

## WHO SELF-CARES?

**STEPHEN MANN**

Managing Editor, *SelfCare*.

April 5th sees the publication of the report 'Who Self-Cares Wins' by Global Action on Men's Health (GAMH) ([http://gamh.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Who-Self-Cares-Wins.GAMH\\_2019.Final-report.pdf](http://gamh.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Who-Self-Cares-Wins.GAMH_2019.Final-report.pdf)). The release is timed to synchronise with World Health Day on the 7th April, and in recognition of this we host a blog post from the author (Peter Baker of GAMH), emphasising the clear call to action that the report represents.

This is an effective report: clearly written, well researched and comprehensive. Drawing on 287 (mainly peer-reviewed) reference sources, there is an abundance of data used to support its conclusions. For those not familiar with them, many of the statistics are startling; and some even shocking. Everywhere around the world, men do not live as long as women, and the gap is widening, rather than narrowing. How long a male can expect to live depends greatly on where he is born; massive disparities exist between both rich and poor countries and regions within the same country. It is unsurprising that the most common causes of premature male death are dominated by 'non-communicable diseases' (NCDs), but outcomes are clearly worsened by the particularities of the male 'mind set' on health.

It is unquestionably the case that 'macro' measures at a governmental level, aimed at addressing inequity in societies and reducing risks from smoking, alcohol misuse and dietary imbalance benefit men in particular. However this report advocates that the policy focus should be on self-care. Despite manifestly different health outcomes between the sexes, the gender perspective has been curiously neglected in discussions about self-care policy at the population level. An understandable desire to promulgate simple messages with universal applicability, may have undervalued the potential to improve health practices through more targeted messages and policies.

It is argued that an effective set of self-care policies should take account of the way men approach health, recognise the gender norms which can get in the way of positive change and seek to build on the positives in male attitudes to lifestyle. The report uses the now familiar '7 pillars of Self-Care' (the International Self-Care Foundation's conceptual framework of major self-care domains) to assess male strengths and weaknesses in each aspect of self-care and identifies the policy priorities for each.

Improving health for men and boys through self-care strategies is a complex problem and requires a systems-wide and multi-layered set of actions. The report looks at the barriers and opportunities,

pointing to current examples where a national focus on men's health is already producing significant benefits. Such a policy focus can provide benefits to society as a whole, since myriad aspects of men's health have a direct impact on the wellbeing of the women and children around them.

This important report argues that society as a whole suffers if we do not address the poor health outcomes that can result simply from being male. Improving the way men approach their own health through self-care holds great promise, and a gender-blind approach to self-care may hamper the potential that is surely there. A tailored and specific self-care agenda recognising the needs of men is called for and this report sets out an achievable series of steps for policy makers. In doing so, the report points the way to a more tailored discussion of self-care, seen through the prism of gender.

**Correspondence to: [editor@selfcarejournal.com](mailto:editor@selfcarejournal.com)**