

The Association between Masculinity and Anxiety in Canadian Men

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Abstract : Background: Masculinity has been associated with poor mental health outcomes in adult men and is colloquially referred to as toxic. Masculinity is traditionally measured using the Male Role Norms Inventory, which examines behaviors that may be common in men but that are themselves associated with poor mental health regardless of gender (e.g., aggressiveness). The purpose of this study was to examine if masculinity is associated with generalized anxiety among men using this inventory vs. a man's personal definition of it. Method: An online survey collected data from 1,200 men aged 18-65 across Canada in July 2022. Masculinity was measured using: 1) the Male Role Norms Inventory Short Form and 2) by asking men to self-define what being masculine means. Men were then asked to rate the extent they perceived themselves to be masculine on a scale of 1 to 10 based on their definition of the construct. Generalized anxiety disorder was measured using the GAD-7. Multiple linear regression was used to examine associations between each masculinity score and anxiety score, adjusting for confounders. Results: The masculinity score measured using the inventory was positively associated with increased anxiety scores among men ($\beta = 0.02$, $p < 0.01$). Masculinity subscales most strongly correlated with higher anxiety were restrictive emotionality ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$) and dominance ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$). When traditional masculinity was replaced by a man's self-rated masculinity score in the model, the reverse association was found, with increasing masculinity resulting in a significantly reduced anxiety score ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.04$). Discussion: These findings highlight the need to revisit the ways in which masculinity is defined and operationalized in research to better understand its impacts on men's mental health. The findings also highlight the importance of allowing participants to self-define gender-based constructs, given they are fluid and socially constructed.

Keywords : masculinity, generalized anxiety disorder, race, intersectionality

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