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Toxic masculinity¹

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), cultural ideals of masculinity are characterized by stoicism, competition, dominance, and aggression, all of which are harmful to men in the first place, women, and society as a whole. In order to fulfil cultural ideals, men tend to engage in unhealthy behaviors, they are not interested in taking care of their own health since they perceive risky behaviors (drinking, smoking, fighting, fast driving) as healthy and refuse psychological help when they need it (Pappas, 2019). In the academic debate this phenomenon is called toxic masculinity.

Toxic masculinity among men leads to striving for power, sexual and domestic violence, suppressed emotions, aggravated mental health, and engagement in toxic, violent and often homophobic behavior. The fulfillment of masculine ideals has its price, which men pay by constant fighting in everyday life. This is followed by their physical problems, which are often caused by unhealthy and risky activities (fighting, killing, alcoholism, drug addiction) on the way towards proving their

¹ This material has been prepared within the frames of the 5-year project "REDEFINE - Gender Transformative Work with Men in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus". The mentioned project attempts to involve men in the fight against gender inequality and violence in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus. The project is implemented by the Swedish NGO MÄN in partnership with Armenian, Georgian, Moldovan and Belarusian NGOs. The project is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The content of this material is the responsibility of the author.

masculinity, as well as their mental health problems, caused by the tension and anxiety of fulfilling masculine ideals.

The ideals of toxic masculinity are described in the so-called "The Man Box", which is seen as a trap in which men are trapped, trying to fulfill the characteristics placed in this "box", because if they do not fulfill them, they will be banished by society and will no longer be considered real men.

Sociologists discuss the 7 pillars², which make up "The Man box". These are: **self-sufficiency, acting tough, physical attractiveness, rigid gender roles, heterosexuality and homophobia, hyper-sexuality, aggression and control**. They transform into social pressure that is exerted on young men by society, family, peers and people in general. Each of them is discussed below.

Self-sufficiency means that men should not talk about their worries and personal issues, instead, they should solve their personal problems themselves and not ask for help. Similarly, **toughness** means that a man must fight without looking back, be physically and mentally very strong and unbeatable in any situation.

These two pillars, along with **hyper-sexuality and aggression**, are considered to be the main characteristics of the macho man, which promote an exaggerated expression of masculinity, through the subordination of women, extreme manifestation of masculine pride and self-confidence. The development of machoism is harmful to society, encouraging violence, i.e. physical and verbal abuse, with which men repress the fear of being seen as weak and thus protect their pride.

The third pillar is **physical attractiveness**, this is related to the aesthetic appearance of the male body, which should replicate the hegemonic ideology of masculinity, thus men have to embody this ideal in order to be considered successful men and not be associated with feminine qualities, in terms of both physical and clothing aspects.

The fourth pillar of the Man Box concerns **rigid gender roles**, focusing on traditional gender roles where a man is a breadwinner, works away from home, and does not participate in upbringing of children or in household activities in general.

The fifth pillar is **heterosexuality and homophobia**, which is mainly related to social messages that force men to be heterosexual in order to be perceived as real men. This creates homophobia, which is especially prevalent among young men. Masculinity is "synonymous with heterosexuality," as a

² The information about the 7 pillars of the Man Box is taken from the doctoral prospectus of Giorgi Urchukhishvili.

quality that boys must display to protect themselves from being labeled as gay, or feminine. Teenage boys try to prove their masculinity by making fun of other boys and subduing girls' bodies. The practice of exploiting a girl's body is used as evidence of heterosexuality (Pascoe, 2007).

Because of this, young men often feel pressured about their sex life and abilities, they think that a "real" man must have many sexual partners and always be ready for sex; This is what The Sixth Pillar of the Man Box, **Hyper-sexuality**, explores. First of all, hyper-sexuality is a manifestation of obsessive anxiety about sexual activity leading to compulsive sexual behavior. Although they have no experience, from the age of 12, young men pretend that they already have sex. In addition, throughout life, men invent and tell many sexual myths and stories that they believe will reinforce their masculinity in the eyes of others. A woman is seen as a tool for proving masculinity and is therefore perceived as a sexual object.

The last pillar, **Aggression and Control**, represents the idea that masculine norms encourage a man to become a perpetrator, which is an undeniable proof for maintaining respect and masculinity status. Studies have shown that biological instincts are not the foundation of a man's violent character, it should be searched in upbringing and adolescence. Adolescent males are encouraged by society to engage in violence in order to prove their masculinity and control over their environment.

[The harmful impact of toxic masculinity on people's health and safety](#)

The masculinity norms have negative impact on men. Mostly, it affects their physical health, and more so the mental health. They try to hide and manage their problems on their own because they have been taught to be self-sufficient, a problem like depression and talking about it out loud is not consistent with their gender. Therefore, precisely because of this, they are not diagnosed and there are no accurate statistics of men's mental health problems. However, they often feel isolated because they cannot talk about their real problems in public, which often leads to mental health problems in the future.

Toxic masculinity has a negative impact on men's life expectancy. According to Eurostat data, the life expectancy of women (83.6 years) is 5 years longer than the life expectancy of men (78.3 years) (Eurostat, 2018). The researchers suggest that the link between gender identity and life expectancy is not biological, but rather a matter of masculine socialization, which is associated with a higher risk of premature mortality. The difference that occurs between male and female life expectancies is influenced by gender role stress and unhealthy and risky behaviors caused by the strict socialization of traditional masculinity which is associated with taking risks and refusing help (Rotundi, 2020).

Men face significant problems because of their **hyper-sexuality** as well; since they believe that sex should be associated with conquest and reckless behavior, they often refuse to protect themselves, which leads to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (Skovdal, M., Campbell, C., Madanhire, C., Mupambireyl, Z., Nyamukapa, C., & Gregson, S. 2011).

Men not only become the victims of hegemonic masculinity norms, they are also the main executors of these norms, although this often backfires on them. Violence between men is a good example of how the fulfillment of masculine norms threatens them in the first place. Considering all of the above, violence on the part of a man is considered as a rather paradoxical pattern of masculinity, because, on the one hand, it idealizes strength, courage and heroism, on the other hand, it is clearly detrimental to their mental and physical health.

Male victims of violence are ashamed to admit this fact and hide that they have been beaten or assaulted, in order to not be seen as weak men, but young men who are victims of physical violence develop long-term mental health problems, low self-esteem, physical aggression, substance dependence, cognitive impairment, neurological dysfunctions, emotional indifference, etc.

Masculinity has a negative impact not only on men but also on women. They are affected by the violent acts perpetrated by men, which are harmful to both their psychological and physical health. Specifically, the popularization of masculine norms, such as power, sexual strength and aggression, leads to the subordination of women and, therefore, the domination of men over women. Sexual harassment is particularly widespread, through which men strengthen their masculine identity and fulfill the social standards assigned to their gender (Rotundi, 2020). The set of cultural views and social behaviors that normalize forms of sexual violence such as rape, sexual harassment, and sexual coercion are defined as "rape culture." In other words, rape culture is formed by a social environment that normalizes, justifies, and even glorifies acts of sexual violence, using misogynistic language and objectifying the female body (Rotundi, 2020).

In addition, the majority of perpetrators of violence against women in the family are men. They abuse their wives and girlfriends because their ideals of masculinity allow them to do so. By violence against women, they prove their masculinity to themselves and other men.

[Georgian toxic masculinity](#)

Toxic masculinity has a damaging impact on Georgian society as well. There have not been many studies about this issue, therefore, there is no scientific knowledge in this regard, although there are

statistical data, the secondary analysis of which allows to adapt discussion developed above to the Georgian reality.

Violence and aggression. Femicide.

Among the harmful effects of Georgian toxic masculinity, the so-called femicide is noteworthy. In 2014-2022, 186 women were killed, 92 women were killed as a result of family violence, and 94 women were killed on other grounds. In the same period, 129 attempts to kill women were made, including 79 attempts to kill women on family grounds, and 50 attempts to kill women for other reasons. It should be noted that as a result of carrying out strict criminal justice policy, the rate of murder and attempted murder of women decreased from 2014 to 2020, an increase was observed again in 2020, and a decrease was observed once more in 2021³. The recent years' reports of the Public Defender of Georgia state that one main challenge is still the killing of women on the grounds of gender (femicide). Statistics show that the number of femicide cases is not decreasing, but increasing from year to year (Report of the Public Defender, 2020). Probably, one of the sources of masculinity strengthening for Georgian toxic masculinity is subjugation of women, often resulting in fatal ending. This fits into one of the pillars of The Man Box - **aggression and control**, this implies the idea that masculinity norms promote a man's violent behavior, which he uses to maintain respect and masculinity status.

The gender of crime and perpetrator

As stated in the guide by the Department of Statistics - "Men and Women", according to the worldwide trend, men commit crime much more often. This trend is the same in Georgia as well. In all types of crimes, from murder to traffic violations, males account for more than 90% of all cases.

The same guide states that over the past 10 years, the statistics on victims of criminal offenses by gender have changed substantially. In 2010-2022, the majority of victims were men with a share of about 55 percent. However, official data show that the share of women victims has been steadily increasing over the past five years, reaching 48 percent in 2022.

The fact that more women than men have been registered as victims in recent years is largely related to issues of domestic violence, of which women are the main victims. During the last decade, a vast

³ <https://pog.gov.ge/uploads/eb6f7f93-Femicide.pdf>

range of measures has been adopted to prevent and eliminate domestic violence in Georgia. Efforts made in this direction have led to a significant increase in social awareness on these issues.

As a result, out of 2,966 registered victims of domestic violence in 2016, this figure exceeded 7,846 in 2022. Toxic masculinity may influence the gender of the crime and the offender. According to the 2023 data of the National Statistics Service of Georgia, out of 18,850 convicted people, 17,686 are men and only 1,164 are women. According to crimes, the data for 2023 are distributed as follows.

	Female	Male
Total number of convicted people	1164	18850
Intentional killing	2	79
Intentional killing under aggravating circumstances	1	54
Intentional infliction of serious harm to health	6	147
Rape	-	34
Burglary	7	190
Robbery	-	89
Theft	139	3347
Illegal manufacturing, production, purchase, storage, transportation, transfer or sale of drugs	25	2038
Hooliganism	1	101
Violation of vehicle safety and/or operation rules	17	556
Other	1966	11051

It appears that men are convicted of the majority of serious crimes, especially intentional killing and intentional killing under aggravating circumstances. Most of the crimes committed by females are theft and drug abuse. Probably, male violence allowed by the Georgian patriarchal society, which is one of the main characteristics of toxic masculinity, affects the gender of criminality and types of crime.

The majority of domestic abusers are men as well (6204), and the victims are women (1162). These data may also reveal the damaging impact of toxic masculinity on women in Georgia. The society often turns a blind eye to the use of force and aggression by men, therefore men are free to abuse women and other family members.

The gender distribution of prisoners is also an important data. By 2023, out of 9497 prisoners, 9172 are men and 325 are women.

Research Aim, objectives and methodology

The aim of the study is to facilitate the collection of subjective information on toxic masculinity from young men and women, which will be important information for future research.

Research objectives:

- Studying the gender attitudes and awareness among young women and men in Georgia;
- Exploring young men's attitudes about violence, education, health and body-related issues. Additionally, the study aimed to find any connection between these approaches and gender stereotypes, or specifically toxic masculinity;
- Identifying issues related to toxic masculinity, that young men in Georgia find most difficult to discuss.

During the research, information was collected using qualitative methodology, specifically the focus group method. The aim of the study was to collect the opinions of young people about toxic masculinity, which they would come up with during a group interview. The research was interested what names young people as a social group would give to different social events related to toxic masculinity.

Purposive, non-probability sampling has been used in the research. The organization Sapari published an announcement online for those willing to participate in the focus group, which was filled out by 75 young people, 45 of whom were young men and 30 were women. A total of 6 focus groups were conducted. 2 groups with young women and 4 groups with men. Focus groups were conducted using platform Zoom, audio recordings were prepared. The method of narrative analysis was used for data analysis, the author of the study tried to find similar accents in the narratives of the respondents and group them together. Below are the results of the study.

Research Results

General Findings

The study revealed several general findings about the attitudes of young women and men.

The first is the gender of participants. Focus groups on toxic masculinity were found to be of interest only to young men who do not express hegemonic⁴ masculinity and do not attempt to present a hyper-

⁴ <http://dictionary.css.ge/content/hegemonic-masculinity>;

masculine identity. Respondents were young men from subordinated⁵, marginalized⁶ or complicit masculinities⁷.

The next general type of finding is the gender of awareness. Young women were found to be more aware and informed about gender, sexuality, reproductive health, body, violence and mental health issues than young men. Apart from this, young women described the gender issues discussed during the research more freely, using more diverse sentences, compared to young male respondents. It can be concluded that young men either tried to refrain themselves in order to fulfil the stereotype of the silent, "real man", or they actually had relatively less information about the mentioned issues than the young women. The exception was the subordinated young men, who knew more about gender, the body, reproduction and sexuality.

Finally, the third general finding is regional and ethnic difference. Young women from Tbilisi, especially Georgians, expressed more openness when talking about gender and sexuality than young women representing regions and especially ethnic minorities. This finding probably could have been different if the in-depth interview method was used, however, during the focus group, the respondents were shy of each other and therefore refrained from expressing their opinions about every issue.

Findings from young women's groups

The study showed that the phenomenon of friendship among young Georgian women is influenced by gender. Women mostly have female friends. In the narratives of female respondents, a common trend was revealed that it is very uncomfortable for them to be friends with boys, because young men perceive them as sexual objects. That's where the hyper-sexuality pillar can be seen, taking on the dynamics of toxicity. Women say that it is impossible to be friends with men, because men always think about sex with them, and this sometimes turns into toxicity. As one of the respondents says:

„I have never had a case with a boy to feel comfortable around him and call him my friend. There are a lot of things causing discomfort; I am saying from my experience, but I think from sexuality viewpoint maybe there is a perception of opposite sex on the part of men. Not always, but it is often the case when boys perceive me as a sexual object and I try to no longer have friendly relationship with them “.

⁵ <http://dictionary.css.ge/content/subordinate-masculinity>;

⁶ <http://dictionary.css.ge/content/marginal-masculinity>;

⁷ <http://dictionary.css.ge/content/complicit-masculinity>

Another female respondent says that boys also think that the main motive of a man in a friendship between a woman and a man is the woman's sexuality. As she says:

"I friend of mine, a boy has said that if a boy starts a relationship with a girl, the interest is always sexual. It may turn into a true friendship, however the initial reason is that - sexuality".

An interesting phenomenon was revealed, when girls talked about the fact that boys perceive them as sexual objects, and therefore it is impossible to be friends with them, or this results in something worse, namely sexual harassment. The researcher then asked them what would happen if young women started seeing men as sexual objects. The young women said that this would boost the boys' egos, raise their self-esteem and would not cause any negative feelings in them. As one of the respondents says:

„They will simply think that more girls like them, they are interesting and attractive“.

According to women's accounts, it is difficult to maintain friendships with boys, especially from the age of puberty. This is due not only to hyper-sexuality, macho and rape culture, but also to the so-called rigid gender roles. It turned out that young men often try to control their female friends from the so-called puberty age. According to women, men control them in terms of what they wear, how they move, who they date, etc. which, according to them, makes friendship impossible. Female respondents agree that heterosexual boys believe their female friends are something they can control. One of the respondents says:

"I had a friend, a boy I did not differentiate between him and my girl-friends but an interesting point was that when I started smoking, he made it clear that I was not supposed to smoke because I was a girl, we got into an argument because of this and he revealed his true face, saying that because he was a boy he had superiority to lecture me and control me and this was a shock to me. We were really good friends but we are not anymore".

Female respondents said that they are friends with young men if they are 5-10 years younger than them, because then the boys perceive them as adults, not as sexual objects, and no longer control them, as young men of the same age did in their childhood. According to one of the respondents:

“Now I have boys, friends, who are 7-8 years younger than me and that’s why the friendship is possible because we are so much older and they are so young that we are not sexual objects for them. Whereas our peers or the “street boys” had this thing that they had to control us. The university changed many of them but some remained the same. I miss them, they are my childhood friends, but I can no longer communicate with them, because they think that since I am a girl certain things are not allowed for me, like smoking, having relationships etc. “

Another finding that research showed from young women's groups is rigid gender stereotypes. According to young women, young men do not respect women's opinions at school or university. Boys expect girls to just listen, stay silent, and if a woman starts to respond, young men either don't listen to her opinion, or they don't like it when a woman responds and try to "put them in their place". Female respondents believe that boys repeat the perceptions saturated with pseudoscientific information in the family and society, that a girl should play only with girls, a man is smarter than a woman, a man has a mathematical brain and a woman does not, etc. According to one of the respondents:

“I have not had boy-friends, because even from the kinder-garden the parents and teachers play a big role, even if the boys said come play, the parents would say no - why would you want to play with a boy? Then I studied at a technical school and a math teacher always used to say that a boy’s brain is better, the geniuses are boys. Even though girls were also very good students, they still preferred boys. <...> afterwards when I enrolled in computer sciences this seemed very strange to everyone, this is an unequal field in terms of gender, it is mostly occupied by boys, and the main problems I have had with the boys with whom I have tried to be friends, have had these pseudo explanations that a girl’s brain is wired in such a way that is it not fit for doing mathematics “

The study revealed that young men avoid talking about their mental health. According to women, men think of mental problems as "craziness" and "it is uncool" to be seen as crazy, because insanity is stigmatized in society. Therefore, they try to silently endure these problems and do not talk about them at all. According to one of the respondents:

"I have noticed with boys that when they have a problem they do not talk about it with girls, they say that this is men's' business and they step aside and do not let the girls know if they have a problem, in order to hide this weakness".

According to women, it is extremely hard for young men to talk to young women about these women's sexual experiences. According to the respondents, if a young woman tells her sexual experience to a young man, who is her partner or a friend, the men become aggressive and try to strictly control them, as if the woman had the sexual experience because of lack of control. According to one of the female respondents:

"Whenever I have started conversation about mental health or sexual experience, even as a joke, any implication about my sexual life, the communication becomes very uncomfortable, the boys try to quickly change the subject or give me a hidden hint that this topic is uncomfortable for them".

According to female respondents, it is especially difficult for young men to talk about the menstrual cycle and sexual violence. Consequently, they do not know how to help women when they have menstrual problems or experience sexual harassment. According to one respondent:

"Boys have no experience whatsoever and no information in this regard. There were two boys in an organization whom I told that I had my period and needed medication and they looked at me so surprised as if it was a shame, at the same time they got interested. One of the boys took me to the side and asked me to show a new menstrual pad, asked me to open it and show it to him, they have interest but do not know who to approach with this interest, they can't go to their parents, sadly they have no education in schools therefore they are confused".

According to female respondents, it is difficult for men to talk to young women, who are victims of violence because they often do not consider sexual violence to be violence and do not trust the stories told by women. According to the study, young women believe that young men have a low awareness on sexual violence. According to one of the respondents:

"Talking about sexual harassment with boys is difficult. When I have had such an experience, when someone stalked me in the subway I got scared and called my father,

and he was like maybe you confused something, misunderstood, you hallucinated. When you receive this kind of feedback, you no longer want to tell”.

One female respondent found an interesting explanation for the discussion developed above. According to her, a young man may avoid talking about sexual harassment with a female friend, so that this young woman does not ask him for protection. According to her:

“Maybe the reason why men deny women’s sexual harassment is that they don’t want these women, their friends to ask them for protection. Whenever I have been in a dangerous situation, I have never asked my male friends for anything, there is no point”.

According to young female respondents, men lack medical and scientific information about reproductive health, body structure, sexuality and masturbation of women and men. Instead, according to women, young men rely on widespread societal misconceptions and pornography. For example, when it comes to masturbation, there is widespread misinformation among young Georgian men that masturbation causes various diseases, including blindness, headaches, melancholy, etc.

As the female respondents reported, young men make jokes about and laugh at masturbation and menstruation more than they have real knowledge and information. According to the respondents, boys do not take these issues seriously. As one respondent states:

“Boys tend to make fun of masturbation and bodily problems, they don’t talk about this often but if they do, they joke. As for menstruation, one boy made a very bad joke about it that he once saw a girl who had a red stain on her pants. Initially I tried to explain, when he did not follow my explanation, I got very angry. Another boy was with me and he asked me why I got angry and told me that he was surprised. And this boy belongs to the group of men who do not represent this masculine society. Then I explained and he thanked me. They do not have such experiences at all. In school too, when I have opened my bag and a pad could be seen, boys have laughed at this fact”.

Women say girls teach boys about sexuality and reproductive health. According to the female respondents, boys do not pretend to be ignorant, they actually do not have relevant knowledge about these issues.

According to female respondents, men think that the more relationships they have with women, the more masculine they will appear in society. This fits with the hyper-sexuality pillar. The same line of narrative was revealed in the young men's explanations that being in a relationship with several women simultaneously is viewed as true masculinity in society.

Another finding that the study revealed in the group of young women is perceptions related to the institution of virginity. Female respondents say that although attitudes towards the institution of virginity have been slightly positive in recent years, virginity is still important to the majority of young men when it comes to starting a family. This is relevant to the pillar of traditional gender roles. According to the respondents, despite globalization and modernization, due to which people have received a lot of knowledge and information about sexuality and sexual behaviors, men still worry about the phenomenon of virginity and it is a sensitive issue for them.

According to women, young men divide women into two categories, women who are for sex and women who are for relationships. According to the respondents, even the most open-minded young men behave in this way, they may try to present themselves as if they accept women's free sexual behavior, but in the end, they choose women with no sexual experience or women hiding that experience, as their girlfriends and wives.

One female respondent brought the proposition of a male participant in the Georgian reality show, Prime House as an example, that the latter wants a virgin as a wife because she will not compare him to other men. According to this respondent, this may be a result of toxic masculinity, young men feel uncomfortable and afraid of having a sexually free partner. This corresponds with the pillar of rigid gender roles.

Female respondents say that boys do not have information and knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases and often put girls in danger as well. According to one of the respondents:

“As for sexually transmitted diseases boys don't have any information at all and their lack of knowledge affects girls as well because boys do not use condoms and both end up having problems. They have more experience in masturbation, probably from videos and from years of doing that”.

Focus groups of women revealed that young men have difficulty expressing their own emotions and identifying others' emotions. However, in addition to the lack of expressing emotions, according to one respondent, the new toxic male phenomenon is that women and society sometimes ask men to

be more sensitive than is actually necessary. They are asked to talk more and be more honest. However, according to the respondent, a man may not want this honesty and this may have toxic results.

According to women, men cannot guess others' emotions. When a girl offers friendship, men always perceive it as flirting, and even in case of repeated refusal, they do not believe that a woman offered friendship without sexual context. According to women, men find it difficult to orient themselves in the world of emotions and guess the emotions of others, acting as their learned hyper-sexuality forces them.

A final finding revealed by the women's focus group is the phenomenon of passive bystanders and encouragement of violence among young men. As female respondents report, when someone is bullied or abused at school, the peers do not try to help the victim, because they think it is too risky. Neither school administration nor the teachers try to intervene in the conflict of young male students and often leave them alone facing each other and the conflict and expect them to solve the issue on their own. Boys mostly resolve such conflicts violently, which corresponds with the pillar of aggression and control - the society demands that young men solve the problem alone and violently. According to one of the respondents:

“A boy was beating another boy in front of an apartment building, was swearing at him and people were just passing them by and nobody was approaching to intervene. When I saw this I went to him and told him to leave the guy alone or I would call the police. At this moment the friends of the guy who was beating this boy came rushing from around the corner, they had not intervened before, allowed them to figure this out one on one. There was a girl with me and she was also telling me to not intervene”.

The next part of the research report analyzes the information collected from the focus groups of young men.

Data from young men's groups

As the focus groups of young men revealed, they believe that their generation is more open and conversational than the men's generation ten and twenty years ago. They report that the younger generation does not have a problem of sharing emotions as the older generations. According to them, this allows men to start conversation about sexuality, mental health, emotions and other sensitive issues in Georgia.

At the same time, as a group of women found that women are more friendly with women and have trouble being friends with men because men see them as sex objects, men are also more friendly with men and find it easier to be friends with them, but not because they see women as sex objects. It is simply due to the fact that certain awkwardness occurs after the puberty and they prefer being friends with boys than with girls. In addition, young men say that friendship between a woman and a man is considered abnormal in society. According to one respondent:

“Friendship between a girl and a boy is somehow beyond normal and it is as if normality demands that a masculine be next to masculine, man be friends with man, girl with girl. Being buddies is an expression of male identity and these terms are so rooted that these words - being boy-friend and girl-friend intensifies this gap even more, which exists in modern Georgian society both in and outside of Tbilisi”.

Findings from the women's focus group regarding the fact that young men have very little information about reproductive health and sexuality and mostly rely on public myths, misconceptions and information were also confirmed by the group of young men. According to one of the respondents:

“There is no education in terms of reproductive health, the teachers skip this topic in schools and boys only laugh about these issues. Men are forbidden to talk about these topics. Even among friends these issues are less discussed”.

Focus groups of young men confirmed the findings in women's groups that women have more medical and scientific information about sexuality than men. According to one of the respondents:

“Based on my experience, girls have more medical knowledge than boys. I don't know why this is the case. My explanation is mothers talk more about these issues with daughters than with sons and I think this is often what causes violence against women, that mothers do not give information to boys and boys, due to lack of knowledge make many mistakes”.

Although young men have reported that their generation is more open and does not avoid sharing their emotions, the study still revealed that they find it very difficult to talk about issues such as sexuality, potency and mental health. As the study showed, they are afraid of being labeled "impotent" and "crazy" in society and further stigmatized. Research has revealed that talking about potency/impotence is the most sensitive topic in young men's lives. This clearly corresponds with the

pillar of hyper-sexuality, that a man should always be ready for sex and have an erection every time. Young male respondents call this issue a men's issue.

At the same time, the study revealed that crying and expressing emotions are still forbidden for young Georgian men and the society considers this as weakness. According to one of the respondents:

"I have often been told, you are a boy and why are you crying. This carries a lot of information within itself. This creates some kind of division between boys and girls, that it is normal for girls to express their emotions and not for boys. So, boys talk less about mental and physical health, there is a higher demand from the society that they endure this and keep this only to themselves, which leads to negative results. Women tend to agree going to the psychologist more than men and this is also due to the views rooted in the society. Boys do not like being patients."

At the same time, male respondents state that expressing aggressiveness and being a troublemaker is still considered the main masculine behavior, and those who do not behave in this way are considered unmanly in society. This is relevant for the pillar of aggression and control. The society demands that men first of all defend their positions using aggression.

The next finding that the study revealed is the pressure on young men to be real men, and in this direction, unemployment is one of the most painful events in a man's life, causing severe stress, which further develops into male gender role stress. According to young men, men fear unemployment the most and it is such a big failure for them that if they are unemployed, they become depressed and start having mental problems. All this is very toxic, destroying their personality. According to one of the respondents:

"Yes, I think this exists, I have been working since the age of 18 but I have heard that my friends and other boys are under pressure, like you are at this age and why don't you have a job. I have heard of such pressure less in case of girls".

The next finding revealed in the men's focus group is the image of a lewd man. As young men note, there is a public belief in Georgia that a man's reputation improves depending on how many sexual partners he has had in his life. This certainly fits in with the toxic pillar of hyper-sexuality. According to the respondents, hyper-sexuality leads to sexual violence, because men get angry when women refuse them sex, and therefore they resort to abuse, harassment, etc. In addition, hyper-sexuality

causes the so-called masculine myths. Boys make up sexual stories and tell them to other boys, and in this story they may use the name and surname of an actual young woman and get her in trouble. According to one of the respondents:

“Here, if a man has contact with several girls simultaneously he is perceived as a real man, that he is with several girls and therefore he is so manly.”

According to the respondents, fights and risky behaviors, driving fast, etc., are added to multiple sexual partners as a true representation of masculinity. This probably creates a macho culture that is toxic in itself. According to one of the respondents:

“For some, sleeping with everybody means they are “cool”, especially in the eyes of friends. Fights and risky behaviors too, for example fast driving and uncontrolled aggression are still considered manly behaviors that are likeable”.

The next finding of the study concerns rigid gender roles. Young men said that from the age of 17-18, a young Georgian man must have a girlfriend, otherwise he will be called gay, so young men sometimes have to invent a girlfriend to avoid pressure from society. There is a similar pressure on marriage. According to the respondents, society asks men to get married first, and if he is married, then the demand increases, they must have children. According to the respondents, realization in the family is one of the most toxic demands towards young men in Georgian society. They are forced to fall in love, get married, and become fathers to meet societal expectations. According to one of the respondents:

“There is a big pressure to start a family. From very young age, I have even heard from distant relatives, so when are you going to get married? It is time, you know, aren't you a man?”

Another young male respondent echoes the arguments developed above. According to him:

“If a boy doesn't have a girlfriend they think he is gay, especially in their neighborhood or among relatives. <...> I personally have heard that a boy must get married before the age of 25, if he steps over that age then you have to chase him, and you must have a child, 3 kids before you are 25 (laughs)”.

Finally, a focus group of young men revealed that anxiety about physicality and body representation has increased among young men in Georgia over the past ten years. Young men are expected by society to have a fit, trained and lean body. According to the respondents, a man should look like a man, therefore, young men spend a lot of time and effort, exercising in fitness centers, stomach reduction surgery and dieting are also common. According to one of the respondents, earrings and piercings are also not masculine:

“In our time an earring is associated with femininity and is not masculine, or a piercing on the face. I personally have piercing and have received remarks, even from a peer, from older generation, that this is unmanly”.

Other male respondents also agree with this narrative:

“You have to have a more trained body, if you are too slim and not physically trained, you don’t seem to fit in this manliness. They look down at you, especially your peer men”.

One of the respondents recalled that at school, if a young man was too thin, his peers would make fun of him:

“At school whoever was slim or ugly, were mocked”.

Finally, men believe that toxic issues related to the body and physicality are perceived more critically by women than by men. According to one of the respondents:

“Over the last three years the standards have gone very high, men try to fit the standards entering from other countries. This includes hair removal. You have to follow a specific standard, like other countries. However, this is less toxic in men’s case than in women’s”.

Taboo topics

The research tried to identify the taboo topics, that young Georgian men avoid talking about at this stage. The study revealed that it is still impossible to start a conversation about active bystanders in the Georgian society. As the respondents recalled, it is risky and dangerous to intervene in violence and pull the fighters apart. One of the respondents recalled that he intervened in an incident where a

man was abusing a woman, and afterwards the woman denied everything, and he himself became the object of oppression and violence, this process was prolonged in time, which, according to the respondent, caused intense fear and discomfort in him. Both women and men believe that it is too early to talk about this issue, because the Georgian society itself is not ready for the social institution of an active bystander.

The next taboo topic is homosexuality. As the young male respondents reported, homosexuality is quite a sensitive issue and is not a good topic to start the conversation about toxic masculinity. According to the respondents, men should talk about all topics, but at the initial stage, it is better not to talk about homosexuality.

Finally, the study revealed that the respondents consider the issues of impotence and erection to be the most sensitive and taboo topics. According to them, young men lie excessively about this topic and therefore instead of talking, increasing medical and gender awareness would be more beneficial for them as well as for the society.

Conclusion

To conclude, the study revealed that young men in Georgia are under pressure in terms of all seven pillars of the "The Man Box". They are forbidden to express their emotions, cry and feel fear, as well as talk about mental problems and body issues. Instead, men are asked to fight and resolve issues with each other in a violent way. Hyper-sexuality, having many female partners, and being macho are perceived as true masculinity. Young men strictly adhere to gender roles, stereotypes and attitudes, they want to control women's bodies and do not listen to them, do not see them as equals in conversations. Additionally, they may try to control a friend or female partner if the latter decides to smoke cigarettes or engage in free sexual behavior. Research has revealed that young men lack information about sexuality and reproductive health, and when it comes to masturbation or menstruation, they joke and giggle about the issues instead of talking about and discussing them. Finally, the research revealed that society demands of young men to be employed, earn money and marry, and if a young man does not work, has no girlfriend, or a wife and children after marriage, it oppresses and banishes him as an inferior man and human being.

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