical assistance and preferring to solve problems independently. On the other hand, when facing any problems in everyday life, they also tend to solve the issue on their own with involvement of as few people. Factors like masculinity ideals, fear of vulnerability, and societal stigmas around seeking help contribute to this behavior. Some researchers observe that cultural norms encourage men to exhibit bravery and independence in healthcare, limiting their health awareness and service utilization. In various cultures, perceptions shaped by cultural notions impact men's health knowledge and assistance-seeking behavior⁶. Cultural notions and practices play a major role in shaping men's perceptions in some nations and cultures⁷. Then again, male perceptions of relationships are often influenced by traditional gender roles, affecting communication and emotional expression within these relationships. Challenges in effective communication and emotional intimacy adversely affect the quality of relationships.

Thus, various studies consistently illustrate that societal expectations and traditional masculinity norms significantly impact male perceptions of the acts they should take, their health, mental well-being, emotional expressions and relationships. Understanding these diverse perceptions is crucial in crafting targeted interventions and support systems tailored to address the specific needs and challenges faced by men. In the Armenian context, the absence of tailored research addressing the concerns of boys and men highlights the necessity for initiatives that study and address these patterns specifically within Armenian society. This study initiative aims to delve into the unique needs, worries, and challenges faced by the male population in Armenia.

¹Parker K., Stepler R. (2017). Americans see men as the financial providers, even as women's contributions grow, Pew Research Center

²Kaya, A.; Iwamoto, D.K.; Brady, J.; Clinton, L.; Grivel, M. (2019). The role of masculine norms and gender role conflict on prospective well-being among men. *Psychol. Men Masc.*

³Sileo K. M., Kershaw T. S. (2020). Dimensions of Masculine Norms, Depression, and Mental Health Service Utilization: Results From a Prospective Cohort Study Among Emerging Adult Men in the United States, Published online

⁴Szydek M. R. (2010). Adherence to Masculine Norms and Attributional Processes Predict Depressive Symptoms in Recently Unemployed Men

⁵Stagier T., Stiawa M., Kilina R. et al (2020). Masculinity and Help-Seeking Among Men With Depression: A Qualitative Study

⁶Smith, J. A., Braunack-Mayer, A. & Wittert, G. (2006). What do we know about men's help seeking and health service use? *Medical Journal of Australia*

⁷Skovdal, M., Campbell, C., Nyamukapa, C. & Gregson, S. (2011). When masculinity interferes with women's treatment of HIV infection: a qualitative study about adherence to antiretroviral therapy in Zimbabwe. *Journal of the International Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome Society*



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Masculine Roles and Expectations

This study investigated societal views on gender roles and expectations placed on men, finding that stereotypes significantly influence male behavior, potentially limiting their pursuits. Respondents globally aligned with societal standards, emphasizing the pressure men face to conform to traditional roles like being providers and protectors. Professionally, men are expected to pursue lucrative careers and exhibit continuous growth, unlike women who don't face the same demands for top positions. Interestingly, female perspectives mirrored these expectations but noted shifts in men's attitudes toward women. Both genders recognized evolving family decision-making dynamics, transitioning towards shared responsibilities.

Men are expected to excel in various roles—fatherhood, friendship, and professionalism—by different social groups. These expectations, influenced by societal constructs, impose specific emotional limitations on men from childhood. Men are seen as adept negotiators due to their perceived emotional control, a trait nurtured by societal constraints. Employment settings often reinforce established gender norms, attributing assertiveness to professionalism, perpetuating stereotypical behaviors.

Ultimately, this study reveals the profound impact of societal expectations on men across their professional, familial, and emotional spheres. These entrenched norms shape their paths, influencing their identities and reinforcing established gender roles within Armenian society across traits, occupations, behaviors, and appearance.

Gender-driven Inequality, Discrimination and Challenges

Dwelling into the areas where injustice and discrimination against males are prevalent within society, such spheres like labor, relationships, communication, emotional expression, and military service were emphasized. Female participants noted emotional restrictions imposed on men, while also expecting them to exhibit strength and cover expenses, creating a cycle of conflicting demands and behaviors.

Participants described men's lives as a continuous struggle, aligning with Erik Erikson's developmental theory, particularly noting challenges in establishing individuality due to societal expectations. Discrimination against men was highlighted in labor, education, and behavioral aspects, indicating biases in hiring, grading, and societal demands for assertiveness. Emotional limitations on men, rooted in cultural views, were recognized, though recent shifts post-2020 war suggest a changing attitude toward male emotional expression, with crying becoming more acceptable.

Female participants acknowledged this shift, attributing it to changes in attitudes and generational shifts, encouraging emotional expression among males. The evolving acceptance of male emotional expression indicates changing societal norms, breaking traditional stereotypes and fostering a more open environment.

When discussing aspirations, male participants distinguished between dreams and achievable goals, emphasizing pragmatism and purposefulness in pursuing objectives. Financial stability emerged as a common and practical goal, influencing early entry into the labor market. While participants recognized seemingly unattainable aspirations like working at prestigious international companies, they acknowledged limitations based on birthplace and access to opportunities. Thus, the challenges men face across various domains, shed light on discriminatory practices and societal expectations that hinder their personal and professional growth.

Problem Solving and Coping Mechanisms

The challenges faced by males across various societal settings are multifaceted, spanning personal, relational, and societal domains. Participants highlighted struggles stemming from societal expectations and discrimination, impacting self-realization, familial relationships, friendships, labor market competitiveness, education, and respon-

sibilities tied to national conflicts. Male participants expressed concerns about early workforce engagement during education, unlike their female peers, potentially disrupting their educational journey and limiting opportunities. These challenges resonated with female perspectives, shedding light on the unseen pressures young men navigate. Male students often start working early in their studies, depriving them of a complete education cycle as they prioritize earning money, unlike girls who engage in the workforce later.

In seeking support, males often turn to trusted individuals such as mothers, sisters, brothers, and friends, with male friends and brothers preferred for general issues and female representatives for relationship or emotional challenges. Fathers were less mentioned, implying a more formal relationship, predominantly centered around career-related discussions.

Conversely, female participants noted a tendency among men to handle problems independently, seeking support primarily from friends if their independent approach fails. Younger men tend to seek assistance more from parents, particularly mothers, while older men exhibit more independence in resolving issues. These observed behavioral patterns, deeply entrenched in society, indicate a socially accepted norm of independent problem-solving among men, recognized by both male and female participants.

Health Issues

The discussions around men's health unveiled several critical aspects. Participants highlighted the population's limited awareness of where to seek help for specific health concerns, exacerbated by misinformation among peer groups, leading to undervaluation of immediate medical attention. This especially impacted sexual health issues among men due to entrenched societal norms restricting open discussions about sexual relations. Both men and women often feel ashamed to address sexual health matters, delaying medical consultation until situations become unbearable.

Among younger participants aged 18-25, the gender of physicians, especially urologists, was seen as a barrier for men seeking medical advice, with discomfort in consulting female doctors for sexual health check-ups. Men preferred familiar doctors or family members with medical knowledge, displaying a level of distrust toward the healthcare system.

There's been a positive shift in the perception of consulting psychologists for mental health among men, attributed to a post-war scenario where psychological rehabilitation became more normalized. However, regional areas displayed societal perceptions associating visits to psychologists with mental impairment or disorders, leading to labeling and stigma. There's a significant lack of distinction between psychologists and psychiatrists among older generations, contributing to misconceptions about seeking psychological help. Participants exhibited a reluctance to visit psychologists, often masking underlying fears of stigma and judgment from their communities. There's a prevalent reliance on relatives or acquaintances for support, despite specialists offering a different perspective and more specific guidance.

Perceptions of a Good Father

The expression of love from a father to their children is influenced by various factors, including the children's age, gender, and the personalities of both the father and child. Participants noted differences in emotional expression among fathers, with some struggling while others demonstrate high levels of affection. An emotionally good father was described as one who fosters a strong bond, dedicates quality time, acts as a friend and guide, actively participates in upbringing, and treats children as equals.

Discussions highlighted a perception that compared to mothers, the love expressed by fathers is often less immediately visible, leading to a complex relationship and affection dynamic. Fathers are sometimes seen as stricter due to societal norms, but this might stem from suppressed emotions or past traumas. Being a good father is considered contingent

upon being a good husband, influencing a child's development through the modeled behavior of parents.

Participants stressed the importance of a conscious decision when a man becomes a father, emphasizing readiness and willingness to be a good parent. They outlined characteristics such as ensuring family safety, providing autonomy to children, and giving personal space while balancing societal expectations, especially the pressure on fathers to be primary providers.

Regarding child development, participants highlighted the significance of parents providing autonomy, guiding, advising, and teaching problem-solving skills. There were concerns about neglecting personal happiness, urging the need for personal relaxation and time away from routine demands, especially for fathers who face societal pressure as primary breadwinners.

They also discussed Freud's theory of psychological development, suggesting childhood experiences may impact future partner selection and romantic preferences. Additionally, participants observed differences in paternal affection based on gender, with fathers displaying special affection toward daughters and being stricter with sons, attributing this to preparing children for their future lives.

In summary, participants outlined the traits of a good father: being a good husband, a role model, a friend, mentor, and advisor to children, fostering independence while openly expressing love and care, adapting to the child's age. They acknowledged that differential treatment based on gender is unacceptable, though they recognized that societal expectations might lead to differences in emotional connections between boys and girls in Armenian culture.

Necessary Changes and Transitions

The discussions about the evolving masculine roles and societal expectations revealed intriguing differences between participants from the capital and regional communities, highlighting contrasting perspectives on societal changes. Those from Yerevan noted a gradual shift towards more progressive views aligned with European standards, but also acknowledged clashes when individuals from traditional communities bring stereotypical views into the city. In contrast, participants from regional areas emphasized the need for crucial changes in societal perceptions to facilitate easier lives for male society members.

Participants from regional communities outlined several key areas where changes were desired to address societal issues:

- ❶ **Male-Female Friendships:** Prevailing beliefs in regional communities often limit friendships between individuals of opposite genders, assuming romantic affection or marriage as the only accepted outcomes. Participants stressed the need to change this perception for healthier relationships in society.
- ❷ **Ideal Age for Marriage:** Societal pressure for women, in particular, to marry by the age of 25 was highlighted as problematic. This pressure affects men as well, compelling hasty decisions based on societal expectations rather than personal intentions.
- ❸ **Financial Responsibility for Parents:** The unwritten expectation that a male child is responsible for financially supporting parents for their lifetime was seen as discriminatory, limiting individual freedom and choices within the family structure. Participants advocated for a more flexible role in this regard.
- ❹ **Expectations on Boys and Men by Girls and Women:** There's a need for society to stop imposing idealized behaviors on others, particularly in rural areas. Reevaluating and adjusting these expectations is deemed crucial.

Female participants shared concerns similar to their male counterparts from regional areas, particularly regarding outdated restrictions on female sexual expression and expectations on emotional stability for men. They highlighted the necessity for educational and cultural changes to discard outdated traditions.

Both male and female participants emphasized personal responsibility in fostering societal evolution. They recognized that initiating changes within themselves could contribute to broader transformations in social norms and expectations. This internal shift in perceptions and attitudes is seen as vital for driving meaningful societal change.

Website for Men

Creating an online platform in Armenia to address men's diverse needs was reported as incredibly beneficial. The participants emphasized the need for resources focusing on mental health, personal growth, and community building, noting a lack of localized platforms catering to these aspects. They mentioned various informal settings where men gather for discussions, indicating a desire for spaces to converse on different topics among friends or acquaintances. Their insights highlighted several important considerations for such a platform: (a) cultural and lingual adaptation, (b) professional information, (c) online vs. offline preferences, (d) trust and credibility and (e) skills and employment. Participants highlighted specific discussion topics they'd find valuable, including sexual health, relationships, psychological counseling, health-related issues, challenges specific to males in various cultures, and automotive topics. The differences in preferences between participants from the capital and regional communities should be considered when developing the platform to ensure it caters effectively to the diverse needs of different groups. Offering a blend of online resources, face-to-face interactions, and anonymous chats could potentially create a well-rounded platform accessible to a wide audience.



METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

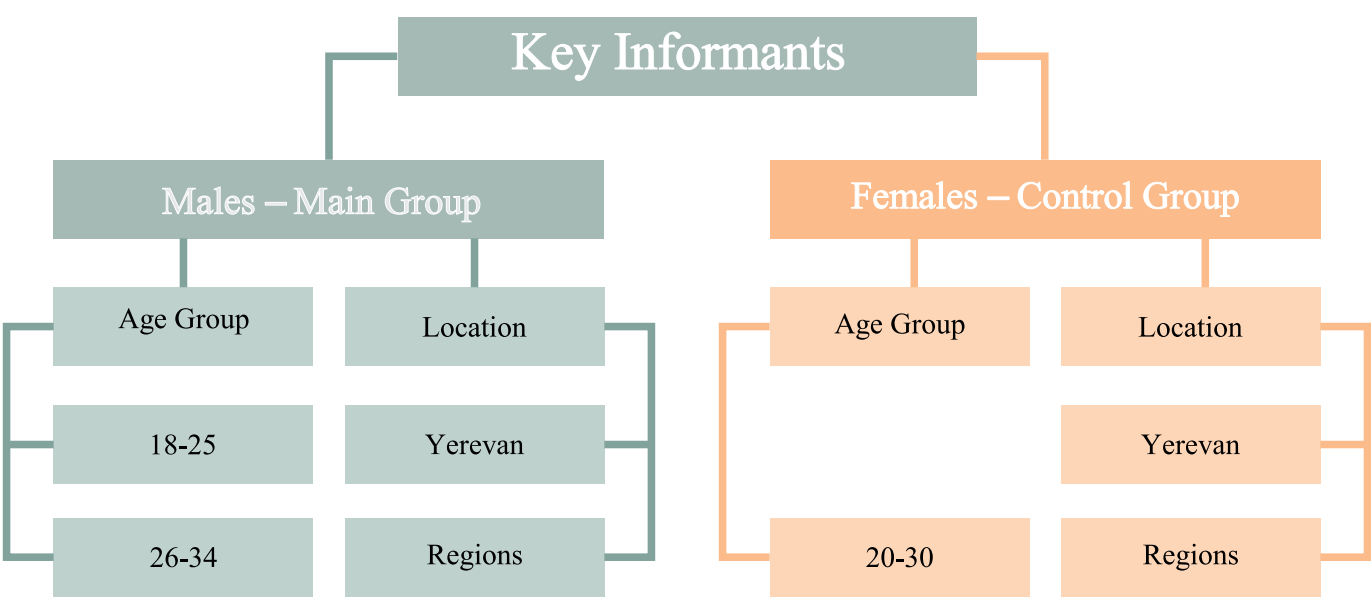
The primary objective was to initiate an inclusive effort to comprehend the experiences of Armenian boys and men in the Republic of Armenia. The research sought to unearth their unspoken questions, concerns, and the support systems they rely on during challenging times. The overarching goal of the study was to establish a foundational base for creating a specialized website catering to the needs of the male population in RA. This involved collaborating with subject matter experts, psychologists, and professionals to curate reliable and accessible content. The platform aims to provide confidential advice, accurate information, and referrals to experienced professionals if needed.

Approach and Data Collection

This study engaged a qualitative methodology centered on focus group discussions (FGDs) as the primary means of gathering in-depth insights. The focus group discussion method was selected for current study as it allows gaining an understanding of the specific group, exploring the degree of consensus on a topic, bringing out insights and understanding that would not be ascertained through questionnaire items or individual interviews, as well as collecting feedback regarding a planned product, specifically the website.

Focus groups are a commonly used research method for gathering qualitative data and insights from target audiences. They offer several advantages, such as providing in-depth and rich insights, facilitating group discussion, and allowing for the testing of new product. However, focus groups also have some disadvantages, such as being prone to bias, limited generalizability and limited control over the behavior of the participants. Nevertheless, current study has acknowledged all the advantages and disadvantages of this method and found it the most convenient one for application in the given context and topic.

Figure 1: Focus Group Discussion Participant Selection Quota



Diversity was the cornerstone of participant selection. Males from different backgrounds, spanning various ages, socio-economic statuses, and geographic regions, were purposefully invited to ensure a rich tapestry of perspectives. The goal was to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and viewpoints, recognizing that nuances exist within different demographics. Simultaneously, a parallel control group consisting of females was included. This intentional contrast allowed for a holistic understanding by not only delving into male perspectives but also exploring how females perceive and interpret these male-related issues.

In total, the study encompassed **5 male groups** and **2 female groups**, engaging a total of 60 male and 24 female representatives from various regions and the capital city of Armenia. The sampling process proved satisfactory as the collected data achieved saturation, indicating a point where additional information no longer revealed new patterns or insights. Throughout the discussions within these groups, recurring themes and main patterns emerged consistently, signifying a comprehensive exploration of the topics under consideration.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants of Focus Group Discussions

Region	Group	Participants	Age Group	Number of Participants	Number of Meetings
Yerevan	Main	Male	18-25	12	1
Yerevan	Main	Male	26-34	12	1
Armavir	Main	Male	18-25	12	1
Kotayk	Main	Male	26-34	12	1
Ararat	Main	Male	18-34	12	1
Yerevan	Control	Female	20-30	12	1
Diverse regions	Control	Female	20-30	12	1
Total				84	7

Participant Selection

- Participants were recruited through education institutions, community centers, and other accessible channels.
- Efforts were made to ensure a diverse representation of male and female representatives from different socio-economic backgrounds and regions.

Data Analysis:

The utilization of constant comparison analysis in this study marked a meticulous approach to identifying recurrent patterns, concerns, and emergent themes from the wealth of data acquired through focus group discussions. This method, entrenched in qualitative analysis, ensured a robust organizational structure for the data, facilitating a comprehensive and nuanced interpretation.

Recording and transcribing all discussions provided a rich repository of information. The transcriptions underwent a thorough verification process against the original recordings. This meticulous cross-referencing ensured accuracy and fidelity to the nuances captured during the live discussions. Any discrepancies were revised and aligned with the predetermined blocks and topics delineated for the study.

As the data began to take shape, the constant comparison analysis method came into play. This involved a systematic comparison of segments of transcribed data against each other, seeking similarities, differences, and recurrent themes. Patterns began to crystallize as these comparisons unfolded, allowing for a deeper understanding of the underlying narratives.

The emergence of recurring patterns and similarities within the dataset served as the foundation for subsequent analysis. These patterns were dissected, scrutinized, and interpreted to distill key insights. Themes organically arose from the data, each representing a facet of the multifaceted perspectives shared during the discussions.

Ethical Considerations

Informed verbal consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and confidentiality. Measures were in place to safeguard the anonymity of participants, especially when discussing sensitive topics during the focus group discussions. The discussions were transcribed in a way to make it impossible to identify the responses with the individuals. The overall analysis of the data was done in a generalized way.

Study Limitations

Acknowledged the potential limitation of recruiting a diverse participant pool representing the entire spectrum of the Armenian male population in Armenia. However, risks were mitigated by adhering to initial criteria and quotas, ensuring information saturation.

Thus, the study's methodology centered on a qualitative approach via focus group discussions to comprehensively understand male perceptions, concerns, and needs. Ethical considerations were integrated, and potential limitations were acknowledged to ensure the integrity and reliability of the research findings.



MAIN FINDINGS

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■ Masculine Roles and Expectations

According to the existing theories, gender roles in society mean how we're expected to act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct ourselves based upon our assigned sex. These expectations and role models are taught and duplicated from the early ages of the child. The children act upon the patterns they witness in their surroundings. When the expected patterns are not replicated the one's behavior is regarded as deviant and non-fitting to the set standards. Meanwhile, every society, ethnic group, and culture has gender role expectations, but they can be very different from group to group. They can also change in the same society over time.

A stereotype is a widely accepted judgment or bias about a person or a group — even though it's overly simplified and not always accurate. Stereotypes about gender can cause unequal and unfair treatment because of a person's gender. To better understand the specifics of gender stereotypes those can be categorized in four groups⁸:

- **Personality traits** — Expectations often dictate that women display accommodating and emotional traits, whereas men are expected to exhibit self-confidence and aggression.
- **Domestic behaviors** — There's a common expectation that women will manage childcare, cooking, and household cleaning, while men handle finances, car maintenance, and home repairs.
- **Occupations** — Stereotypical assumptions lead to beliefs that teaching and nursing are female-dominated professions, whereas piloting, medicine, and engineering are male-dominated fields.
- **Physical appearance** — Gender norms prescribe that women maintain a slim and graceful physique, while men are expected to be tall and muscular. Additionally, dressing and grooming align with stereotypical gender roles, with men wearing pants and short hairstyles, and women wearing dresses and makeup.

This study aimed at revealing societal perceptions regarding gender roles and primary expectations associated with male members of the population. The hypothesis underlying this research suggests that stereotypes significantly influence male behaviors, potentially hindering their pursuit of dreams and aspirations.

The perceptions expressed by respondents, regardless of their geographical location, revealed a direct correlation with the widely accepted standards imposed on male members of the community. The pressure of conforming to societal norms and family traditions was particularly evident in regional contexts. Respondents emphasized specific societal expectations placed on males, such as the need to exhibit strength, assume the role of the primary provider, and protect the family. Interestingly, respondents highlighted how the unstable political and conflict-ridden situation amplified societal expectations of bravery and strength from male members.

“The man is considered the pillar of the family, responsible for laying the foundation and setting the tone. In Armenian families, this stereotype, this tradition, seems ingrained in our mentality. In every setting, a man is expected to articulate himself, express his thoughts, and exhibit behavior that reflects the attributes of a typical man.”

Male, 18-25, regional group

⁸Retrieved from Planned Parenthood platform at <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/>

"Men ought to embody several moral virtues: courage, simplicity, and dedication to their family and relatives. Regarding their profession, they should opt for a career they enjoy and one that can sustain their family. If, in addition to these qualities, they can contribute to their homeland, it's highly advantageous. Regardless of one's achievements, what truly matters is that a man preserves his essence as a man, maintaining his character without deviation, staying true to himself."

Male, 26-35, Yerevan group

Regarding professions, there was a direct link to the notion of men being primary breadwinners. Therefore, societal expectations dictate that men should opt for professions that promise easy and assured income generation. Additionally, societal pressure extends to appearance and clothing choices. This aspect is particularly emphasized in rural communities where certain outfits are deemed inappropriate and unacceptable.

"I possess clothes but don't personally tailor them. In my residence, the village of Avshar, stereotypes prevail, and thinking is relatively rigid. I find myself able to wear the same clothes much more freely in places like Yerevan or Masis. These localities, in contrast to our village, have a more diverse community and a broader perspective, allowing for more liberal attitudes."

Male, 18-25, regional group

The participants unanimously agreed that irrespective of gender, individuals should exhibit competence and expertise in their respective professions as a measure of personal success. However, they highlighted societal pressure specifically imposed on men to excel in their endeavors, as a means to validate their superiority and claim the label of the dominant gender. It was noted that societal expectation for men in their professions is to demonstrate progressiveness and leadership, consistently achieving growth to validate their masculine position in society. This expectation stands in stark contrast to the pressure experienced by girls and women, who are not under the same societal demand to constantly strive for the top position in their careers or professions. Certainly, these societal expectations placed on men in their professional lives contribute to the existing burden that men face as they grow and establish themselves in society.

Interestingly, the perceptions of female representatives mirrored those of males in many aspects. They observed that society expects men to embody strength, exhibit gentlemanly behavior, uphold certain patriarchal values, and take on the responsibility of providing for the family. There's also an expectation for men to pursue prestigious professions such as those in IT, law, or medicine. However, despite these commonly accepted expectations, some female participants highlighted a notable shift in recent years.

Certain female participants noted changes in men's attitudes towards women, indicating a significant shift in their perceptions of women and their freedoms. This change was particularly discussed among females from regional areas. They mentioned that men have become more tolerant towards women and have started to value their advice and recommendations, especially concerning family decisions and issues. This evolving perspective on gender roles and decision-making within families was a point of active discussion among female participants. The male group also emphasized the traditional expectation for men to take on decision-making responsibilities, especially within families, placing this responsibility squarely on the head of the family, typically the man. However, both male and female representatives participating in the focus group discussions acknowledged a significant shift in recent years. They noted

that alongside the increasing prioritization of a woman's role in the family, the responsibility for decision-making has evolved into a shared responsibility between spouses. The perceptions of gender roles were remarkably similar among both male and female groups of respondents.

The family role attributed to men was highlighted in the discussions, with participants emphasizing the prime importance of being a good father, followed by being a good son and a loyal friend. Expectations placed on men were outlined across various groups:

- ❶ **Parents** aspire for a well-rounded son, often **projecting unfulfilled aspirations** onto their children, particularly males, seeking them to be educated, employed, and capable of providing for families.
- ❷ **Friends and relatives** look for **loyalty, support, and mutual understanding** from men.
- ❸ **Life partners or girlfriends** expect **devotion, strength, provision for the family, protective instincts, as well as romantic and affectionate behaviors**.
- ❹ **Employers** anticipate **professionalism, commendable conduct, and goal achievement in work-related tasks**.
- ❺ **Profession-dependent individuals**, such as patients for doctors or lost individuals for rescuers, expect **high professional competence to execute their duties** for the well-being of others.

Participants highlighted that these expectations, stemming from various social constructs, encompass both common societal patterns and specific demands placed by distinct groups. The societal expectations placed on men in various social settings, including family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, involve distinct norms regarding **emotionality, brutality, openness, caring, or hostility**. Across these spheres, there exists a pervasive societal tendency to **limit emotional expression for men**, deeming it inappropriate in public settings. These limitations are deeply ingrained from childhood, promoting the belief that displaying emotions signifies weakness and is unsuitable behavior for males. Meanwhile, in discussions, male participants highlighted a perceived contrast between men and women in negotiation dynamics. They observed that men tend to negotiate and express their desires in a manner deemed more understandable and acceptable compared to women. Women, in their view, were seen as more emotional during negotiations, potentially allowing passion and sentiments to impact their approach, which might hinder successful negotiations. Contrarily, men were considered skilled negotiators capable of presenting their expectations with clarity and precision. This proficiency was linked to men's perceived ability to exercise better control over their emotions and feelings—a trait attributed, in part, to the emotional limitations imposed on men from an early age. Interestingly, these limitations were regarded as potentially advantageous, contributing to the development of men's decision-making abilities in the future.

The impact of societal expectations and established patterns on male individuals was particularly emphasized concerning employment. Participants highlighted that employers and colleagues are key influencers in shaping communication and relationships based on predetermined roles and expectations. In this context, holding a managerial position as a man is often associated with power over subordinates, where a certain level of assertiveness is equated with high professionalism. Specific activities aligned with designated roles become evident in the workplace, accelerating stereotypical patterns of behavior and conduct expected from individuals in particular positions or roles. This environment becomes the stage where established societal norms are reinforced, particularly in relation to the behaviors anticipated within specific job roles.

Thus, to sum up it becomes obvious that the perpetuation of societal expectations molds the experiences of men across various domains, from their professional trajectories to familial roles and emotional expression. These entrenched

norms dictate the parameters within which men are expected to operate, shaping their paths in employment, family life, and even emotional conduct. The influence is profound, extending from workplace dynamics to the definition of masculinity itself, portraying a complex interplay between established norms and individual identities. Thus, the study reaffirms that Armenian society adheres to entrenched and crystallized standards dictating the roles and responsibilities attributed to men and women across personality traits, behaviors, occupations, and even physical appearance. These societal expectations persistently shape and define the norms within these four categories, reinforcing established gender roles and societal beliefs.

■ Gender-Driven Inequality, Discrimination and Challenges

Gender equality and issues related to discrimination are frequently associated with injustices towards women, particularly in the economic sphere. Numerous studies and papers highlight the discriminatory attitudes toward women in the labor force, showcasing the disparities in high-ranking positions predominantly held by men. However, amid this extensive body of information, the other side of the coin—the gender-driven inequality and discrimination faced by male members of society—is often overlooked. In sociology, there exists a small but growing body of work addressing male issues⁹. Elena Essig and Richard Soparnot have highlighted the scarcity and dispersion of literature concerning male issues, particularly within the workplace. They noted a lack of empirical research focusing on understanding the nature and origins of difficulties faced by men, especially from a managerial perspective¹⁰.

Considering the aforementioned points, the study aimed to uncover the perceptions of both male and female participants regarding discrimination and injustice faced by men during their upbringing and self-realization. The male participants underscored specific spheres where injustice and discrimination against males occur within society, including the labor market, relationships, communication, emotional expression, and military service. Conversely, female participants highlighted emotional limitations and boundaries imposed on men, stemming from societal and self-imposed expectations. They pointed out a noticeable paradox: while advocating for equality and equity, women also expect men to exhibit strength, provide protection, and cover expenses.

"Expectations for boys are often influenced by girls' preferences, as they also desire strong, capable partners. I've yet to encounter a girl who would be content with a man always crying, unwilling to work, or shirking responsibilities. So, we are somehow creating this discrepancy that causes additional discrimination".

Female 20-30, regional group

This contradiction fosters a complex and seemingly unsolvable cycle of conflicting expectations, demands, and societal behaviors that present challenges for men within society. The following analysis of the various aspects offers a general perspective on the challenges and discrimination faced by males.

⁹Rudman, L.A. & Mescher, K. (2013). Penalizing Men Who Request a Family Leave: Is Flexibility Stigma a Femininity Stigma? *Journal of Social Issues*, 69 (2), 322-340
Vandello, J.A., Hettinger, V.E., Bosson, J.K. & Siddiqi, J. (2013). When Equal Isn't Really Equal: The Masculine Dilemma of Seeking Work Flexibility. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69 (2), 303-321

¹⁰Essig, E. & Soparnot R., (2019). Re-thinking gender inequality in the workplace – a framework from the male perspective, *Dans Management*, vol 22, 373- 410

General Aspects: The male participants described the lives of men within society as a continuous cycle of diverse challenges and crises that need to be navigated for personal growth. This notion, expressed by some participants, aligns with Erik Erikson's psychological theory of human development. Erikson proposed eight stages of development covering an individual's entire lifespan, each stage presenting a psychosocial crisis or a critical issue that needs resolution. Failure to overcome these age-specific challenges can hinder development, leading to stagnation in the unmet stage and preventing full realization¹¹. Erikson's theory applies to human beings in general regardless of their gender. However, the participants noted that boys more often encounter challenges in establishing their personality and individuality from an early age across various facets of life, including family, friends, school, university, army and the workplace. Guided by societal expectations imposed on men, they progress through developmental stages, shaping their lives accordingly. However, this journey can engender various issues for men, forming the foundation for further discrimination or exclusion from certain social settings.

Labor Aspects: The male participants in the discussions emphasized that gender discrimination, commonly recognized as sexism, adversely affects men as well. In the service sector, the preference for hiring good-looking women is often seen as a sexist approach toward females. However, it's perceived as genuine discrimination against men and boys aspiring to work in the service industry, facing rejection solely based on their gender.

“The service sector often emphasizes hiring girls with an attractive appearance, which can be a distinguishing factor. This preference isn't indicative of gender discrimination between girls and boys”.

Male 18-35, regional group

The areas identified as male-dominated, according to the participants, is the construction and military forces sectors, where physical power and confidentiality are highly valued traits. However, in recent years, female representatives are increasingly welcomed into these professions, sometimes even receiving higher salaries. This trend, according to the participants, fosters a genuine discriminatory attitude toward male employees.

Educational Aspects: The discussions highlighted a comparable situation within the educational sector, where male students are often subject to more discriminatory treatment compared to their female counterparts. It was noted that, even under equal circumstances, female students tend to receive better grades than male students. This discrepancy is often attributed to stereotypes suggesting that male students are less motivated or enthusiastic about learning, although this may not always be the case in reality. This is why the male participants noted that they face discrimination also in the education sector, as they are deprived of equal treatment from their lecturers.

Behavioral Aspects: The discrimination and challenges faced by individuals, particularly males, in society were attributed to varying approaches in child-rearing, ethics, and behavioral norms acquired during development. The discussions highlighted instances where modest and well-mannered men might struggle in communication when faced with rude and assertive counterparts. In certain contexts, modesty and good manners were perceived as weaknesses, leading to a societal demand for boys and men to exhibit aggression and forcefulness to achieve success. Moreover, the discussions pointed out a higher level of discrimination within the military service sector, where the vast majority of servicemen in Armenian reality are male. In this environment, competition and discrimination are prevalent, irrespective of gender, as males contend with each other within the same group. This setting disregards gender specifics, contributing to an environment where discrimination and competition within the military context are commonplace. In

¹¹Bishop Ch. (2013). Psychosocial Stages of Development, The Encyclopedia of Cross-Cultural Psychology (pp.1055-1060)

such circumstances the behavioral specifics of a person become a real challenge and hinder for equal communication and opportunities.

Emotional Aspects: Both male and female participants of the discussions recognized the emotional limitations imposed on men as a form of injustice. These limitations, deeply rooted in Armenian cultural views, instill emotional restraints in boys from a young age, expecting them to demonstrate bravery and masculinity while suppressing emotional expression. Both genders highlighted this injustice in their discussions. However, male participants noted a shift in societal perceptions of emotional boundaries, especially post the 2020 war, where crying has become more accepted among males. Despite expressing readiness for emotional expression and crying, participants acknowledged there are still societal constraints on where and with whom they feel comfortable displaying vulnerability. They mentioned being willing to openly express emotions, particularly crying, in front of individuals such as mothers, sisters, and female friends, suggesting a degree of comfort in demonstrating vulnerability with these trusted individuals. At the same time, the discussions indicated that the willingness to express emotions and the act of crying isn't solely dictated by stereotypes or societal norms, but also hinges on individual characteristics. Regardless of gender, individuals can possess varying degrees of emotional strength or vulnerability, impacting how they express their emotions. The issue arises when men experiencing overwhelming emotions feel pressured by society to suppress their feelings, while women who display emotional stability may be perceived as having a reserved personality that conceals their emotions to appear strong. These dual stereotypes foster an environment of mutual expectations that impede an individual's genuine expression of their emotions.

On the other hand, the female participants also reported a shift in the perception of men's emotional expressions, largely influenced by changes in attitudes and generational shifts among females. They highlighted their own roles in instigating this change by adopting different attitudes toward emotional expression, particularly in how they communicate with their brothers, male friends and raise their children. These women mentioned encouraging their children, including their sons, to openly display their feelings and emotions, no longer viewing such displays as indicative of weakness or vulnerability. This change in attitude is fostering a more accepting environment for emotional expression among males.

"I believe it stems from us—the notion that girls understand it's acceptable to cry and that there's no shame in it. This shift might have originated from girls openly discussing how crying is normal and not something to be ashamed of."

Female 20-30, regional group

It's becoming less stigmatized for males to cry, particularly as modern approaches to upbringing have shifted. Men are increasingly comfortable expressing their emotions openly and speaking up about their need to cry, signaling a departure from the traditional expectation for men to hide their feelings.

"Since a young age, we were taught not to cry: it was considered shameful, something reserved for girls... They aimed to underscore the distinction, emphasizing that boys should be tough. Yet, crying is a natural expression of emotions, a means to release and relax. Personally, I can't recall a time when I cried; instead, I tend to bottle it up inside. Perhaps it's not ideal, but it's how I've handled it."

Male 18-25, regional group

"In my opinion, crying is a natural process that contributes to achieving mental stability."

Male 26-35, Yerevan group

"In my view, crying is a reflex that's beyond a person's control. When the urge to cry arises, one may choose to withdraw or cry privately, yet the tears still flow. The distinction lies in today's greater acceptance and acknowledgment of crying, whereas in the past, such admission or acceptance was less common."

Male 18-25, Yerevan group

Female participants also highlighted the changes they've observed in recent years, noting the increased willingness of males to openly express their emotions and feelings without fear of ridicule or bullying. They attribute this change to the overall shifts in perception and information that the new generation is experiencing. Women themselves have become more assertive in expressing their opinions and desires, leading to an expectation for men to also express their feelings more openly and confidently.

"In the past, men often seemed unprepared to engage in discussions within both brother-sister and husband-wife relationships. However, from what I observe, and based on personal experience, women's encouragement has played a significant role in this change. Previously, men would dismiss such conversations, finding it easier to refuse than to open up or attempt to understand. Now, there's a positive shift; men are increasingly willing to share, which is a commendable change."

Female, 20-30, regional group

The aforementioned shifts in expectations regarding the level of male emotional expression demonstrate that acknowledged challenges can indeed be changed. There are no stereotypes so fixed that they can't be broken or altered; only a willingness to make modifications is required.

Aspirations: When discussing the dreams and aspirations of men and the barriers they face in realizing them, the majority of male participants noted a transformative process: what's perceived as an aspiration or dream becomes a goal to pursue. They tend to eschew sentiments, striving to tangibly materialize their aspirations, ensuring they exert genuine effort in turning dreams into reality. This pragmatic approach often renders male aspirations highly realistic for achievement, leaving little room for unrealized dreams. Participants highlighted the importance of purposefulness as a key characteristic for males in attaining their goals. Yet, a distinction emerged between aspirations and goals: goals are seen as achievable through effort and dedication, while aspirations or dreams are viewed as distant, obstructed by obstacles. However, by breaking aspirations into smaller, more attainable goals, these aspirations transform into the ultimate objective to be achieved within a specific timeframe.

"It's often said that every individual, regardless of the gender, should possess a grand dream or significant goal to pursue in life, breaking it down into smaller milestones. Why can't a person have a dream—perhaps we label it as a goal—something they envision now but seems improbable? Yet, step by step, it's reachable, albeit taking time. The crucial aspect is embarking on that journey and persisting until the very end, firmly believing that the goal, that dream, is attainable."

Male, 18-25, regional group

Meanwhile, all acknowledged that a person's goals and dreams vary significantly depending on their age. Older individuals tend to have wiser and more realistic aspirations, while younger people often harbor unbelievably lofty goals. Financial sustainability emerged as one of the most realistic and prominent goals imposed on every male member of society. This necessity often leads males to enter the labor market earlier than females. As for aspirations working in internationally renowned companies like NASA or Google was mentioned, along with the notion of the participants recognizing the seeming impossibility of achieving such dreams, especially considering one's place of birth and the limitations in accessing opportunities that could bring them closer to these aspirations.

Problem Solving and Coping Mechanisms

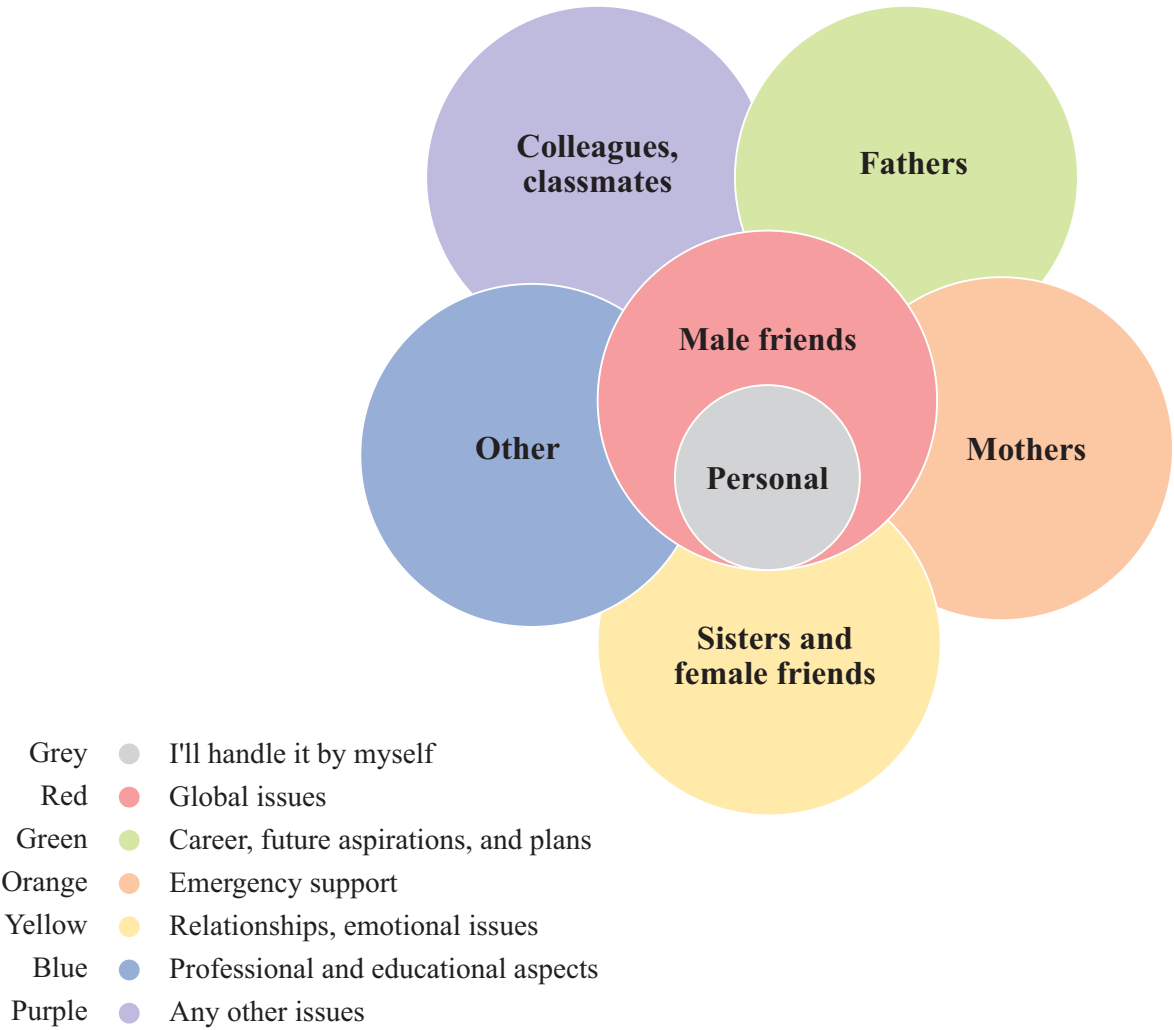
When speaking about the challenges the males face within the society and its different settings, the participants outlined that the challenges confronting males within society are multifaceted, spanning personal, relational, and societal spheres. They described the struggles tied to societal expectations and discrimination, encompassing issues of self-realization, strained familial relationships, constraints on cross-gender friendships, fierce labor market competition limiting opportunities, financial constraints impacting education, and the weight of security responsibilities imposed by national conflicts. Male participants voiced concerns about starting work early in their education, contrasting with female peers who engage in the workforce later, potentially truncating the educational journey for young men, limiting their opportunities for a complete academic cycle as they're compelled to prioritize earning money. These challenges, discussed by male participants, resonated with female perspectives, shedding light on the often unseen burdens borne by young men navigating these intersecting pressures and societal expectations. This is to say that the male students to start working from first years of studies, whereas girls are becoming engaged in the labor on later stages of their education. As a result, the young men become deprived of the right to obtain full education cycle, instead being forced to work to earn money.

Participants noted that male members of society seek support from various trusted individuals depending on the nature and scale of the issue. Mothers, sisters, brothers, and friends, both male and female, were cited as key confidants. Male friends and brothers were preferred for general problems, while female representatives were approached, particularly for matters related to relationships or emotional challenges. Interestingly, fathers were less frequently mentioned, especially regionally, suggesting a more formal and less emotionally bonded relationship compared to the connection with mothers. Discussions with fathers often reportedly revolved around career choices and work-related matters, rather than issues tied to self-realization or self-confidence.

Conversely, female participants described men's approach to seeking help as "I'll handle it on my own," highlighting a tendency for males to address their problems independently, involving few people in the process. They mentioned that if this independent approach fails, men are more inclined to seek support from friends rather than turning to their parents. Female respondents agreed that the extent of seeking support among men depended largely on their age and status. Younger men tend to seek assistance more often, primarily from their parents, particularly their mothers. As men grow older, they tend to become more independent in solving issues. These observations were echoed by male participants, indicating that these behavioral patterns are deeply entrenched in society and are easily recognizable across different groups.

Thus, the trust cycle for the male members of the society can be described via this simple diagram:

Figure 2. Problem Solving Trust Cycle



The diagram illustrates the interconnected challenges faced by male members of society over time and identifies whom they tend to trust when seeking support. While the diagram simplifies the main aspects, it underscores their significant interconnections. Additionally, both the challenges and the individuals sought for assistance can easily shift based on specific needs, as individuals demonstrate confidence and competence in providing support within particular aspects. An important element to highlight within this cycle is the central grey circle, which signifies an individual's inclination to independently resolve their issues without seeking external support. This aspect was notably emphasized during discussions with male participants, underscoring their confidence in overcoming challenges autonomously. Some participants highlighted the significance of specialists or professionals in specific areas, expressing a preference to seek help from individuals specialized in addressing the issues they face. This targeted approach was emphasized as more purposeful and effective in providing assistance tailored to their needs.

The study uncovered a consistent trend among males, showing a tendency towards autonomy in resolving their issues while also identifying a specific group of individuals they are inclined to approach when necessary. This pattern was similarly observed in the responses of female participants, signifying a socially accepted norm of problem-solving behavior imposed on men. This norm is perceived as a standard procedure not only by males themselves but also by female members of society.

Health Issues

As highlighted in the problem description of the study, men often exhibit a reluctance to seek medical assistance and prefer independent problem-solving, a trend corroborated by discussions with male participants. Specifically, during discussions about men's health issues and the specialists they should consult, notable aspects emerged. Participants emphasized the population's limited awareness regarding where to seek help for specific health concerns. Furthermore, misinformation circulating among peer groups contributes to an undervaluation of the importance of immediate medical attention, resulting in exacerbated health outcomes and their corresponding consequences.

“There have been instances when boys/men faced genital health issues but felt ashamed to seek help from a urologist. This reluctance might contribute to the declining birth rate. Nowadays, there's an increase in fertility-related problems among couples. Many people refrain from seeking medical advice due to misinformation, avoiding timely visits to doctors, and maintaining unhealthy dietary habits for extended periods. Consequently, this leads to prolonged difficulties in conceiving for numerous couples.”

Male, 18-25, regional group

This was particularly notable in discussions about sexual health issues affecting men, attributed to stereotypical and entrenched societal norms regarding sexual relations. These norms tend to restrict women's sexual freedom while affording men more latitude, leading to men experiencing sexual health issues at a significantly higher rate than women. However, societal constraints also impede timely treatment of these issues, as both men and women feel ashamed to discuss sexual health matters, especially sexually transmitted diseases, often avoiding medical consultation until the situation becomes unbearable.

“Yes, there's a significant issue with individuals feeling hesitant to seek help, undergo examinations, and receive treatment, particularly in the case of these two specialists [urologists and sexologists]. Unfortunately, very few seek assistance until the situation becomes critical, often waiting until it's too late. Conditions such as genital organ-related cancers, whether in the prostate gland or elsewhere, often arise due to delays in seeking medical attention. Lighter problems are disregarded, and consulting a specialist is delayed, resulting in more severe complications later.”

Male, 25-34, regional group

Interestingly, among the younger participants aged 18-25, a noteworthy pattern emerged regarding the gender of physicians, particularly urologists, being perceived as a significant barrier for men seeking medical advice. This observation was made by a few participants who recalled peers feeling embarrassed about visiting female doctors for sexual health check-ups, particularly during medical examinations for military service. Additionally, when discussing men's willingness to attend medical check-ups, participants indicated a preference for visiting a familiar doctor or someone within their family possessing medical knowledge, rather than seeking out a specific specialist. This inclination reflects a level of distrust toward the healthcare system. Some participants expressed concerns about doctors recommending unnecessary examinations or treatments due to a lack of awareness among the patients, potentially driven by financial motives.

Among the health concerns specifically affecting men, participants highlighted physical distress, spine-related problems, lung and stomach cancer, and heart diseases. Lung cancer, in particular, was depicted as a disease more

prevalent among men due to early and frequent smoking habits, although there was acknowledgment that nowadays women smoke as frequently as men. Participants discussed how societal expectations often pressure men to smoke, considering it abnormal for men not to do so. Similarly, societal norms regarding alcohol usage compel men to drink during gatherings or social occasions. Consequently, these societal stereotypes and expectations contribute to health issues by encouraging behaviors that can significantly harm men's health.

Mental health issues: In the discussions regarding consulting psychologists for mental health issues, it was surprising to note that a majority of male participants responded positively. As shared by participants from Yerevan, the idea of consulting a psychologist was previously considered abnormal for Armenian men, leading to potential social ostracization. However, there has been a recent positive shift in this perception, attributed to the post-war scenario where many servicemen underwent psychological rehabilitation. Seeking help from psychologists is now seen as a normal requirement for men in general. Nonetheless, when it came to their personal situations, most participants expressed that they didn't feel the need to seek psychological help, believing their mental health to be stable.

During discussions with males from regional areas, an interesting pattern emerged highlighting a societal perception issue associating visits to psychologists with mental impairment or disorders. They mentioned instances where people were labeled as "psycho" upon knowing they attended psychological sessions, irrespective of their gender. This sentiment was echoed by males from the capital city, who noted substantial perceptual differences between newer and older generations. The older generation often conflates psychologists and psychiatrists, considering visits to psychologists as psychiatric treatment, leading to the perception that the individual is mentally or psychologically ill. As noted during the discussions, the role psychologists carry can be challenging. Being a constant listener and compassionate support isn't easy. Some participants from Yerevan expressed that psychologists might feel overwhelmed by the information shared with them, to the point where they might need their own support. However, in Armenian reality, there aren't enough opportunities for psychologists to address their stress, leading to professional burnout. This situation impacts their interactions with patients, potentially making these interactions less productive and discouraging people from seeking support.

At the same time, the terminology used by the participants showed that they too were influenced by the existing stereotypical ideas and they too couldn't clearly distinguish between the psychological and psychiatric patients. In their speech, they used the term "psycho" when describing someone who is seeing psychologists. Some participants who had experience visiting psychologists believed themselves to possess better psychological insights than the specialists they consulted, highlighting the fact that after the first 5 minutes of interaction it felt like they were the psychologist and the specialists were the patients (in their words "psycho"). This behavior, especially noted among male participants from regional communities, reflected an avoidance of visiting psychologists. They offered reasons to justify this avoidance, likely to mask the underlying cause—fear of stigma and judgment from their community members. Meanwhile, they had an affirmative attitude towards others visiting psychologist if such need be.

"I won't go to a psychologist if I have a problem. I don't know why; maybe I think the problem won't be solved, or I can't really say why. But I won't go. I won't even consider seeing a psychologist. I might suggest my friend go, but I won't go myself."

Male, 18-34, regional group

“I’ve had moments when I’ve considered seeking help from a psychologist, and these thoughts still occur. But for some reason, I haven’t taken that step yet. It could be about personal space—feeling hesitant about sharing everything with a stranger that I wouldn’t disclose to a relative. I hope to overcome this hesitation someday because seeking help, even if considered a sign of weakness, is crucial for our well-being. Ignoring our mental health can lead to complex consequences that affect us in many ways.”

Male, 26-34, Yerevan group

This is once again pointing out the deep rooted issues of miscommunication, lack of awareness and disbelief that exists towards the psychological and medical support in general. The results come to prove that seeking help from a physician or psychologist isn't widely accepted in our society. Instead, people often turn to their relatives or acquaintances for support. However, relying solely on relatives might not always yield the right advice or help, as specialists offer a different perspective that relatives might not provide. Nevertheless, the reported positive shift observed in society, particularly among the male population, is encouraging, offering hope for a better and more tolerant future society.

■ Perceptions of a Good Father

The perceptions of a good father have been varying from generation to generation and between cultures. Until the 1970s, the role of fathers in their children's development was not much studied at all. Their most important job was seen as economically supporting the mother, who would in turn be the emotional anchor for the child. However, in contemporary times, there's a notable shift where many fathers are recognized and celebrated for their sensitivity, involvement, and active participation in caregiving. A growing body of research is transforming our understanding of how they can shape their children's lives from the start, challenging conventional ideas of parenthood and gender¹². Studies indicate that non-maternal caregivers, particularly fathers, significantly impact children's behavior, happiness, and cognitive development. Palkovitz describes the idea of “good-fathering” as containing three components: relational (e.g. caring and loving); role (e.g. provider of needs such as economic, boundary setting, and support); and personality (e.g. patient and invested)¹³.

The discussions among the target groups revealed a significant similarity with the three components described by Palkovitz. In fact, the discussions among both male and female participants highlighted the complexity of being a good father, emphasizing the significance of establishing an emotional connection with children, irrespective of their gender. The expression of love from a father towards their children was perceived to be influenced by various factors such as the children's age, gender, and the personal characteristics of both the father and the child.

The discussions among the participants were the clear attribution of the Erich Fromm's theory on the Art of Loving, where he explains the differences between the fatherly and motherly love, outlines the role of the father and how it is perceived in the society. In particular he notes: “Father does not represent the natural world. He represents the world of thought, of man-made things, of law and order, of discipline, of travel and adventure. Father is the one who teaches the child, who shows him the road into the world. Father has the function of teaching, guiding to cope with problems. Father's love should be guided by principles and expectations; it should be patient and tolerant. It should give the growing child an increasing sense of competence and eventually permit him to become his own authority and to dispense with that of father.”¹⁴

¹²Hardach S. (2019). The secret of being a good father, BBC article, published online on 12.07.2019

¹³Palkovitz, R. (2002). Involved fathering and men's adult development: Provisional balances. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

¹⁴Fromm E. (1995). The Art of Loving. Dublin: Thorsons. ISBN 978-1-85538-505-4.

Participants observed that some individuals may struggle with expressing their emotions, while others demonstrate high levels of affection and love. A good father, from an emotional perspective, was described as someone who fosters an emotional bond with their children, dedicates quality time to be with them, acts as a friend and guide, actively participates in their upbringing from the outset, and treats them as equals.

"A commendable father is someone who not only loves but also actively engages in work, cares for the child, and demonstrates this care consistently. This involvement ensures the child doesn't grow up feeling estranged or disconnected from their father."

Male, 18-25, Yerevan group

"Love should manifest through the warmth extended to a child, enabling them to see their father not just as someone to obey, but as a respected and beloved figure akin to an elder brother or a close friend."

Male, 26-35, Yerevan group

The discussions from regional groups shed light on a prevalent notion: compared to mothers, the love expressed by fathers is often less apparent or immediately visible. While the mother-child bond typically develops early, strengthening after childbirth, the relationship and affection between fathers and their children were described as more complex. Participants emphasized the father's role in fostering the development of own self-expression and creating an environment of mutual trust and understanding. In Armenian society, there exists a perception that fathers embody strictness, while mothers are often seen as nurturing figures providing peace and safety to their children. Sometimes, the emotional suppression displayed by fathers is misconstrued as strictness, when in reality, it might stem from childhood traumas that compelled them to exhibit emotional rigidity.

"The child often readily perceives a mother's love, while comprehending a father's love requires depth. We have a saying that reflects a mother's unwavering care for her child, regardless of their actions. Overall, a father's love holds profound depths, becoming more evident as the child matures. It's crucial to offer love to the child, and individuals, whether as mothers or fathers, should be attentive to their own emotional wounds from childhood to prevent their impact on the child."

Male, 18-24, regional group

While comparing how mothers and fathers display their love and affection, participants also highlighted an interlinked role that men have in their lives. They emphasized that being **a good father** is contingent upon being **a good husband**. Both male and female participants noted the pivotal role parents play in influencing their children's development through imitation of behavior, actions, and emotional expressions. For instance, if a child witnesses a father who is caring and loving but simultaneously subjects their mother to violence, the idealized image of the father is immediately shattered. Therefore, the participants stressed the crucial significance of a conscious decision when a man contemplates becoming a father. They emphasized that without readiness and willingness, a person cannot be a good parent at all.

"To truly be a good father, one must first excel as a good husband. It's implausible for someone to be a bad husband—disloyal, abusive, or violent towards their wife—and still be regarded as a good father."

Male, 26-35, regional group

“In my view, a good father begins by being a good husband and then evolves into the role of a good father. But what defines a good father? To me, it's someone who consciously embraces the choice to have a child. It's when he recognizes this desire in his life, ensuring that he doesn't burden his unfulfilled dreams or plans onto the child. This conscious decision and commitment already mark the qualities of a good father, in my opinion.”

Female, 20-30, Yerevan group

Another aspect voiced by the participants that encompassed the concept of being a good father was ensuring the **safety and well-being** of the family, particularly the children, from various angles. This included being the provider for the family's needs, creating an environment where children feel confident and secure, actively sharing responsibilities related to raising children with their partner, and being a reliable figure in moments of love, stress, failure, or new endeavors. It's interesting to note that female participants emphasized the paternal role in providing emotional security, while male participants tended to view financial stability as a key aspect of ensuring security. This pattern is well expected given the social stereotypes that prevail in the Armenian society, that often place a significant emphasis on financial security as a measure of success, especially in the context of being the head of the family. These norms heavily influence perceptions and expectations, shaping what is considered a successful father or family provider within a society.

The next characteristic of a good parent and particularly a good father outlined by the participants was the ability of the parent to **give autonomy** to their children from a certain age. This was seen in

- giving them the chance to make their own decisions, even if they might be wrong, and taking responsibility for their actions
- guiding and advising rather than forcing to some actions,
- teaching problem-solving skills instead of solving those on behalf of the children,
- providing ample information and knowledge ensuring that children develop a sense of consciousness and understanding in handling various situations, etc.

“A good father gradually comprehends his child's maturity. While it's natural to be concerned, it's vital to gradually let go, allowing the child to foster independence and organize their life autonomously.”

Male 24-35, regional group

“In my perspective, a good father facilitates their child's ability to choose their life's path rather than imposing their own unfulfilled dreams. It's about enabling the child to make their own decisions about their future direction.”

Male 18-25, regional group

The male participants stressed the significance of personal life and space for individuals, especially upon taking on the responsibilities of being married and having children. They highlighted the need for personal relaxation and time away from the routine demands of life. They expressed concerns that neglecting personal happiness might turn them into mere routine followers, ultimately disrupting the harmony within the family. While acknowledging that this is applicable to both parents, they emphasized that societal expectations, particularly the pressure on fathers to be primary breadwinners, should not overshadow their personal desires. They recognized that in Armenian society, this issue is

more commonly associated with mothers, but stressed that both parents have the right to detach from family duties momentarily and focus on personal well-being and rejuvenation.

Some participants noted that **children often imitate what they observe during childhood and adolescence**, which can extend into adulthood. Referring to Sigmund Freud's theory of psychological development stages, they highlighted the impact of the Oedipal complex on future partner selection and romantic preferences toward the opposite gender. According to Freud's theory, boys and girls, typically aged 3-6 in the Phallic stage of development, unconsciously form a strong attachment to their opposite-gender parent (i.e., boys to mothers and girls to fathers)¹⁵. Consequently, the participants suggested that boys might **base their perceptions and idealizations** of a future life partner on these childhood patterns and their mother's character.

“Children often express thoughts like, “When I grow up, I’ll marry my dad,” or “I’ll marry my mom,” which subtly reflects their perception of the roles and characteristics of each parent. Consequently, whether consciously or not, these early influences can shape our preferences in choosing partners, often reflecting the stereotypes we internalize about male and female roles from our parents.”

Male, 26-35, Yerevan group

As for the **differences in child upbringing and expression of love** by fathers towards different gender children, the female participants observed that fathers tend to display special affection toward their daughters, especially during their daughters' childhood and prior to their marriage, suggesting a more emotional bond. However, they noted that fathers can be stricter with their sons, aiming to instill resilience and readiness to face challenges in their future lives. The reasoning behind this contrast was explained as fathers prioritizing emotional closeness with their daughters as they anticipate their daughters leaving the parental home for their own families, while focusing on preparing their sons to overcome future obstacles.

“The cultural norm among Armenians often involves showing more delicate affection and paying extra attention to girls while being stricter with boys. I acknowledge this pattern, understanding that it's believed this approach helps boys grow into resilient individuals.”

Male, 26-35, regional group

“Fathers often form stronger attachments with their daughters, yet the expectations placed on girls tend to be doubly high compared to those on boys. Even though there might be less discourse about boys' rights, boys are often taught that they can achieve anything, encouraged to follow their hearts, while girls, conversely, face different, more restrictive expectations.”

Female, 20-30, Yerevan group

“The father's role in the lives of girls often holds significant importance, and there's often a perception that fathers display deeper affection toward their daughters compared to their sons.”

Female, 20-30, regional group

It's interesting to note that while both male and female participants acknowledged these differences in paternal affection toward children based on gender, the emphasis and discussion around these distinctions were more pronounced among the female participants than the male participants.

¹⁵Freud, S. (1905). Three essays on the theory of sexuality. Se, 7.

Thus, in general, the study participants outlined the key traits of a good father. Primarily, a good father must exemplify being a good husband and serve as a role model for his children to emulate. He should also act as a friend, mentor, and advisor throughout the child's development, allowing independence while guiding decision-making. Furthermore, an ideal father shouldn't suppress emotions or demand emotional suppression from their children. Instead, he should openly express love and care, adapting the expression based on the child's age. It was unanimously agreed that any differential treatment based on gender is unacceptable and could lead to significant issues for children in the future. However, the participants recognized that emotional connections and displays of affection might not be identical for both genders, especially considering societal expectations that boys may be treated with a bit more strictness than girls in the Armenian culture.

■ Necessary Transitions and Changes

The discussions about masculine roles, expectations, discriminations, and overall perceptions of males also shed light on the necessary changes and transitions crucial for societal development and creating a more conducive environment for growth and progress. When discussing the anticipated societal changes to mitigate stereotypical or toxic outcomes from established patterns, intriguing differences surfaced between the perspectives of male participants from regional communities versus those from the capital. Participants from Yerevan affirmed a noticeable shift in societal views, aligning more with European standards and distancing from traditional expectations of the past. In contrast, male participants from regional groups emphasized the need for transitioning from traditional to more modern and progressive views to facilitate easier lives for male society members.

The participants from Yerevan didn't specifically highlight changes they wished to see, noting that perceptions in the city have evolved over the years, offering more freedoms than in previous decades. However, they acknowledged facing conceptual challenges when individuals from regional communities bring their stereotypical views to the city. This clash of concepts often results in conflicts and misunderstandings. They emphasized that attitudes, perceptions, and ideas in Yerevan are generally less stereotypical compared to those prevalent in regional communities.

The participants from regional groups both male and female, on contrary, highlighted an emerging need for crucial changes in society, addressing the issues they've observed within their communities and society at large.

- The issue frequently highlighted was the societal perception of **male-female friendships**. In regional communities, simple friendships between individuals of opposite genders aren't acknowledged. According to prevailing beliefs, if two individuals of opposite genders form a friendship, it's assumed to involve romantic affection or marriage, with no other alternatives being accepted. Participants believed this perception should be changed to have a healthier society and relationships between its members.
- Another prevalent issue in regional communities concerns the perceived **ideal age for marriage**. There's a societal expectation that individuals, particularly women, should be married by the age of 25. Failing to do so is viewed as a significant problem and often considered a tragedy for both the family and the community. According to the participants this places additional pressure on males, as they often feel compelled to make hasty decisions based on societal expectations and requirements rather than their own emotions or personal intentions.

- There's an additional burden on males within regional communities: the unwritten expectation that the **male child of a family is responsible for financially supporting** their parents from a specific age until their parents' lifetime. This was seen as a form of discrimination, limiting the individual's freedom and choices within the family structure. Participants believed this expectation needed to transition into a more flexible and less obligatory role.
- The regional groups also highlighted societal expectations placed on boys and men by girls and women. They expressed the need for society, particularly in rural areas, to **accept and adapt to the idea of not interfering in others' lives**. They pointed out an idealization of behaviors that people tend to impose on others, stressing the necessity to reevaluate and adjust these expectations.

The discussions among female participants mirrored some concerns expressed by males from regional groups, particularly regarding male-female relationships and the outdated restrictions on female sexual expression, which contrast with the freedoms afforded to men. However, participants from Yerevan highlighted the necessity for **educational and cultural changes** to help society recognize and discard outdated traditions. Intriguingly, females from regional areas echoed the same need for change emphasized by their male counterparts, especially regarding outdated expectations placed on men related to emotional stability, toughness, and courage.

Recognizing the need for societal evolution, both male and female participants highlighted the importance of personal responsibility. They acknowledged that fostering change in societal norms demands an internal shift in perceptions and attitudes from each member of society. By initiating changes within themselves, they may contribute to broader transformations in social norms and expectations.

■ Website for Men

The analysis and explorations of the internet and social media, as well as the suggested face-to-face discussion clubs, one can indicate that in Armenian society there is no single platform for men to discuss their issues, get an advice or a consultancy, find educational materials and content for self-development and growth.

Creating a dedicated online platform for men in Armenian society appears to be a crucial gap in resources. While platforms for women cover diverse topics like pregnancy, motherhood, and health, there's a notable absence of a similar space tailored to men's needs. The few existing platforms for men predominantly focus on sexual content, often inappropriate in nature.

Research into international platforms reveals several models that offer support and information to males. Some noteworthy examples include:

- **1. Reddit products (USA): r/MensLib** - Focused on discussing men's issues from a progressive standpoint, covering topics like gender equality, mental health, and relationships.
r/AskMen Forum- An advice-sharing platform covering a wide range of topics, from relationships and dating advice to lifestyle and career guidance.
- **2. HeadsUpGuys (Canada):** Provides mental health resources, support networks, and tools for men dealing with depression.
- **3. Men's Sheds (Australia, UK, Ireland, etc.):** Physical spaces where men gather for various activities, fostering friendships and support networks.

4. **The Good Men Project (USA):** An online publication and community discussing masculinity, relationships, mental health, and personal growth.
5. **Man Therapy (USA):** An online mental health resource using humor to address men's mental health issues.
6. **CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably, UK):** Offers support and a helpline for men dealing with mental health struggles.
7. **ManKind Project (USA):** A global organization providing personal growth support, workshops, and communities for men to explore and develop healthier ways of living and relating to others.
8. **The Art of Manliness Community (USA):** A community that explores various aspects of traditional masculinity, offering advice on personal development, relationships, and practical skills.

These international platforms illustrate diverse approaches that address men's needs beyond just sexual content, catering to mental health, personal growth, and community building. Developing a similar platform in Armenia could fill the void and provide valuable resources for men seeking advice, support, and education. Not surprisingly, the male participants highlighted alternative venues that serve as informal platforms for discussions and support. These included pubs, football clubs, shooting ranges, and similar settings where men gather to converse on various topics among friends, acquaintances, or even strangers.

Interestingly, some participants were aware of similar online platforms outside Armenia, particularly in Russia due to language barriers that limit access to English-administered platforms. They noted the absence of such crucial platforms within Armenia itself, expressing the need for a localized space addressing men's concerns and discussions in their native context.

“There are numerous sectors and platforms where there exists a Russian version outside the country, but unfortunately, there isn't an Armenian version available. Believe me, if there were, it would have brought about significant changes.”

Male, 26-35, Yerevan group

The importance of a professional information platform, particularly for boys entering puberty, was underscored to provide accurate, expertly curated knowledge on sexual development and health. The concern stemmed from the vast amount of unchecked information available on the internet, which poses risks for teenagers and adolescents seeking information on these topics.

The participants expressed interest in platforms staffed by professionals and mentors, emphasizing the importance of reliable information over anecdotal experiences. Participants from Yerevan leaned toward online platforms due to their busy schedules, which made physical attendance at meetings challenging, while those from regional groups favored face-to-face meetings with guaranteed anonymity. As expected, some of the participants from regional groups were against any kind of platforms, whether online or offline, believing it is shameful to disclose one's problems to a stranger who might later mock or ridicule them in public. Others expressed a preference only for anonymous chats, where individuals can ask personal questions without being identified and can receive specific answers to their particular queries.

“I envision the platform with categorized rows based on professions or topics. Users would pose questions openly on the platform, and the platform coordinators would relay these questions to designated experts in a systematic order. The experts would provide answers, and these responses would be filed under the respective profession or topic. Later, users interested in that field can access the specific section to find relevant questions and answers.”

Male, 18-25, Yerevan group

“I believe the platform shouldn't be restricted to a specific direction; rather, it should facilitate an exchange of experiences. Gathering various specialists to offer their perspectives on different issues would be beneficial. Each specialist can contribute their viewpoint, allowing for a diverse exchange of experiences. This approach, in my opinion, would offer a more focused and comprehensive understanding.”

Male, 26-35, Yerevan group

“I find this online chat system to be the exception rather than the preference. I lean towards offline meetings—sitting face-to-face allows for more open communication, the freedom to ask questions, and a different level of connection. Interacting with someone in person differs significantly from communicating through a screen. In face-to-face meetings, you can gauge emotions, perspectives, and gestures, understanding more comprehensively what someone wants to convey. Especially for discussions that might be better offline, I highly prefer in-person meetings.”

Male, 18-25, regional group

The participants stressed that the platform's success hinges on its credibility. To address the critical needs in Armenian society, the platform must prioritize building trust among users. Anonymity, reliability, and verified information should be ensured to prevent any negative repercussions and ensure the platform's seriousness and quality.

“There won't be many people hanging around in the yards either. They'll likely turn to this platform, whether offline or online, because everyone faces problems these days and seeks solutions for their issues.”

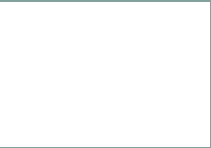
Male, 26-35, Yerevan group

The platform could act as a hub for individuals seeking to acquire new, in-demand skills and secure employment opportunities. It would offer a space for individuals to access educational resources for learning new specializations and connect with potential employers, creating a bridge between education and employment for men in need of job prospects in modern professions.

The participants highlighted specific topics favorable for discussion within such platforms:

- Sexual health and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases
- Love, relationships
- Psychological counseling
- Health-related issues
- Challenges specific to males in various cultures
- All topics related to cars and automobiles

Thus, the discussions with male participants highlighted the necessity for a platform, whether online or offline, where they can freely express concerns, discuss various topics, and gain access to information and knowledge they currently lack. However, there were notable differences in preferences between the participants from capital city and regional communities. These differences should be considered when developing the website to ensure it effectively caters to the diverse needs of different groups of ultimate beneficiaries.



CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive exploration of masculine roles and societal expectations in Armenia illuminated a complex landscape heavily influenced by traditional norms, emerging shifts, and evolving perceptions. The study underscored how entrenched stereotypes and societal constructs significantly shape men's behaviors, influencing their pursuits across personal, professional, and familial domains.

Within the professional realm, men face considerable pressure to adhere to traditional provider and protector roles, often expected to pursue lucrative careers and exhibit unyielding growth. While both genders acknowledged evolving family dynamics, recognizing shared responsibilities, societal constructs continue to impose emotional constraints on men from an early age, shaping their identities and behaviors.

Moreover, gender-driven inequality and discrimination were prevalent across various facets, including labor, relationships, communication, and military service. Participants noted a cyclical pattern of conflicting demands placed on men, highlighting challenges in establishing individuality due to societal expectations.

Further insights unveiled multifaceted challenges spanning personal, relational, and societal spheres, notably impacting educational journeys, familial relationships, and mental well-being. Participants highlighted the often unseen pressures faced by young men, particularly the early entry into the workforce affecting their educational pursuits.

Seeking support, men tended to turn to trusted individuals such as family and friends, emphasizing a social norm of independent problem-solving but also highlighting concerns about limited engagement with fathers on emotional issues. Female participants noted this tendency, affirming men's preference for handling problems independently or seeking support from friends.

The discourse on men's health underscored limited awareness and discomfort discussing sexual health issues, compounded by societal norms and the gender of healthcare providers. The positive shift in consulting psychologists for mental health post-war signifies a changing attitude, though stigmas persist, primarily among older generations.

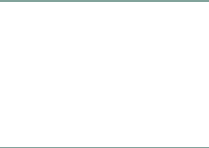
Expressions of love and fatherhood were shaped by various factors, including children's age, gender, and the emotional capacity of fathers, revealing complexities in the father-child relationship. The study highlighted a need to discard differential treatment based on gender while recognizing societal expectations influencing emotional connections between boys and girls.

Discussions on societal changes revealed divergent perspectives between urban and regional communities, emphasizing the necessity for crucial transitions to ease societal pressures. Areas such as male-female friendships, ideal ages for marriage, financial responsibilities, and societal expectations on boys and men were identified for change by participants from regional areas, echoing concerns expressed by their female counterparts.

An envisioned platform for men in Armenia, encompassing mental health, personal growth, and community building, was deemed highly beneficial. Participants highlighted preferences for diverse discussions in settings that facilitate informal conversations among friends or acquaintances. Considerations for such a platform ranged from cultural adaptations and professional information to online vs. offline preferences and trustworthiness, aiming to provide a comprehensive resource addressing men's needs.

In conclusion, the study illuminated the pervasive influence of societal expectations and traditional norms on men's lives in Armenia, spanning professional pursuits, emotional expression, familial roles, and health. It emphasized the

necessity for societal evolution, marked by changing attitudes and generational shifts, paving the way for more open environments. The envisioned platform, tailored to men's multifaceted needs, could serve as a pivotal resource, fostering healthy discussions, and providing essential support in navigating the challenges faced by men across Armenian society.



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