



Young men's health in a digital world

2025 REPORT



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Acknowledgments

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ABOUT MOVEMBER

Since 2003, Movember has challenged the status quo, shaken up men's health research, and transformed the way health services reach and support men – taking on prostate cancer, testicular cancer, mental health, and suicide prevention with unwavering determination.

Movember has raised over AUD \$1.7 billion (or GBP £945.8 million) for men's health, thanks to a passionate network of Mos. These critical funds have delivered more than 1,300 men's health projects around the world. Championing new research, cutting-edge treatments, and healthy behaviours. To learn more, please visit [Movember.com](https://www.movember.com)

ABOUT THE MOVEMBER INSTITUTE OF MEN'S HEALTH

Building on a 20-year legacy of investment in men's physical and mental health, The Movember Institute of Men's Health launched in 2023 and has ambitious goals to enhance quality of life for millions of men worldwide. Uniting global experts in the field of men's health, the Institute will accelerate research and translate it into tangible, real-world outcomes.

ABOUT MOVEMBER'S COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Embarking on this research, we invited a number of partners to support the process, providing us with insights from their expertise and issue areas. These partners have informed and strengthened our final research report, and have inspired the next phase of our program of work exploring young men's experiences online- the young men, media and masculinities lab.

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Executive summary

Social media is an integral part of young men's lives. Popular influencers creating 'men and masculinity content' are amassing millions of young male followers who spend hours a day consuming their videos. Beyond creating engaging content, the appeal of these influencers lies in the online communities they are cultivating, which encourage sharing of ideas, ideologies and connection. For years, these communities were largely limited to fringe, radicalized online subcultures. Yet, in recent years, men and masculinity influencers, and the content they create, are far more present in the lives of young men.

Despite high levels of public interest in online men and masculinity content, there has been a stark lack of attention to the diverse voices and experiences of young men. We have little understanding about what young men think and feel about the men and masculinity content they are consuming and how it is impacting their health outcomes (physical, mental and relational).

This report synthesises data from over 3,000 young men (aged 16-25 years) in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. Our research evidences the role of men and masculinity content, and the influencers creating this content, on the everyday lives of young men, offering new approaches to increasing young men's wellbeing and reducing associated health harms.



THE KEY FINDINGS OF THE REPORT ARE SUMMARIZED BELOW:

■ **Men and masculinity influencers have gone mainstream:** Nearly two-thirds of the young men surveyed were regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers. Their content encompassed a wide breadth of themes that resonated with, and are relevant to, young men (i.e., fitness, financial success, relationships). Young men engaging with these influencers were typically white, older, employed full-time, university-educated and residing in high-income households.

■ **Men and masculinity influencers appeal to young men as entertaining, motivating and inspiring:** While primarily engaging with influencers for entertainment, many young men reported acting upon influencers' advice. Those acting on this advice described greater positive emotion as an outcome (i.e., felt motivated, happy or purposeful) than negative emotion (i.e., felt anxious or unhappy).

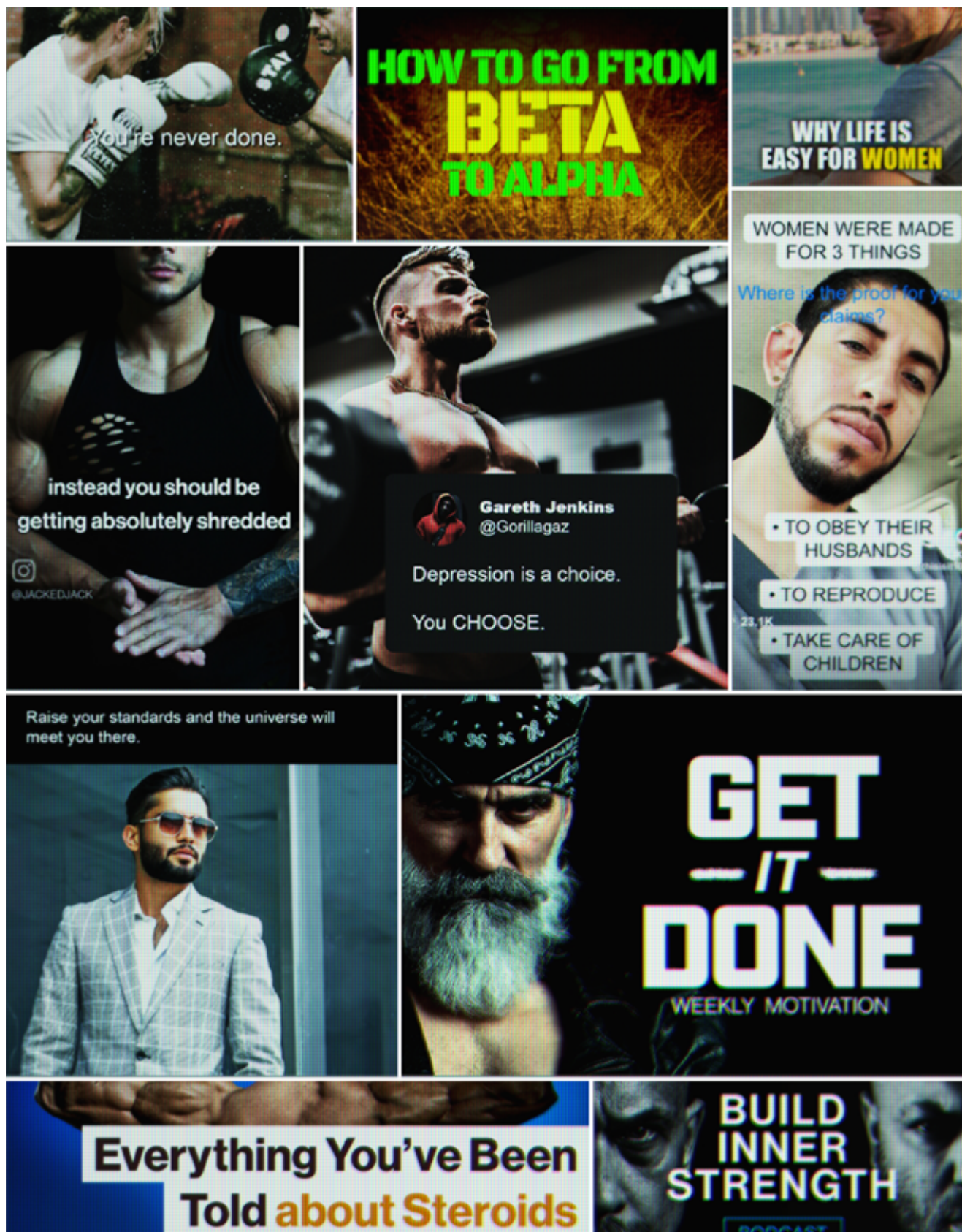
■ **Men and masculinity influencers may play a role in young men's health outcomes:** Young men who watched these influencers (relative to those who don't) were more optimistic about their personal circumstances and the social circumstances of men in future. By contrast, these same young men

were also more likely to report worse mental health outcomes, a reduced willingness to prioritise their mental health, and higher rates of risky health behaviours (i.e., steroid use, exercising while injured).

■ **Men and masculinity influencers may be shaping young men's ideals of masculinity:** Many young men in our study, especially those regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers, saw self-reliance and emotional control as important norms for men to embody. Young men watching men and masculinity influencers (relative to those who don't) were also more likely to associate an inability to control one's emotions with personal weakness and failure in men.

■ **Men and masculinity influencers may impact how young men perceive gender roles:** Young men who regularly engage with men and masculinity influencers (relative to those who don't) reported negative and limiting attitudes towards women and their roles in relationships. They were also more likely to report feeling frustrated by dating citing 'women being rude to them' and the 'differences between women and men having dating values' as key sources of this frustration. In response, young men engaging with men and masculinity influencers, compared to those who don't, were more likely to search for answers online and self-improvement advice.

Men and masculinity content online



The images shown are not of real influencers or real posts – they are recreations featuring stock imagery and inspired by the content shared and consumed by the young men who took part in the research.

Preface



“

There was nowhere else offering a clear roadmap to masculinity, no one else showing me how to navigate what it meant to be a man.

”

WILL ADOLPHY'S STORY

The year is 2017. I'm 22 years old, living in a flat share, and I can barely leave my room without having a panic attack. Each day feels like a marathon with no finish in sight. I'm desperate for help. I'm in survival mode.

Then one day, on my way to the gym, I put on a podcast. I'll never forget that moment. The voice on the other end had me so spellbound that I barely lifted any weights. It belonged to a well-known online influencer. Before I knew it, he had become a father figure to me—a voice of guidance and certainty in a world that, at the time, felt confusing and hostile to men.

All I wanted was to feel better, so I immersed myself in the world of online masculinity influencers. Not intentionally—I just got hooked. There was nowhere else offering a clear roadmap to masculinity, no one else showing me how to navigate what it meant to be a man.

And these influencers did give me direction. They gave me a masculinity map that said this is how to be a man. Here's how to fix yourself.

- Go to the gym
- Build a business
- Attract a fit girlfriend

So that's exactly what I did.

Suddenly, I had a purpose. I was reading self-help books, smashing my business goals, working out religiously, and in my first relationship. It felt good at the time—really good. For the first time in years, I wasn't drowning.

This map wasn't new, but in a world that seemed to demand change from men without offering a clear alternative, it felt like a lifeline. I thought I had found the answers.

But something else was happening—something I couldn't see at the time.

I was becoming more connected to the online masculinity influencers but more disconnected from myself. I had no idea just how stuck and isolated I truly was because I had never felt what it's like to be out of isolation. My worldview hardened. Everything became binary—right or wrong, strong or weak, us vs. them. Their words became gospel.

I followed the blueprint to the letter. I got the girlfriend, the business, the six-pack. And for a brief moment, I believed I had made it. I believed I belonged. But I had built my house without foundations. From the outside in.

And when the storm came—when my relationship ended, and my business crumbled during COVID—I was completely floored. I was back to feeling worthless, only this time, I was exhausted. I had done everything they said, and my mental health had ultimately gotten worse, and the deeper issues were left unaddressed.

I was lucky. Rock bottom catapulted me out of the online world and towards the real support I needed. I joined a support group, found a therapist and began the process of healing I truly needed.

A lot of men don't get that far though. A lot of men don't reach out for support and survive the fall.

That's why I'm honoured to be part of this research. The more we understand why boys and men are drawn to online masculinity influencers, the more we can learn how to reach them—how to include them in the conversation before they disappear down an alluring path that offers quick fixes but potentially devastating long-term consequences.

On the other side of isolation is a life that every young person longs for. I truly believe that.

Because today, I live a life I no longer wish to escape from.

Will's story is unique to him, but it is not unusual. This is his own story in his own words and helps bring Movember's research findings to life. Research shows that many young men enter this online world because they are feeling down like Will was, but we also know that many are directly targeted by algorithms and fed this through their social media feeds.

They are drawn in for a wide range of reasons; young men have questions around how to be a man, how to be successful, and how to attract a partner. These are good questions, but the answers that they are being served are pushing potentially harmful advice for their own health and their views of men's roles in society.

Introduction

The issues facing young men today are well-documented. We know they are particularly vulnerable to loneliness and social disconnection (Barreto et al., 2021), and suicide is a leading cause of premature death in young men worldwide (Glenn et al., 2020), including in Australia (AIHW, 2024), the UK (Office of National Statistics, 2020) and US (CDC, 2024).

Young men's psychological distress can result in increased risk of harm towards self and others, often in the form of interpersonal violence (Fulu et al., 2013; Schumacher et al., 2001) and substance misuse (Rice et al., 2014). We also know that young men can feel profound pressure to enact a rigid and socially prescribed version of masculinity, pressure that is often intensified within online communities, specifically on social media (DFSV Commission, 2023).

Amidst conflicting messages and increasing uncertainty about their role and value in society, many young men are turning to social media, and the key actors who hold influence in these spaces for answers – particularly 'men and masculinity' influencers who speak directly to young men's experiences. Increasingly, these influencers connect with young men's deepest anxieties and insecurities by validating, responding, and at times, perpetuating the disconnection and uncertainty many of them may be experiencing (Bujalka et al., 2022).

THE RISE OF MEN AND MASCULINITY CONTENT ONLINE

'The Manosphere' is an umbrella term used to describe a network of online communities that revolve around perceptions of masculinity and what it means to be a man. This content originated as a loose collection of dedicated online forums (i.e., via platforms such as Reddit, 4chan, Discord) and websites (i.e., incels.co, incel.is, looksmaxxing.org) for men to discuss the issues facing them, and discuss narratives that promote the idea that there is an increasing societal bias against men in favour of women. Content and discussions encompassing a broad spectrum of content, from masculine self-improvement (e.g. fitness and finance) to men's rights advocacy, to misogyny (Brito et al., 2024).

These male-oriented communities and voices, which were once small scale and fringe, have become mainstream and accessible to young men through the rise of social media. The proliferation of algorithmically-driven social media platforms over the last decade, and the content creators (influencers) within them, has resulted in content from the 'manosphere' now spreading via mainstream social media platforms, engaging large and diverse audiences.

Existing research has tracked the rapid pace at which TikTok (Solea & Sugiura, 2023) and YouTube (Reset Australia, 2022) algorithms push politicized and radicalized content towards young men. This research maps algorithmic-pathways whereby young men are driven from relatively innocuous content focused on men's interests (e.g. gaming, relationship advice, physical exercise) towards more extreme content originating in specific online sub-communities, including antisocial ideas and attitudes towards women and gender minorities, unverified health advice, and performance or body image related content (looks-maxxing). As a result, there is now a vast spectrum of everyday cultural and lifestyle content that is inherently difficult to classify and assign 'harm' or 'risk' labels to given its nuanced, popular and sometimes relatively innocuous nature.

AN EVIDENCE GAP

The health and wellbeing challenges encountered by young men are well evidenced. Online spaces, particularly social media, have now become a sanctuary for young men to seek guidance, education and connection, especially when they may face barriers to support offline. We also know that the mainstreaming of men and masculinity content is happening, yet we presently have little understanding of whether (and how) this is linked to their individual and relational health and wellbeing. The pathways through which these influencers connect with, speak to and shape young men's lives are also not well understood, and certainly not from the perspectives of young men themselves.

With rising online commentary and existing research focusing primarily on the presumed risks to young men's individual and relational health posed by social media, very little research has focused on the diverse experiences of young men and what is useful, helpful and harmful from their perspective. Quantifying the relative risks and benefits linked with young men's engagement with men and masculinity influencers will better document young men's lived experience with this content and identify ways to safeguard their health where it may be at risk.

STUDY AIMS

The purpose of this study was to examine the health and wellbeing outcomes of young men who were regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers online. Specifically, we aimed to investigate:

1. What do young men think about the influencer content they see?
2. Do young men who actively engage with men and masculinity influencers have different mental, physical or relational health compared to those who aren't engaging?
3. Are young men who actively engage men and masculinity influencers different in their views about masculinity and gender roles compared to those who aren't engaging?

¹In an attempt to move away from a deficits-based frame (conceptualised in past research as the 'manosphere'), this report will instead use the term 'men and masculinity content' which adopts a more neutral frame to describe the range of mainstream content young men see online relating to their gender, and the issues that concern them. This neutral frame is important to accurately represent popularised core themes across men and masculinity content including men's self-improvement, where influencers recognise the issues faced by modern young men, and call upon them to take charge of their own health, wellbeing, material, financial and sexual success.

Method

WHO TOOK PART

We surveyed 3,048 young men online, aged 16-25 who live in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States between May and July 2024. The sample was nationally representative across key demographic variables (age, ethnicity, education, employment and household income). We recruited a similar number of young men from each country (1,003 from Australia, 1,023 from the United Kingdom, and 1,022 from the United States), including a minimum of at least 1,000 young men who engaged with a predefined list of men and masculinity influencers.

WHICH INFLUENCERS?

A series of preliminary research projects were undertaken in partnership with a cultural research partner, 'The Good Side', to meaningfully engage with UK, US, and Australian young men, and identify prominent influencers who talk about men and masculinity or orient their content towards them.

First, interviews with subject-matter experts (including researcher and industry experts, cultural experts [authors, journalists], lived experience experts [young men, streamers, influencers], teachers and community group facilitators) were conducted. Additionally, social media mapping strategies were used to identify a long list of men and masculinity influencers who have large audiences (1-10 million on average).

Secondly, qualitative research (interviews and focus groups) with an online community of 100 young men (aged 16-25 years) across the UK, US, and Australia, was undertaken to refine this list, removing and adding some influencers. This sample of young men was screened and recruited based on their engagement with said influencers. This ensured that the young men interviewed had a

high level of engagement and knowledge of these influencers and were able to provide knowledgeable and relevant insights. The list was refined based on which influencers' content was spontaneously shared or referenced by young men in content sharing tasks and open text-based or video-based reflection exercises (i.e., influencers who were not mentioned by young men were removed from the list, while novel influencers mentioned were added).

This preliminary research determined that influencers differ greatly, not only in terms of the content they produce but also in their audience reach and tangible influence. The differences within each influencer's content also varied greatly, with most influencers creating a wide array of content that can be seen to exist on a spectrum from innocuous to harmful. Despite these noted differences however, common narratives and topics of content were clear and typically focused on topics related to masculinity, wealth, fitness, discipline, self-improvement and relationships. Therefore, the refined list of influencers was then defined as men and masculinity influencers.



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WHAT WE ASKED

In addition to asking young men about the kind of influencers they followed, we asked young men close-ended questions relating to their health, behaviours, attitudes, and relationships. These custom questions we developed are succinctly summarized in the four themes below. The exact wording for all questions can be found in Appendix A.

Theme 1: Audience and influence, asked participants questions regarding their demographic characteristics, their reasons for watching men and masculinity influencers, and whether they have acted upon advice from said influencers.

Theme 2: Personal impacts, enquired about optimism for young men's futures, their proclivity to engage in risky health-related behaviours, their mental health, and what they view as important in the pursuit of success.

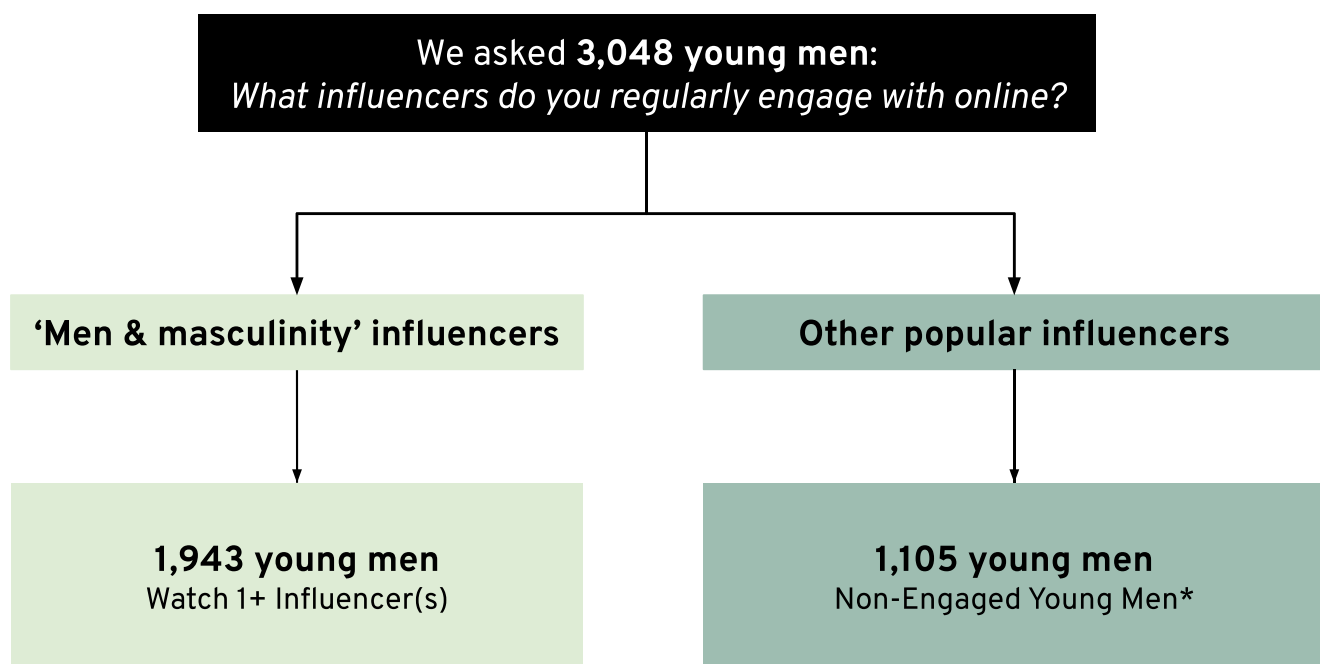
Theme 3: Masculine norms and social connections, asked about the importance of masculine norms, male friendships, and the traits young men valued in their male peers.

Theme 4: Gendered dynamics and relationships, investigated young men's attitudes towards gender roles for men and women, and how they felt about dating in the modern world.

Findings and discussion

Our findings compare the frequencies between two distinct groups: young men regularly engaging² with one or more men and masculinity influencers (watch 1+ influencer[s]) and those who were not actively engaging with men and masculinity influencers (non-engaging)³.

FIGURE 1 – STUDY ANALYSIS



*Young men who do not actively engage with 'men & masculinity' influencers.

²Regular engagement² was self-defined by participants. Participants were asked "Do you regularly watch content online featuring any of the following? Please select all that apply."

³These results should not be interpreted as indicative of causation, but rather as a descriptive analysis of observed differences.

THEME 1: AUDIENCE

- Nearly two thirds (63%) of young men in Australia, United Kingdom and the United States were regularly engaging with content from at least one men and masculinity influencer.
- Young men engaging with men and masculinity influencers were diverse, from all income groups, ages (16-25) and ethnic backgrounds. However, these young men were more likely to be white, older, employed full-time, educated and residing in high-income households, compared to young men who weren't engaging with these influencers.
- Those engaging with men and masculinity influencers reported significantly higher adherence to 'traditionally masculine' interests, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

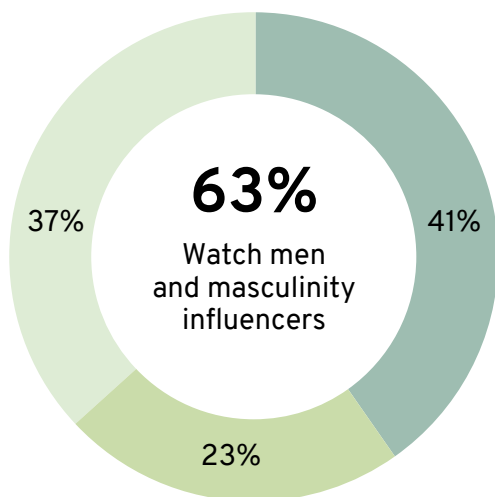
Almost two thirds of young men in Australia, United Kingdom and the United States (63%) are regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers. Of those young men, 23% were regularly engaging with only one men and masculinity influencer, and 41% were engaging two or more men and masculinity influencers (Figure 2). More young men in Australia reported engaging with one or more men and masculinity influencer (68%) relative to young men in the UK (61%) and the US (60%). All market comparisons can be found in Appendix B.

FIGURE 2 – CONTENT ENGAGEMENT

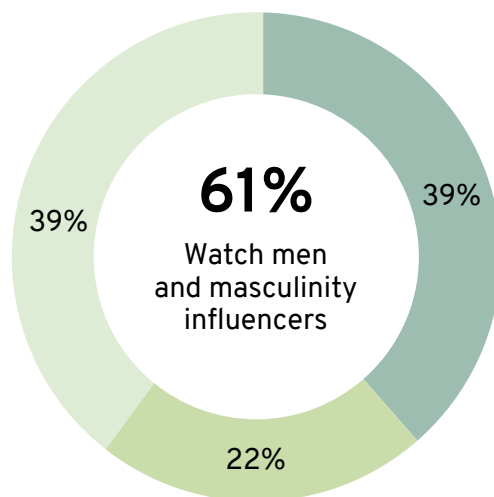
Group

- Watch 0 Influencers Regularly
- Watch 1 Influencer Regularly
- Watch 2+ Influencers Regularly

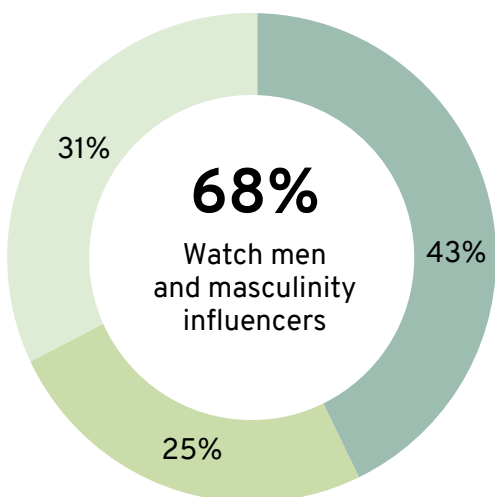
Total (n=3,048)



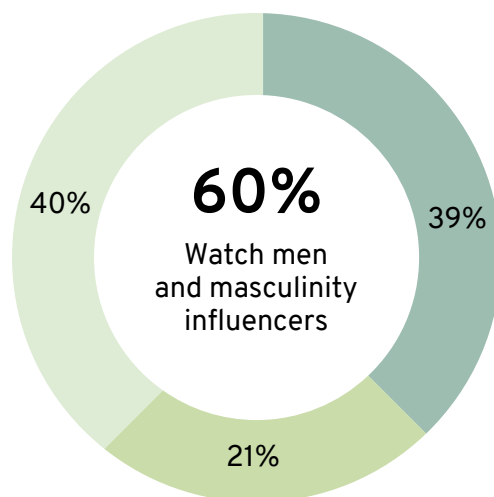
UK



Australia



USA



Young men who regularly engage with men and masculinity influencers (relative to those who aren't actively engaging i.e., non-engaged young men) occupy more affluent and privileged positions in society (Figure 3). They were more likely to be white, older, employed full-time, educated (holding a tertiary degree) and residing in higher-income households. Additionally, these young men were more likely to be in a committed romantic relationship in comparison to the non-engaged young men. They were also more likely to consider themselves to be 'traditionally masculine' with respect to their interests, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and their outward appearance.

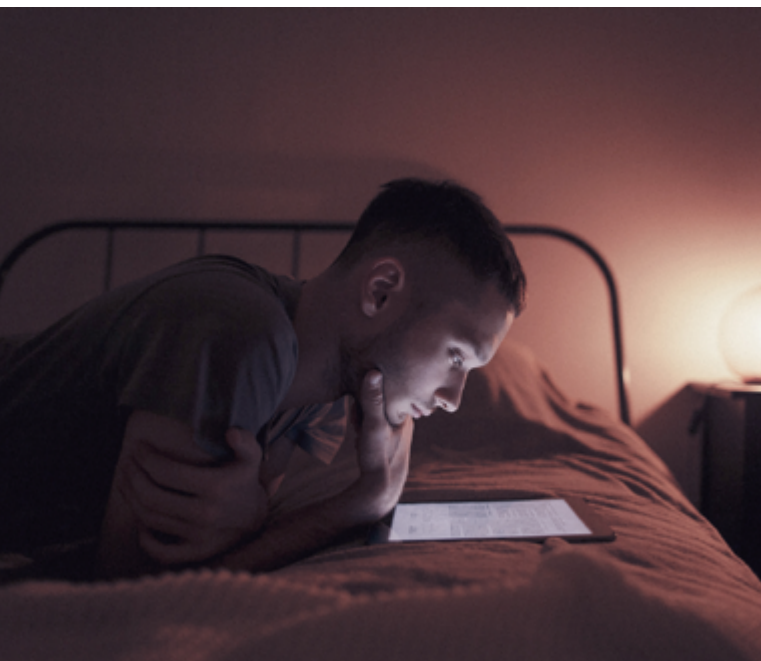
TABLE 1 – PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

	Watch 1+ Influencer(s)	Non-Engaged Sample (%)
Age		
16-19 years	32%	36%*
20-22 years	34%	33%
23-25 years	35%*	31%
Race/ethnicity		
White	57%*	52%
Any other race/ethnicity	43%	48%
Employment		
Employed full-time	47%*	31%
Unemployed	6%	12%
Relationship status		
In a committed relationship	30%*	26%
Looking for a committed relationship	20%	20%
Household income (hhi)		
High HHI	33%*	18%
Medium HHI	30%	25%
Low HHI	32%	43%
Traditional masculine norm adherence^Δ		
TMF Score - (Average) (7 - 'totally masculine') (1 - 'not at all masculine')	32.3 (SD= 0.23)*	28.8 (SD= 0.30)

SD=Standard Deviation

*Statistically significant $p < .05$

^ΔMeasured by the Traditional Masculinity-Femininity 7-item Scale (TMF scale; Katchel et al 2016). Participants were asked to rate some statements from 1 ("not at all Masculine") to 7 ("totally masculine") including: I consider myself ..., Ideally, I would like to be ..., My interests would be considered..., My outer appearance would be considered ...



Previous research profiling the demographics of young men accessing online men and masculinity forums and communities (i.e., Reddit, 4Chan) has primarily examined fringe sub-communities, such as incels (involuntary celibates) who were more likely to come from middle or lower-class backgrounds and experience lower levels of education, higher rates of unemployment and mental health challenges (including Autism Spectrum Disorder) in comparison to other men (Whittaker et al., 2024).

In addition, past research has suggested that factors such as employment instability, educational uncertainty and a sense of being adrift may draw young men towards men and masculinity content and communities (Di Muccio and Knowles, 2021). Our study reveals a different audience profile, with the young men engaging with men and masculinity influencers being more likely to be highly educated, employed, financially stable and partnered. This may speak to the rising popularity, growing saturation and ubiquity of men and masculinity influencers. Despite most of the media attention and existing research surrounding one high-profile influencer (e.g., Wescott, Roberts & Zhao, 2024, Haslop et al., 2024), current findings highlight a diverse range of men and masculinity influencers that young men are seeking out and connecting with.

THEME 2: RESONANCE AND RELEVANCE

Young men regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers...

- Saw influencers content as a source of entertainment, motivation and inspiration.
- Reported frequently acting upon influencers' advice.
- Reported more positive emotions (feeling motivated, happy or purposeful), rather than negative emotions (feeling like a failure, anxious or unhappy) after acting on influencers' advice.

...in comparison to young men who aren't actively engaging with men and masculinity influencers.

Men and masculinity influencers are powerful drivers of change and transformation in young men's lives.

There is a wide spectrum of content created by men and masculinity influencers and the advice they offer young men is diverse in nature. Some influencers offer advice on practical topics including self-improvement or exercise from which young men may be deriving positive tips and direction. Other influencers normalize (or even glorify) potentially harmful attitudes or behaviours (i.e., diet and exercise disinformation, misogyny and sexual violence, self-harm or suicide content). It is also common for influencers to present elements of both positive (i.e., self-improvement) and potentially harmful content (i.e., violence) within the one podcast, interview or video.

Past research has focused primarily on men's perceived alienation and disempowerment as key factors that push them into engaging with this content (Maloney et al., 2022; Speckhard & Ellenberg, 2022). Our findings expand on this work, demonstrating that young men who are engaging with men and masculinity influencers see their content as entertaining, motivating and inspiring. Importantly, while young men's desire for motivation and inspiration may stem from feelings of alienation and disempowerment, the positive emotion that this content elicits may serve to reinforce its consumption.

Forty-five percent of young men who were regularly engaging with one or more men and masculinity influencer found them entertaining, 43% said they were motivating, and 41% appreciated how influencers made them think. Most young men regularly watching men and masculinity influencers had acted upon (38%) or considered acting upon (47%) influencers' advice.

Of the young men who had acted upon influencers' advice, there was limited evidence of negative ramifications: 75% said acting on this advice made them feel more motivated, 58% reported feeling happy and 44% felt they had a greater sense of purpose. Conversely, 9% felt anxious after acting upon influencers' advice, 6% reported feeling like a failure, and 2% said they were unhappy.

Of note, the number of young men who said they had acted upon influencers' advice differed according to the influencer. Fewer young men reported acting upon influencers' advice whose content typically focuses on politics and gender (for example Influencers A and D; Figure 4). However, young men's 'action rates' were much higher for influencers who focused on fitness and self-improvement-oriented content (e.g., Influencers C and G; Figure 4).

TABLE 2 – MEN AND MASCULINITY INFLUENCERS

Influencer	Content Focus	Audience Reach % of young men who report regularly engaging with influencer	Primary reason for watching % of young men who said the primary reason they watch this influencer is because...	Action Rate % of young men who report having acted on influencer's advice
Influencer A	Politics, Wealth, Gender	50%	Entertainment (47%)	36%*
Influencer B	Fitness, Self-improvement, Politics	49%	Entertainment (62%)	29%*
Influencer C	Fitness, Self-Improvement	33%	Motivational (71%)	58%
Influencer D	Politics, Relationships, Gender	25%	Entertainment (58%)	24%
Influencer E	Politics, Self-Improvement, Relationships	23%	Makes me think (52%)	38%
Influencer F	Fitness, Self-improvement, Relationships	16%	Motivational (44%)	45%
Influencer G	Fitness, Self-improvement,	13%	Motivational (51%)	47%
Influencer H	Politics, Wealth, Relationships, Gender	10%	Entertainment (40%)	37%

*High engagement, lower action-taking. Amongst young men regularly engaging with men's and masculinity influencers (n = 1,943).

Further data is needed to understand if, and how, young men choose key messages they act on. By extension, further data is also needed to better understand the key messages young men choose to reject. This raises an important avenue for future research surrounding what drives young men's decision-making, both consciously (trust in influencer, audience following, metrics of their content) and even unknowingly (precipitating factors, including mental health, family situation, education), when actioning men and masculinity influencers' advice.

THEME 3: HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Young men consuming men and masculinity influencer content were optimistic and hopeful about their futures.

Young men regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers...

- Reported more optimism about their personal circumstance and the social circumstances of men in the future.
- Reported worse mental health outcomes and a reduced willingness to prioritize their mental health.
- Reported higher levels of engagement in risky health behaviours (e.g., steroid use, exercising despite being injured).

...in comparison to young men who aren't actively engaging with men and masculinity influencers.

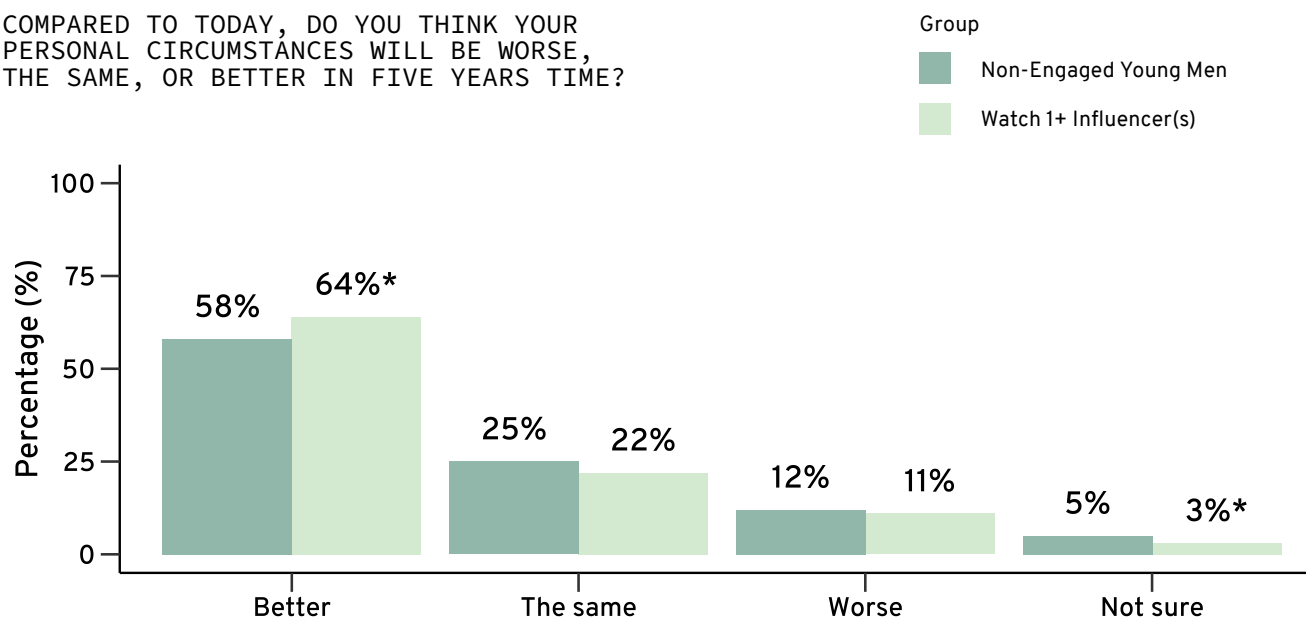
Many young men reported experiencing increasing uncertainty about their developing identity and roles in contemporary society, particularly in an ever-evolving social and political climate (Elliott, 2020). Yet, our findings indicated that most young men, particularly those regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers, believed social circumstances will improve for young men over the next five years (Figure 5).

Young men who watched men and masculinity influencers reported higher levels of optimism about their personal futures (64%), relative to young men who did not watch these influencers (58%). This optimistic outlook wasn't limited to their personal circumstances. Nearly half (49%) anticipated that social circumstances for men would improve over the next five years - a significant increase when compared to young men who weren't engaging with these influencers (33%).

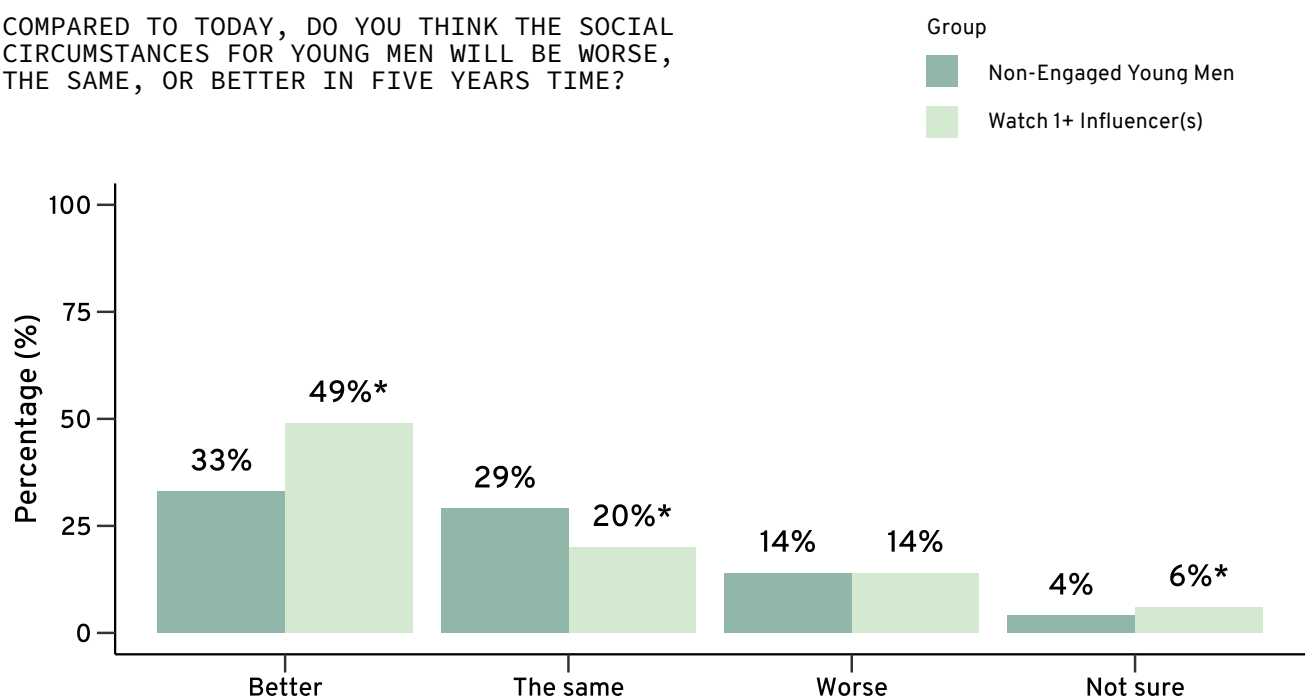


FIGURE 3 – PERSONAL AND SOCIETAL OUTLOOKS FOR YOUNG MEN

COMPARED TO TODAY, DO YOU THINK YOUR PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES WILL BE WORSE, THE SAME, OR BETTER IN FIVE YEARS TIME?



COMPARED TO TODAY, DO YOU THINK THE SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES FOR YOUNG MEN WILL BE WORSE, THE SAME, OR BETTER IN FIVE YEARS TIME?



While it is unclear how these optimistic and hopeful outlooks develop over time, it appears, at least from a cross-sectional level, influencers may be cultivating a seemingly positive and optimistic outlook for young men with a vision for the future

that resonates. Better understanding the link between men and masculinity content and young men's optimism over time and identifying key messages that ignite hope amongst young men remain important areas for future enquiry.

ENGAGEMENT WITH INFLUENCERS LINKED WITH POORER MENTAL HEALTH

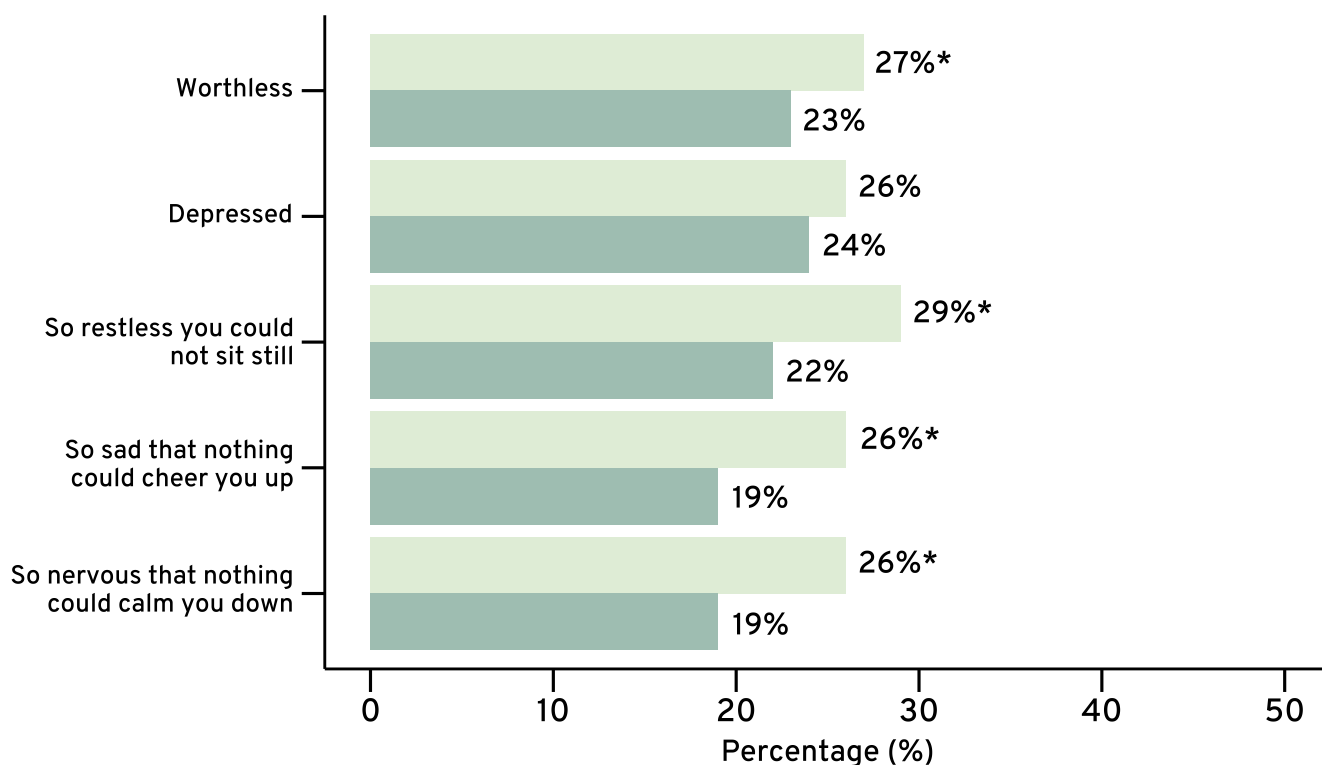
Globally, young people, including many young men are experiencing complex life stressors and mental health challenges (McGorry et al., 2024). High levels of psychological distress were evident among young men in this study, particularly young men regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers. Young men watching these influencers reported significantly higher levels of worthlessness (27% vs. 23%), nervousness (26% vs. 19%) and sadness (26% vs. 19%) when compared to those who were not actively following these influencers (Figure 6).

FIGURE 4 – PAST 30 DAYS PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

DURING THE LAST 30 DAYS,
HOW OFTEN DID YOU FEEL?

Group

- Non-Engaged Young Men
- Watch 1+ Influencer(s)



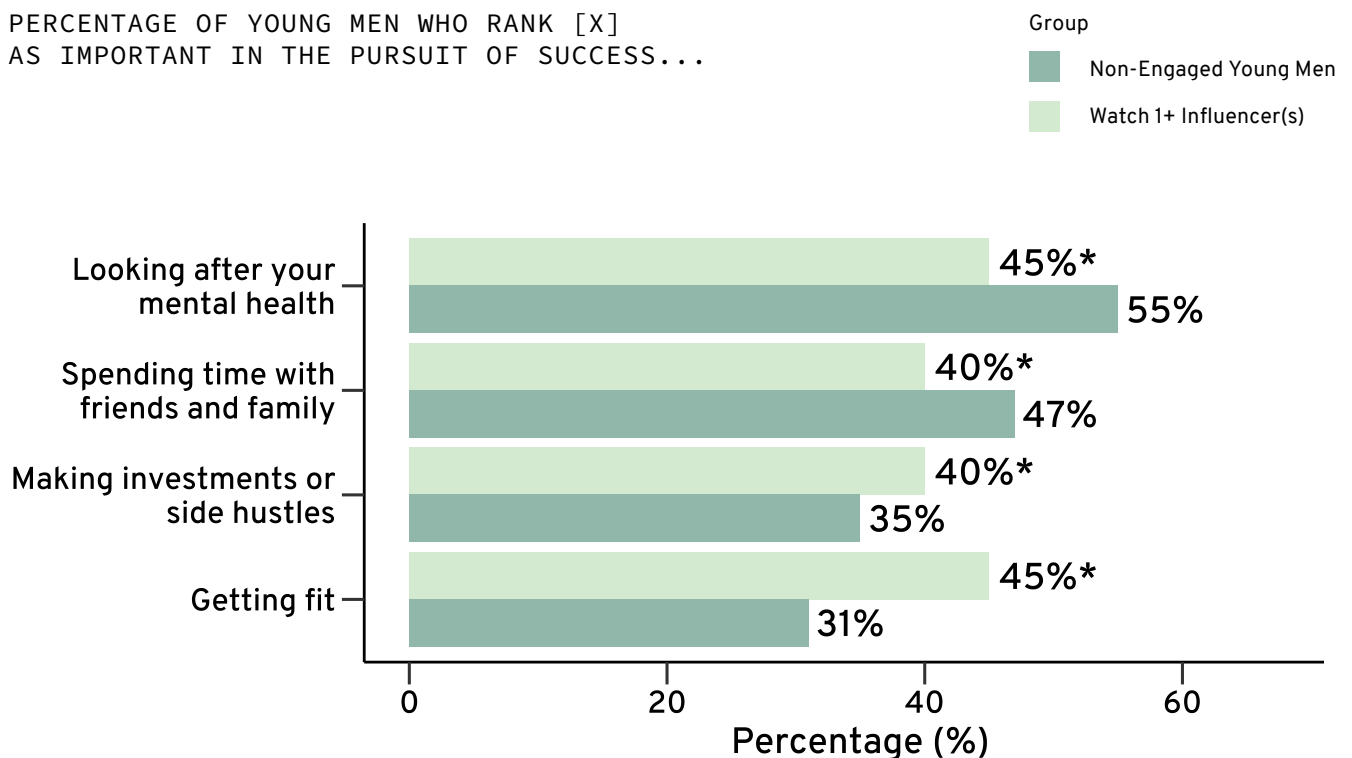


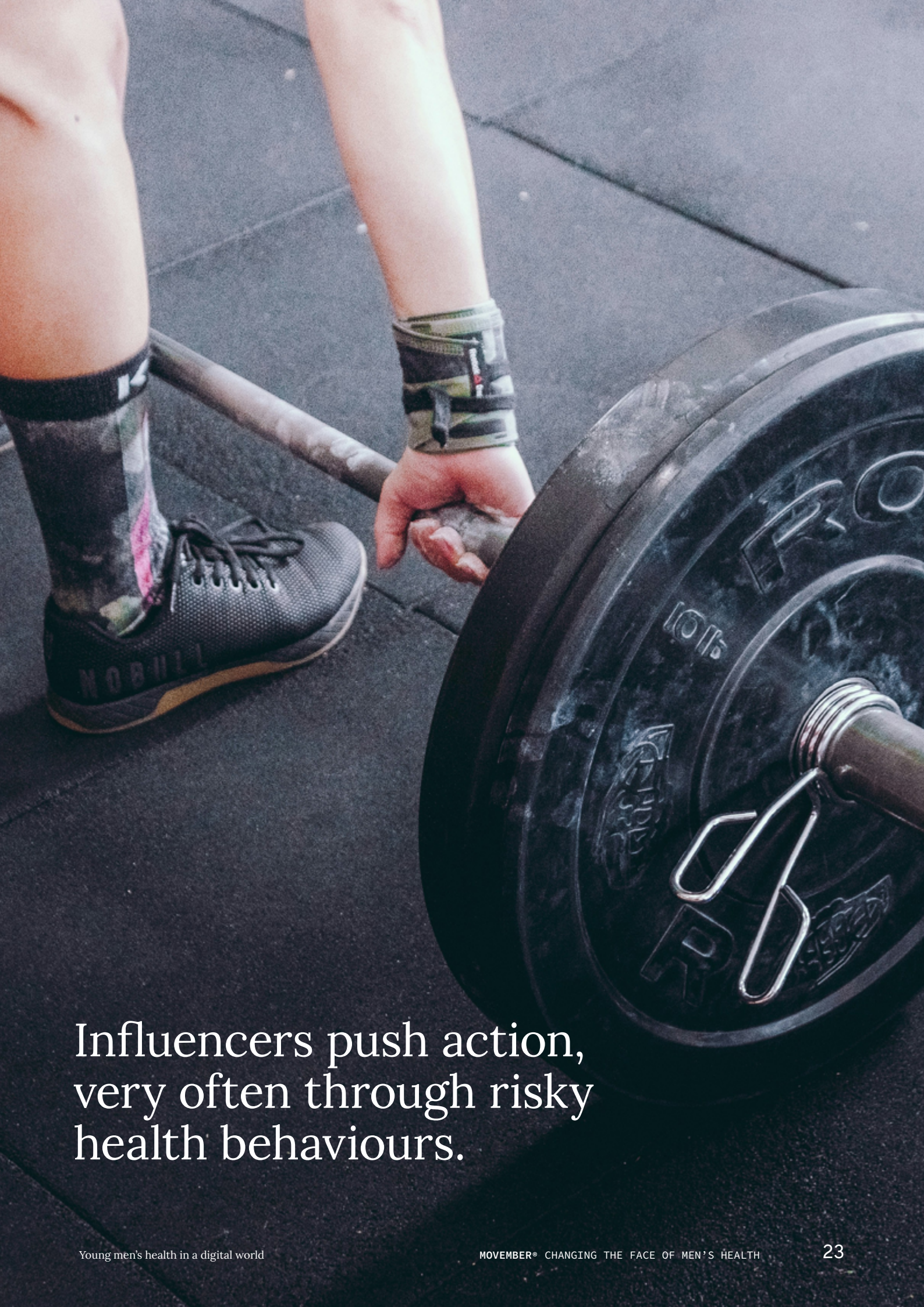
While young men might typically view men and masculinity influencers as a source of motivation, inspiration and optimism, this sentiment didn't translate into better mental health for this group.

Concerningly, Figure 7 shows that young men watching men and masculinity influencers were also less likely to prioritise looking after their mental health (45% vs. 55%) and less likely to see spending time with friends and family as important in the pursuit of success, relative to non-engaged young men (40% vs. 47%). This suggests that common protective factors for wellbeing (i.e., social connection and looking after your mental health) may also be at odds with messages they are taking away from this content.

FIGURE 5 – DEPRIORITISATION OF MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PURSUIT OF SUCCESS

PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG MEN WHO RANK [X] AS IMPORTANT IN THE PURSUIT OF SUCCESS...





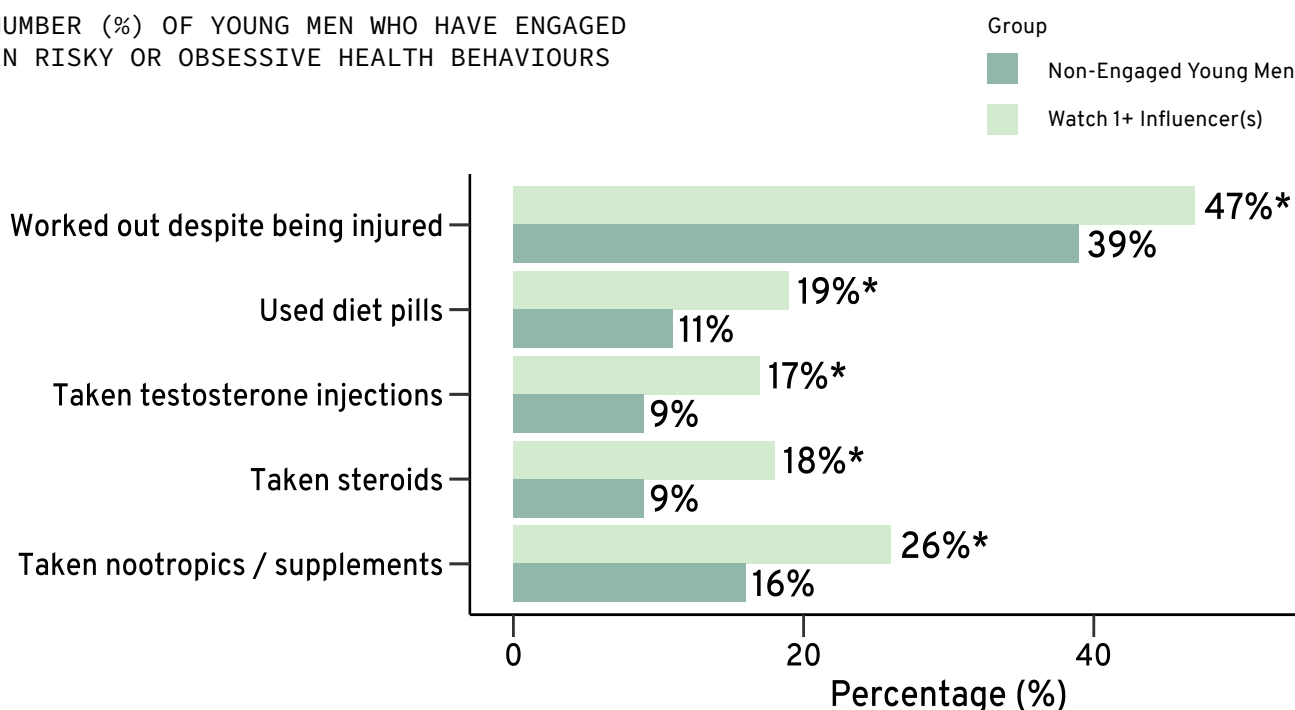
Influencers push action,
very often through risky
health behaviours.

Men's self-improvement advice is a core theme deeply embedded in men and masculinity content. Influencers commonly call upon masculine norms central in the men's movement, such as discipline, stoicism, and strength, encouraging young men to push beyond their perceived limits to improve their financial status, sex life and physique/athleticism. In some instances, this can have positive benefits for young men – encouraging them to drink less, motivating physical activity, normalizing help-seeking and prioritising one's health and wellbeing. In extreme examples however, unrelenting physical endurance may lead to obsessive physical appearance-oriented behaviours, equally problematic for men and boys as for women and girls (Chatzopoulou et al., 2020).

Nearly half (47%) of young men watching men and masculinity influencers admitted to working out despite being injured, compared to 39% of non-engaged young men (Figure 8). While pushing one's physical limits should not be perceived as constituting risky or extreme behaviour, these young men were also significantly more likely to use performance-enhancing or body modifying substances, including nootropics or supplements (26%, relative to 16% of non-engaged young men), diet pills (19%, compared to 11% of non-engaged young men) and steroids (19%, compared to 11% of non-engaged young men).

FIGURE 6 – RISKY HEALTH BEHAVIOURS

NUMBER (%) OF YOUNG MEN WHO HAVE ENGAGED IN RISKY OR OBSESSIVE HEALTH BEHAVIOURS



THEME 4: EMOTIONAL CONTROL AND SOCIAL CONNECTION

Young men regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers ...

- Reported greater importance on self-reliance and emotional control in men.
- Reported prioritizing ambition, popularity and wealth in friends, over trust and kindness.

...in comparison to young men who aren't engaging with men and masculinity influencers.

Young men consuming men and masculinity influencer content revere self-reliance and associate a lack of control of one's emotions with weakness.

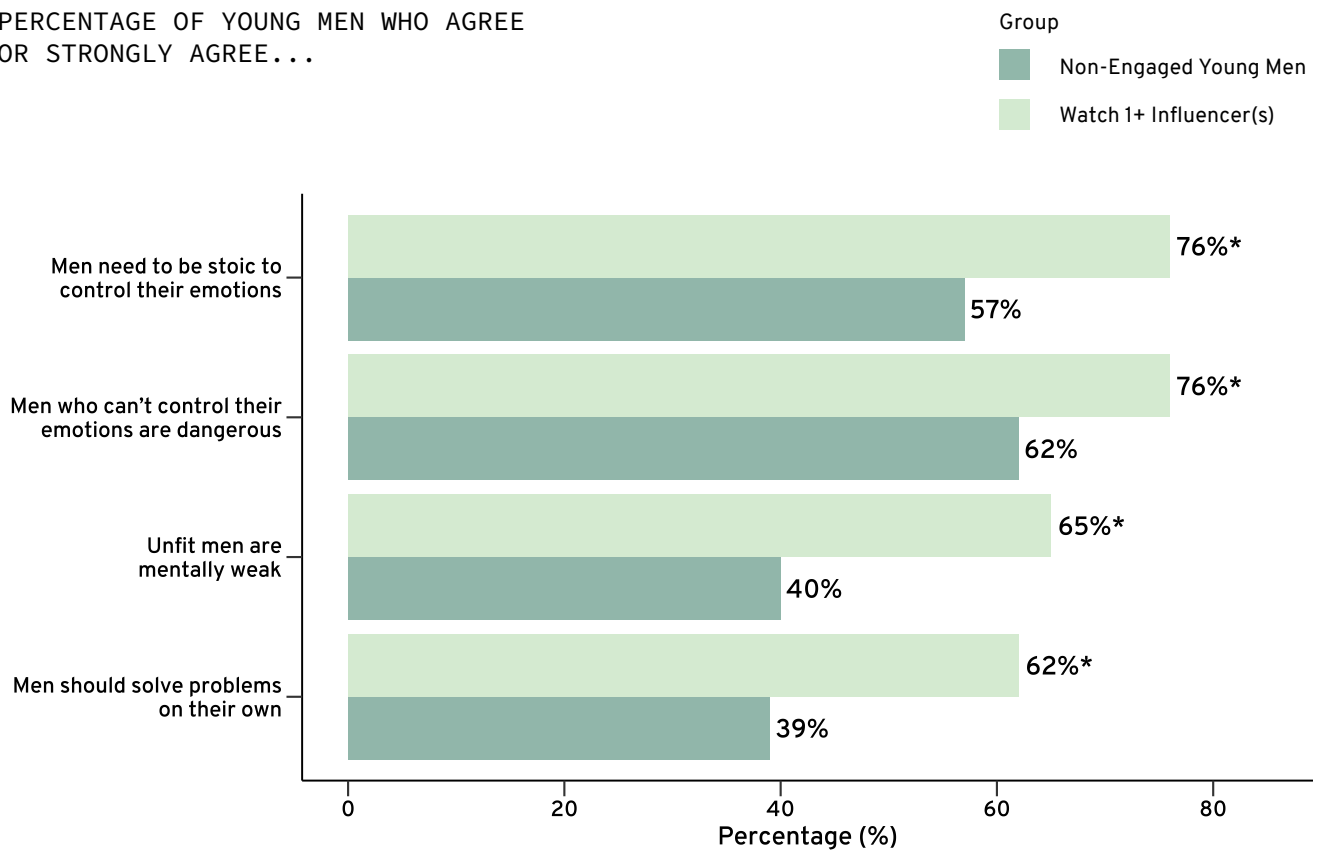
Some researchers have suggested prominent men and masculinity influencers capitalize on young men's insecurities and pressures to assert their masculine identity, claiming to have the 'solution' and providing a clear roadmap for the way forward (Haslop et al., 2024; Leeming, 2023). From this perspective, influencers placate young men's fears and anxieties replacing them with a focus on strength, dominance and control.

Many young men in our study, especially those regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers, saw self-reliance as an important virtue for men to embody (Figure 9). Sixty-two percent of young men regularly engaging with influencers believed men should solve problems on their own (compared to 39% of non-engaged young men). These young men also associated the absence of emotional control in men with personal weakness and failure (76% believed that men who can't control their emotions are weak (compared to 62% of non-engaged young men).

A central narrative in men and masculinity content is the promotion of self-reliance and emotional control. These qualities aren't inherently problematic, and in fact are fundamental for successful leadership, resilience and mental toughness. However, the rigid or excessive adherence to these norms as often displayed (or advocated for) by men and masculinity influencers have been linked with reduced help-seeking and can impede men's ability to connect openly and honestly with others (McKenzie et al., 2018). It's important to note that while these are central themes in this content, young men may already value and glorify the importance of these values and seek out influencers who then reinforce and amplify expectations of how men should behave.

FIGURE 7 – SELF-RELIANCE AND EMOTIONAL CONTROL

PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG MEN WHO AGREE
OR STRONGLY AGREE...



Young men experience barriers to social connection despite a desire for intimacy and relationships.

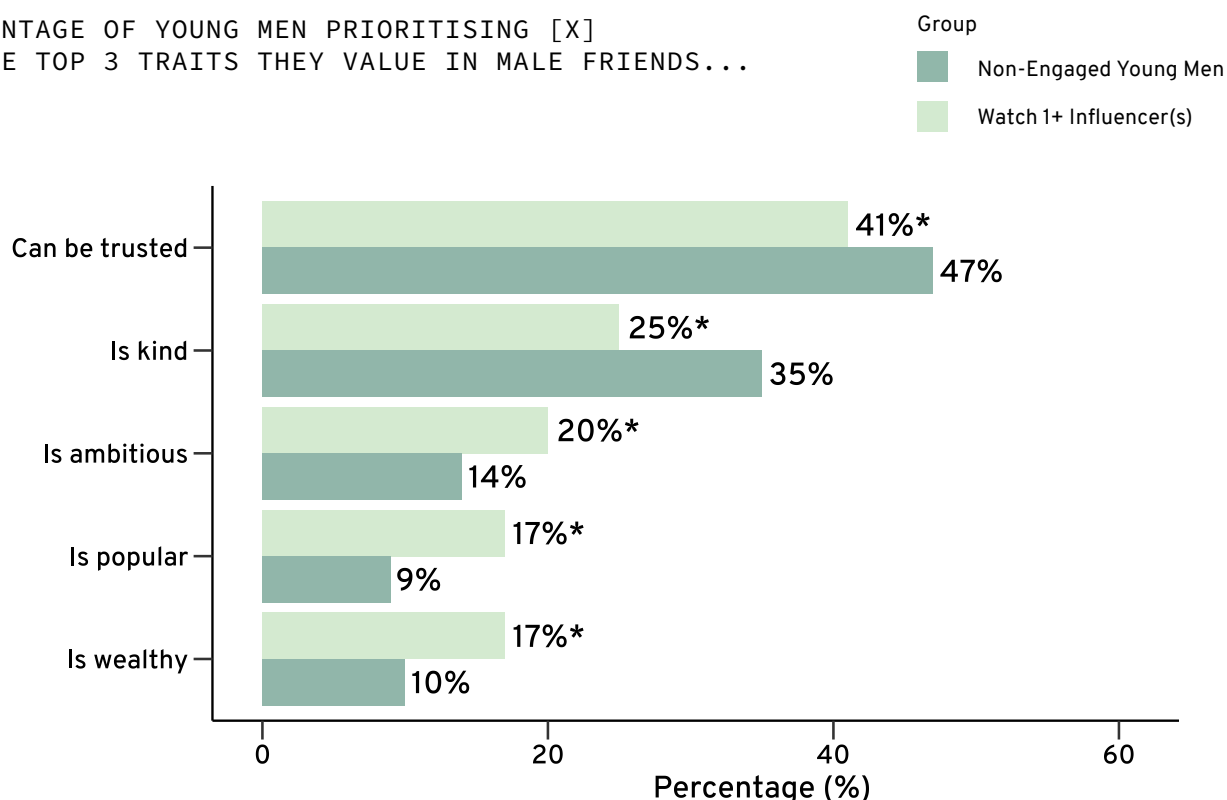


Social disconnection is a key problem for young men. Past research has shown that this trend is worsening, with up to two-thirds of young American men feeling that “no one really knows” them (Barker et al., 2023). In fact, young men living in countries which prioritise individualism (like those represented in this study) are the most likely of any group to report feeling lonely (Barreto et al., 2021).

In our study, the proportions of young men lacking close male friends was high across the board. Thirteen percent of young men in this study did not have any close friends (12% of young men regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers vs 14% of non-engaged young men). In addition, proportionally more young men engaging with men and masculinity influencers saw having male friends as important (31%), in comparison to young men who were not watching these influencers (23%). There were also significant differences in the attributes young men deemed important in their male friends, that in many ways, mirror the narrative of status-based masculinity advocated by many influencers. While trust and kindness were the top valued attributes in friends across the board, young men engaging with men and masculinity influencers were less likely to value trust and kindness relative to young men who weren’t watching these influencers (Figure 10). Instead, young men engaging with these influencers uniquely prioritised ambition (20%), wealth (17%) and popularity (17%).

FIGURE 8 - MALE FRIENDSHIP ATTRIBUTES

PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG MEN PRIORITISING [X]
IN THE TOP 3 TRAITS THEY VALUE IN MALE FRIENDS...



Men and masculinity online communities (i.e., forums, websites, chat groups) have been shown to offer opportunities for connection, community and conversation for young men (Wilson et al., 2024; ReachOut, 2023). However, our findings extend upon past work indicating this content may be influencing how men are approaching friendships, what types of friends they are looking for and the type of support they are thus able to receive.

Additionally, our findings uncover important insights surrounding the barriers to social connection that young men engaging with men and masculinity content may encounter outside of these familiar online spaces and communities. This presents an opportunity for future research to better delineate and determine how engaging with men and masculinity content may be impacting young men's social connection and highlight potential mechanisms through which these opportunities for emotional expression and connection can be strengthened and encouraged, rather than stifled.

THEME 5:
GENDER ROLES AND
INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Young men regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers value traditional gender roles as important.

Young men regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers...

- Reported more traditional attitudes towards gender roles in relationships and society
- Reported more negative and limiting attitudes towards women and their roles in relationships
- Reported higher levels of frustration around dating
- Reported unique responses to dating frustrations (e.g., searching for advice online and focusing on self-improvement)

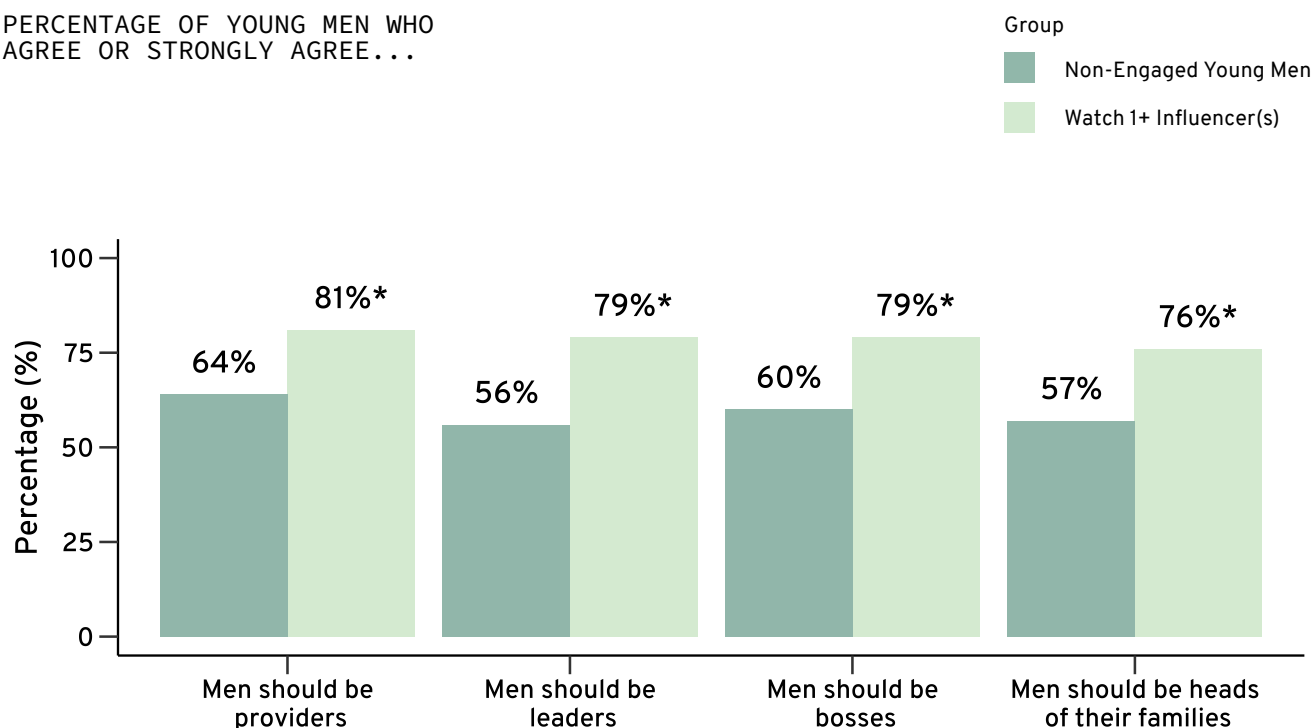
...in comparison to young men who aren't engaging with men and masculinity influencers.

Traditionally, masculine roles in Western cultures have enforced the importance of men's dominance, power and privilege over women and other men in their workplaces, societies and families (Ragonese, Shand & Barker, 2018). Embodying and adhering to traditional masculine roles is a way for young men to assert their masculine status and mitigate masculine insecurity (Reigeluth & Addis, 2015). Men and masculinity content often appeals to young men by providing them with a clear roadmap for what masculine success looks like – including the leadership and powerful roles men should hold in their families and communities.

In our study, approximately 80% of young men watching men and masculinity influencers thought men should be providers, leaders and bosses (Figure 11). These roles are synonymous with responsibility and leadership. In some instances, this may manifest as a perceived obligation to assert power and authority over others: 76% of young men watching men and masculinity influencers believed men should be heads of their families, relative to 57% of non-engaged young men.

FIGURE 9 - TRADITIONAL MASCULINE ROLES

PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG MEN WHO
AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE...



It may be particularly important to help young men regularly engaging with men and masculinity content to cultivate authentic values about the flexible roles they want to hold in their relationships and communities. Further, interventions (i.e., media literacy interventions) should then focus on equipping young men with the skills and confidence to decide when the advice of influencers (or narratives they may see online) is in line with their personal values, or when it may be holding them and others back.

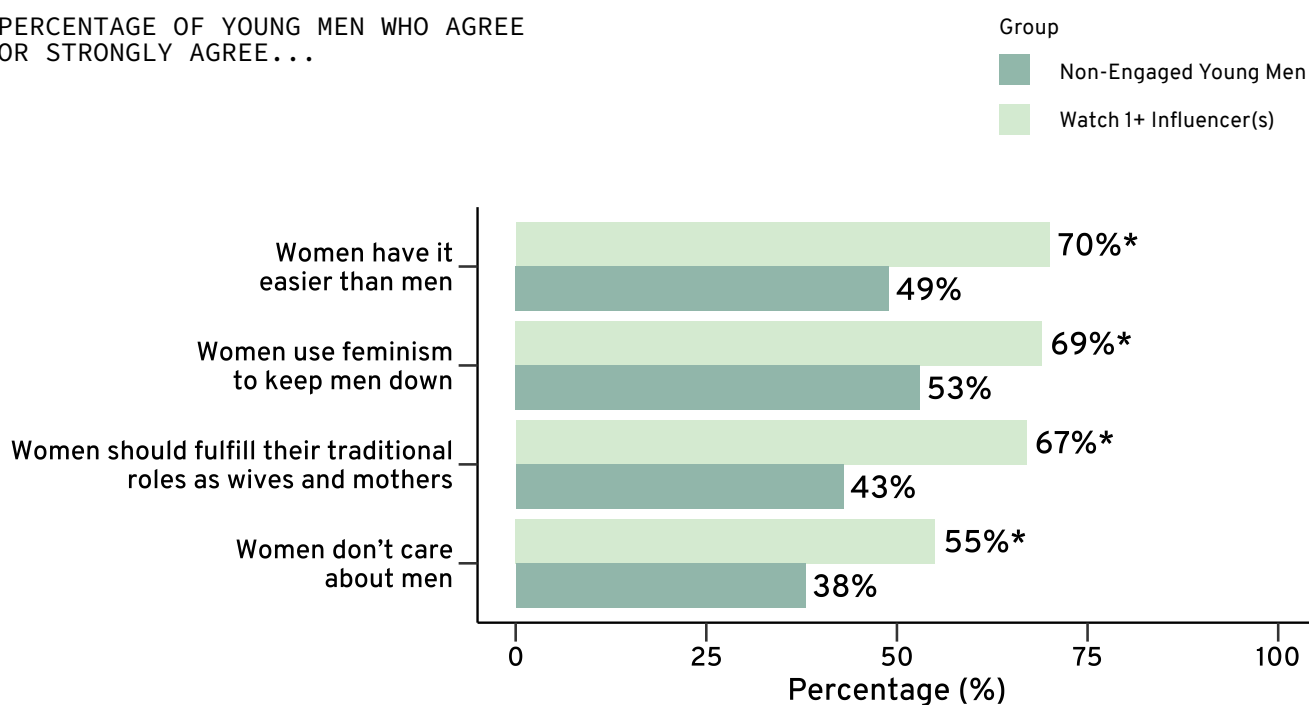
Negative attitudes towards women and feminism may be linked with influencer engagement.

Feminism and the state of gender relations (i.e., between men and women) are discussed by some men and masculinity influencers. These discussions and narratives can send direct and indirect messages to young men about gender equality and the 'place' of men and women in society (Roberts et al., 2025; Rothermel, 2023).

The way young men in this study viewed themselves in relationships, their community, and society more broadly extended to their attitudes towards women and feminism. A large proportion of young men endorsed the statement that women should fulfil their traditional roles as wives and mothers (Figure 12). Irrespective of whether young men watched men and masculinity influencers, around half of the young men in this study believed women: have it easier than men (62%), use feminism to keep men down (63%), don't care about men (49%) and should fulfil their traditional roles (58%). However, young men who regularly engaged with men and masculinity influencers were more likely to agree with these statements than non-engaged young men, with 70% believing women have it easier than men (relative to 49% of non-engaged young men agreeing with this statement).

FIGURE 10 - ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN

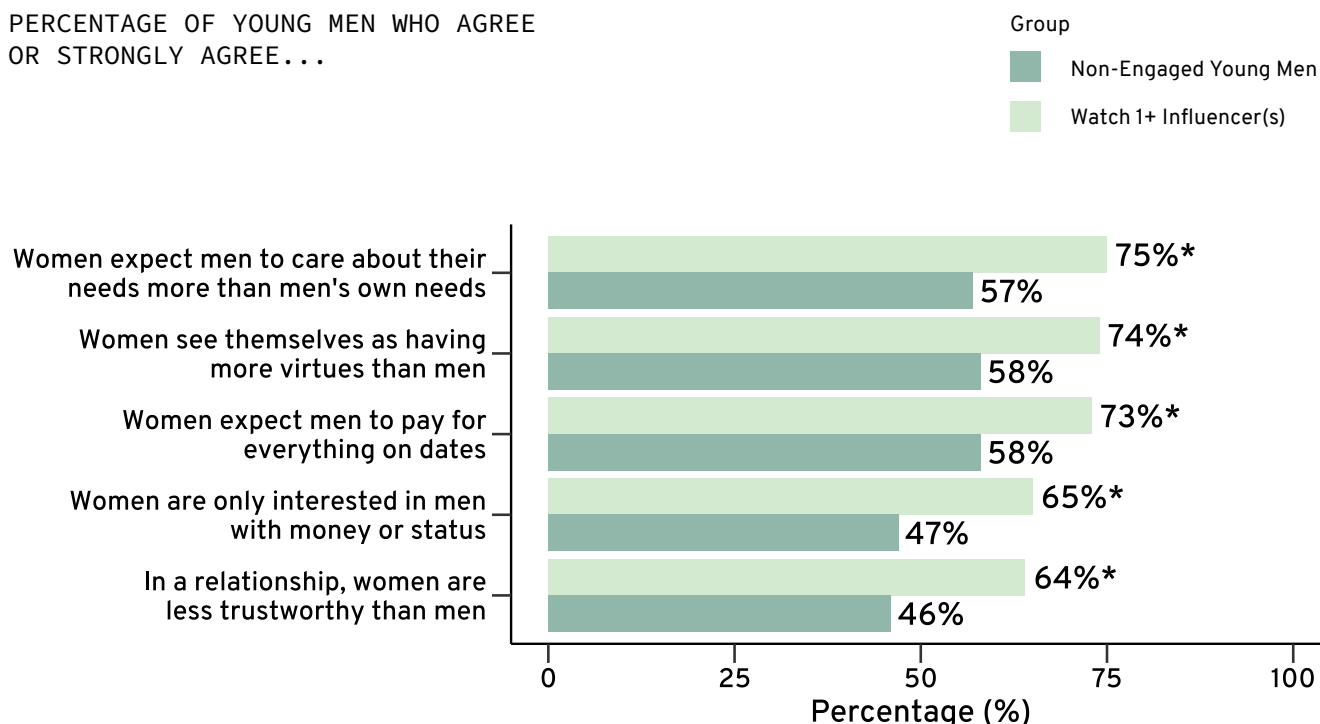
PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG MEN WHO AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE...



Young men's negative attitudes towards women and feminism could also be seen in their perceptions of women's roles in relationships (Figure 13). Many young men watching men and masculinity content believed women were only interested in partners who enact stereotypical masculine behaviours in relationships (i.e., paying for everything on dates [73% agree or strongly agree]) or embody masculine traits of success (i.e., having a lot of money or status [65% agree or strongly agree]). Linked to this, it appeared these young men also questioned women's intentions in romantic relationships and were apprehensive about women's loyalty and authenticity in relationships and overall empathy towards men.

FIGURE 11 – BELIEFS ABOUT WOMEN’S ROLES IN RELATIONSHIPS

PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG MEN WHO AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE...



These findings align with narratives promoted by some men and masculinity influencers presenting women as superficial or manipulative, depicting gender-equality as a zero-sum game disadvantaging men (Rose, 2024; Sparrow, 2024; Barker & Soler, 2024). Some content in men and masculinity subcommunities can depict women as manipulative, superficial and only interested in ‘high value’ men (i.e., the best looking or most successful). This may reinforce adjacent narratives advocating for traditional gender roles and masculine norms, particularly when young men see these traits and roles as quintessential for finding a romantic partner. As such, future research should look to determine how gender relations narratives in men and masculinity content intersect with young men’s developing masculine identities and impact their health outcomes. Young men have described feeling their worth is not valued, thus further investigation is needed to understand how feelings

of anxiety or insecurity in young men may in some instances exacerbate or give rise to anger, aggrieved entitlement and violence (Wilson et al., 2024).

While our findings contribute to understanding the link between men and masculinity content and negative attitudes towards women, it’s important to note many young men still held limiting beliefs about women even if they weren’t actively engaging with men and masculinity content. Future research must investigate whether trends surrounding young men’s limiting attitudes towards women and feminism are a result of increased exposure to certain types of content, or pre-held beliefs which make some young men more agreeable to select men and masculinity influencers, communities and dialogues.

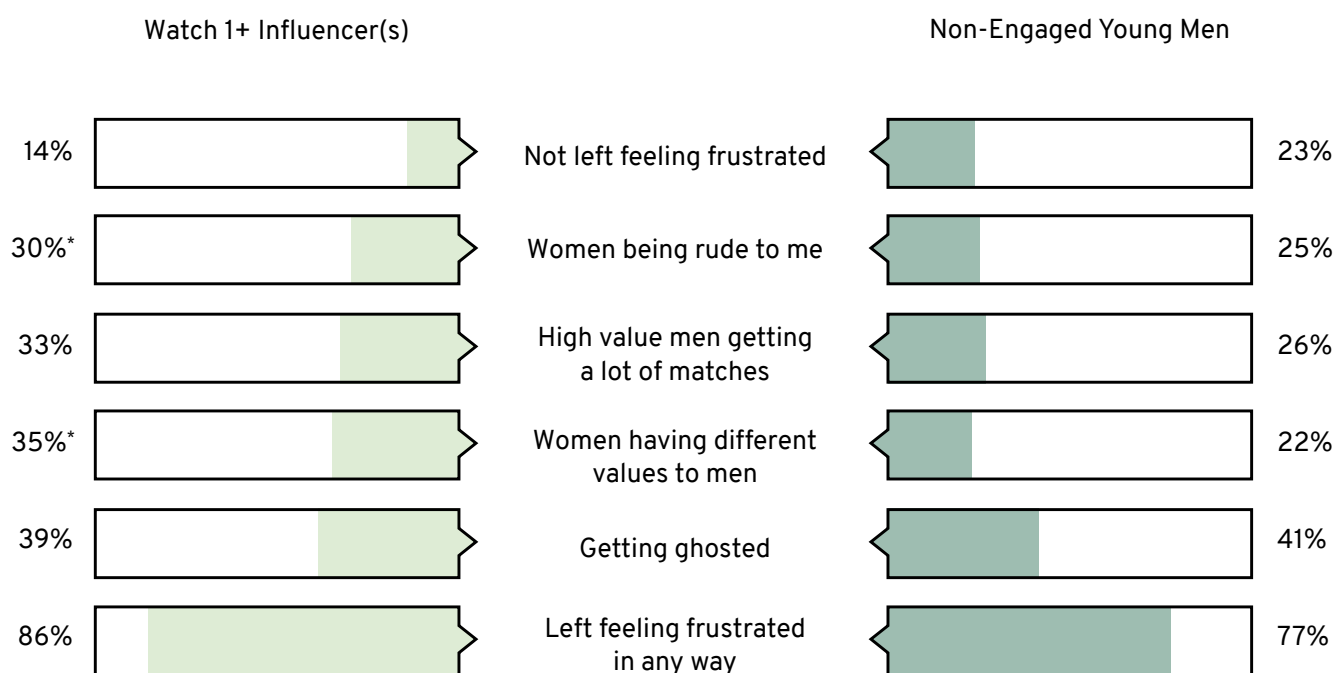


Young men engaging with men and masculinity influencers encounter unique frustrations when dating.

Intimate relationships were a priority for the majority of young men in this study, especially amongst those engaging with men and masculinity influencers. In this way, young men's attitudes towards women did not necessarily align with (or diminish) their desires for romantic relationships and intimacy. As outlined in Figure 2, young men engaging with this content were more likely to be in committed relationships (30% were in a committed relationship, compared to 26% of non-engaged young men) or dating casually (23%, relative to 17% of non-engaged young men). Further, a smaller number of young men engaging with men and masculinity influencers said they were not interested in dating in comparison to non-engaged young men – 18% of young men engaging with men and masculinity influencers were not looking for either a committed relationship or casual dates, compared to 31% of non-engaged young men. Despite these desires, a number of young men

were increasingly frustrated with dating, reporting negative dating experiences, particularly when online dating (86% of young men engaging with men and masculinity content reported they 'were left feeling frustrated in any way', compared to 77% of non-engaged young men; Figure 14). Almost a third of young men watching men and masculinity influencers cited 'women being rude to them,' 'high value men (i.e., men with money and status) getting more matches' and the 'differences between women and men having dating values,' as key sources of their dating frustrations, all common narrative threads in men and masculinity influencer content.

FIGURE 12 – DATING FRUSTRATIONS

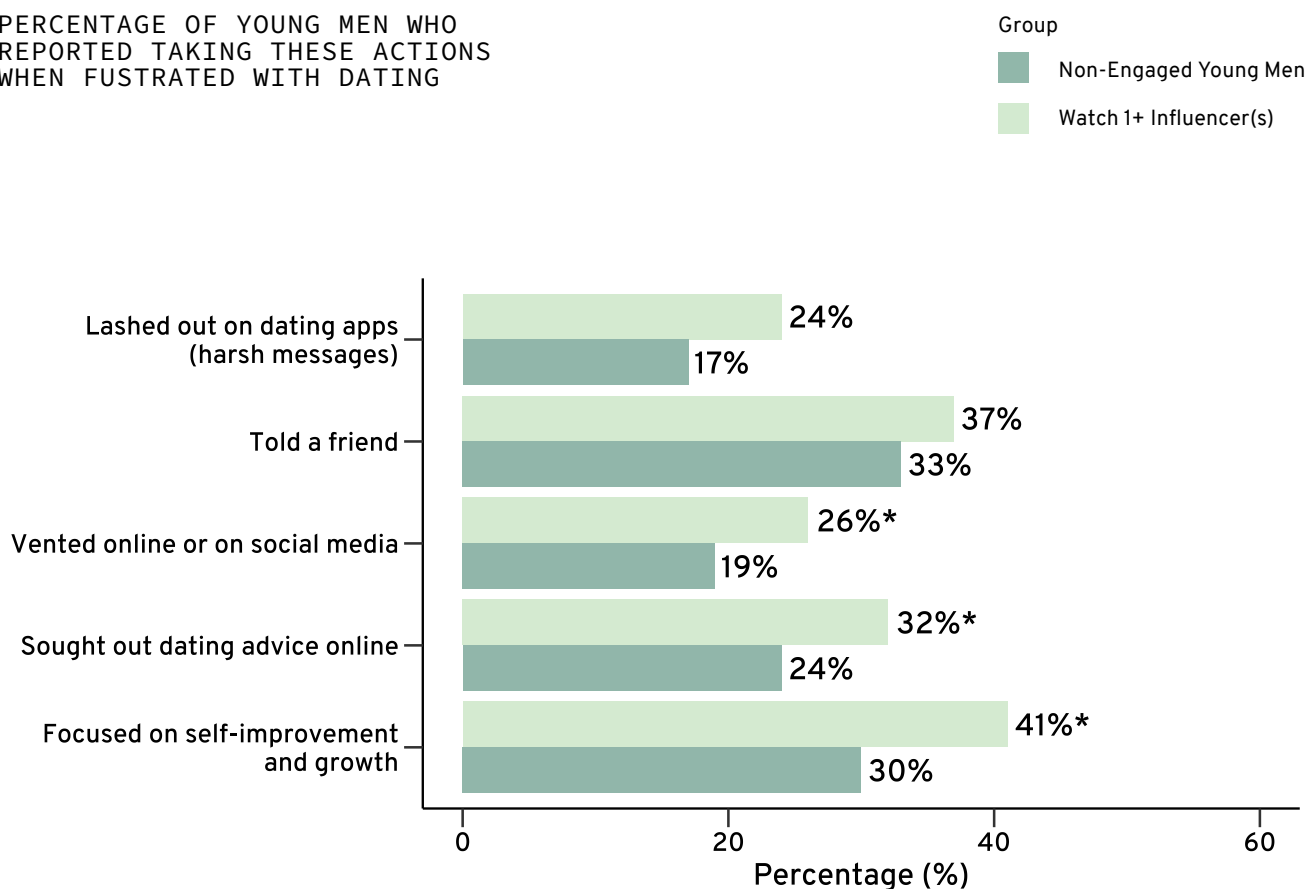


Note. *Statistically significant $p < .05$

Young men watching men and masculinity influencers were likely to report taking action in the face of these frustrations. More than 30% of young men who watched men and masculinity influencers said they focused on fitness and self-improvement (41%) or went online to find dating advice (32%) when they felt frustrated whilst dating (Figure 15).

FIGURE 13 – RESPONSES TO DATING FRUSTRATIONS

PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG MEN WHO REPORTED TAKING THESE ACTIONS WHEN FRUSTRATED WITH DATING



Past research has identified relationship breakdown and difficulties forming intimate relationships as a common pathway to men and masculinity content (specifically online forums and websites dedicated to dating, masculinity, men's rights; Botto & Gottzén, 2023). Our findings add extra context to a bidirectional relationship that may be occurring, whereby young men engaging with men and masculinity influencers are more likely to seek answers

online after being romantically rejected, focusing on self-improvement and growth. This highlights an important opportunity to leverage this desire for growth and self-betterment by ensuring information, resources and interventions are developed which support young men to adaptively manage (i.e., cope with) romantic rejection, or provide young men with information to reduce their dating uncertainties, in a healthy and strengths-based way.

Conclusion:

Healthier men, healthier world

The purpose of this study was to examine the health and wellbeing outcomes of young men regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers online, and to strengthen our understanding of how young men are experiencing and responding to this content. Our report has shown that young men's experiences of their digital worlds, and the impacts of men and masculinity influencers and the content they create, is an ever-evolving and complex picture. We found exposure to men and masculinity content to be widespread, and young men who engage regularly with it found it not only entertaining, but also inspiring and motivating, leading them to take action in pursuit of success and/or self-improvement.

We also found regular engagement with this content was correlated with a more positive attitude towards young men's own personal and social circumstances in the future, but with risky health behaviours and poorer mental health. This suggests that while influencers may be cultivating a seemingly positive and optimistic outlook for young men with a vision for the future that resonates, these sentiments are not translating into better mental health for this group. Additionally, common protective factors for wellbeing (i.e. social connection and looking after your mental health) may be at odds with messages young men are taking away from this content. When it came to young men's views of gender roles

and beliefs about women and romantic relationships, we found that regularly engaging with this content was associated with more negative and limiting attitudes towards women, their roles in relationships, and more frustrations with dating. These findings align with narratives promoted in the content depicting gender-equality as a zero-sum game disadvantaging men. However, it's important to note many young men still held limiting beliefs about women even if they weren't actively engaging with men and masculinity content. Future research must investigate whether these trends are a result of increased exposure to certain types of content, or pre-held beliefs which make some young men more agreeable to select this content.

This report presents new data on some of the impacts of men and masculinity influencers on young men. It has the ambition to build a common understanding amongst those working with men and boys and seeks to inspire future work on this topic, centring more specifically on the experiences of young men.

FUTURE RESEARCH:

As with all research, these findings do not do justice to the full picture of how young men interact with, connect to, and absorb or critically consider the themes presented to them in this content. Specifically, we would recommend future research with young men to understand:

- What is helpful and what is harmful, and to better understand the types of online content driving attitudinal and behavioural change, and whether specific influencers give rise to behaviour change more than others,
- What might be the short-term and long-term benefits and consequences of exposure to various types of online content,
- How specific narratives in men and masculinity online content may influence the priorities and patterns of young men's relationships. This is especially pertinent given increases in mental ill-health, loneliness and isolation among young men, and how young men of varying class, education, race and sexual orientation might respond differently to these content and influencers.

ENGAGING YOUNG MEN:

Our research has shown that men and masculinity influencers can reinforce rigid and limiting views about gender roles and masculinity, but that there are also positive outcomes for young men from engaging in this content. These positive outcomes are likely related to the more motivating messages that are part of a broader mix of themes discussed by influencers, and the range of influencers who are part of this ecosystem. Recognising the importance and appeal of this content in meeting young men's needs, there is an opportunity to work alongside young men and with the influencer content ecosystem and media platforms to challenge this prevailing narrative, and instead to promote a wider spectrum of 'ways to be a man' that are likely to lead to better mental health outcomes for young men.

Appendix A:

Additional Methodological Details

ETHICS APPROVAL

The study received ethics approval from the Bellberry Human Research Ethics Committee (Application No. 2024-04-437).

WHAT WE ASKED

In addition to asking young men about the kind of influencers they followed, we asked young men close-ended questions relating to their health, behaviours, attitudes, and relationships. Well-validated tools and standardized measures were used where appropriate (namely the Kessler Psychological Distress scale and Traditional Masculinity-Femininity measures; Wojujutari & Idemudia, 2024; Kachel et al., 2016). However, since this is a relatively new, and constantly evolving area of research, suitable validated questionnaires were not always accessible to capture the full range of information about men's lifestyle and culture online. We therefore developed custom questions informed by data gathered through the preliminary research projects. This approach allowed us to design questions that better reflected the language, experiences, and reflections of the young men interacting with men and masculinity content.

HOW WE ANALYSED THE RESULTS

Our primary focus for analysis was to compare young men who engaged with men and masculinity influencers with those who did not. This included looking at their backgrounds, wellbeing, attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs about masculinity. Group level proportion comparisons (between those who regularly engaged with men and masculinity influencers and those who did not) were performed using two-proportion Z-tests (Wooditch et al., 2021) to compare the data based on demographics, predefined categories, and other collected information.

METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

This study has some limitations to consider. The study was cross-sectional in nature (i.e., it only captured participants' responses at a single point in time), meaning we couldn't definitively distinguish causes and effects from mere associations. For example, while we observed concerning patterns of health outcomes and attitudes among young men engaging with men and masculinity influencers, it remains unclear whether these young men were drawn to such content because of preexisting factors (e.g., mental health issues, loneliness, or attitudes around masculinity) or if these patterns were a result of engaging with this content. Longitudinal research is necessary to better understand these relationships over time.

Additionally, data were entirely self-reported. Self-reported data can be subject to biases. Social desirability bias may lead participants to underreport or overreport behaviours and attitudes in order to present themselves in a favourable light. Recall bias is also a concern, as participants may not accurately remember or articulate the extent of their engagement with influencers or the nature of the content they consumed. Moreover, self-reporting limited our ability to quantify the depth of young men's engagement with men and masculinity influencers. For instance, participants were only asked if they engaged "regularly" with influencers' content, and we could not determine how frequently or extensively they consumed this material. Furthermore, the study did not capture the degree to which young men endorsed or agreed with the content they were watching, leaving a gap in understanding the influence such content may have on shaping their beliefs and behaviours.

While extensive preliminary research informed the development of the list of men and masculinity influencers included in this study, the survey necessarily focused on a select group of popular influencers. It is possible that some young men primarily engage with more niche or less mainstream content creators whose influence was not captured here. Similarly, other young men may access similar narratives through platforms or formats not included in this analysis, such as Reddit, online forums, or private groups. These alternative avenues of engagement could add depth to future research and broaden our understanding of the digital spaces shaping young men's experiences.

Appendix B:

Market Comparisons

KEY AUDIENCES WATCHING MEN AND MASCULINITY INFLUENCERS

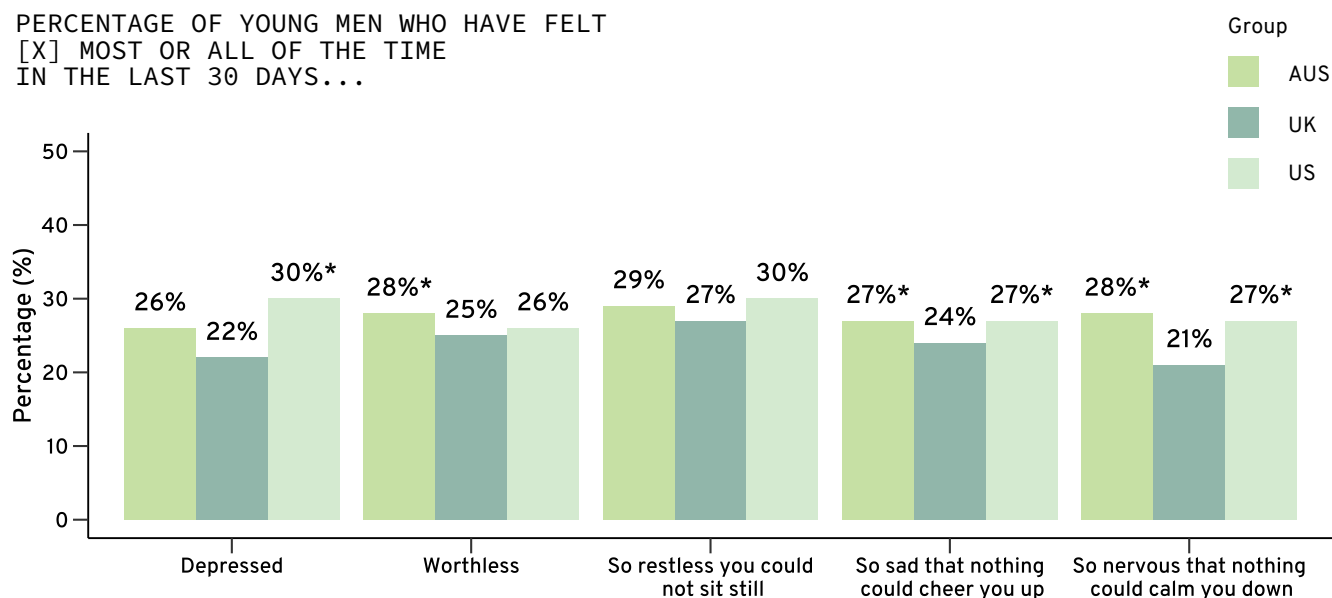
More Australian young men reported watching men and masculinity influencers (i.e., watching one or more influencers regularly; 68%), in comparison to young men in the United Kingdom (61%) and the United States (60%; $p < .05$).

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Distinct and noteworthy market trends were seen with respect to the mental health outcomes of young men regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers (Supplementary Figure 1). These market differences in mental health outcomes were not statistically significant for non-engaged young men (Supplementary Figure 2). Young men in the US ($n = 616$) and Australia ($n = 695$) who were engaging with men and masculinity influencers were more likely to report feeling so sad nothing could cheer them up (27% in the US and Australia, $p < .05$) and so nervous nothing could calm them down (27% in the US and 28% in Australia, $p < .05$), all or most of the time in the last 30 days, compared to young men in the UK who engaged with these influencers ($n = 632$; 24% reported feeling so sad nothing could cheer them up and 21% so nervous nothing could calm them down). Some additional differences in the sample of young men watching men and masculinity influencers were also evident: Levels of worthlessness were higher in Australian young men (relative to those in the UK and the US). Levels of depression were also highest among young men in the US (30% saying they felt depressed most or all of the time in the last 30 days), relative to young men in Australia and the UK.

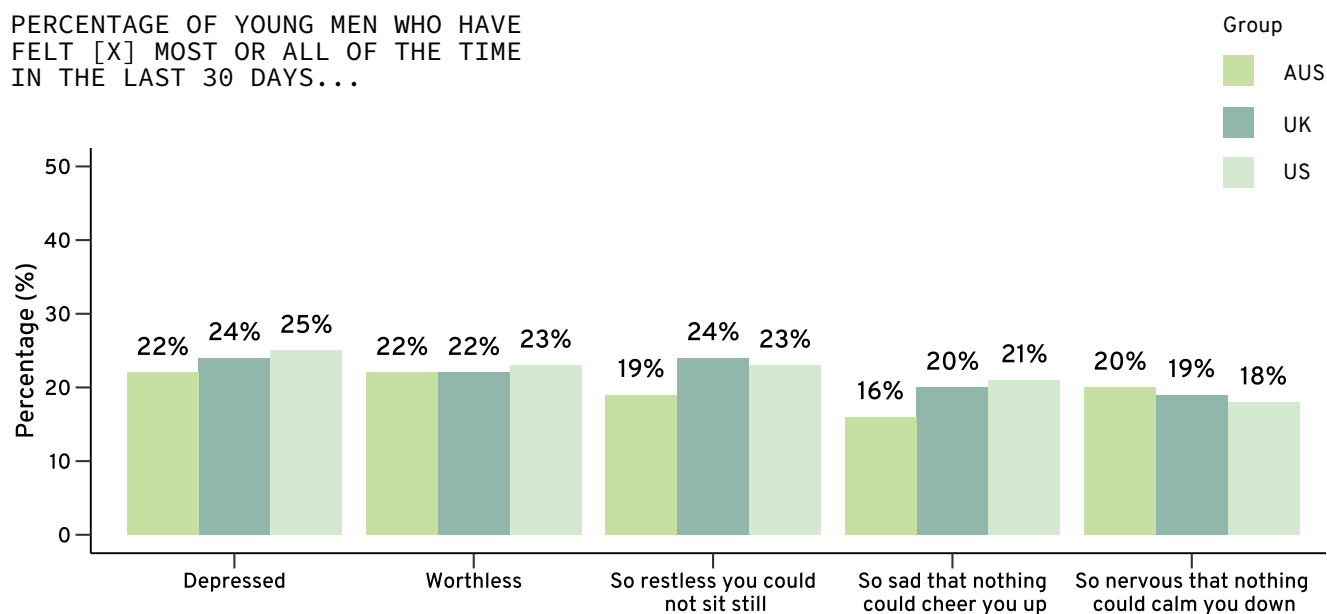
SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURE 1 – MENTAL HEALTH BY MARKET AMONG YOUNG MEN ENGAGING WITH MEN AND MASCULINITY INFLUENCERS

PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG MEN WHO HAVE FELT [X] MOST OR ALL OF THE TIME IN THE LAST 30 DAYS...



SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURE 2 – MENTAL HEALTH BY MARKET AMONG NON-ENGAGED YOUNG MEN

PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG MEN WHO HAVE FELT [X] MOST OR ALL OF THE TIME IN THE LAST 30 DAYS...



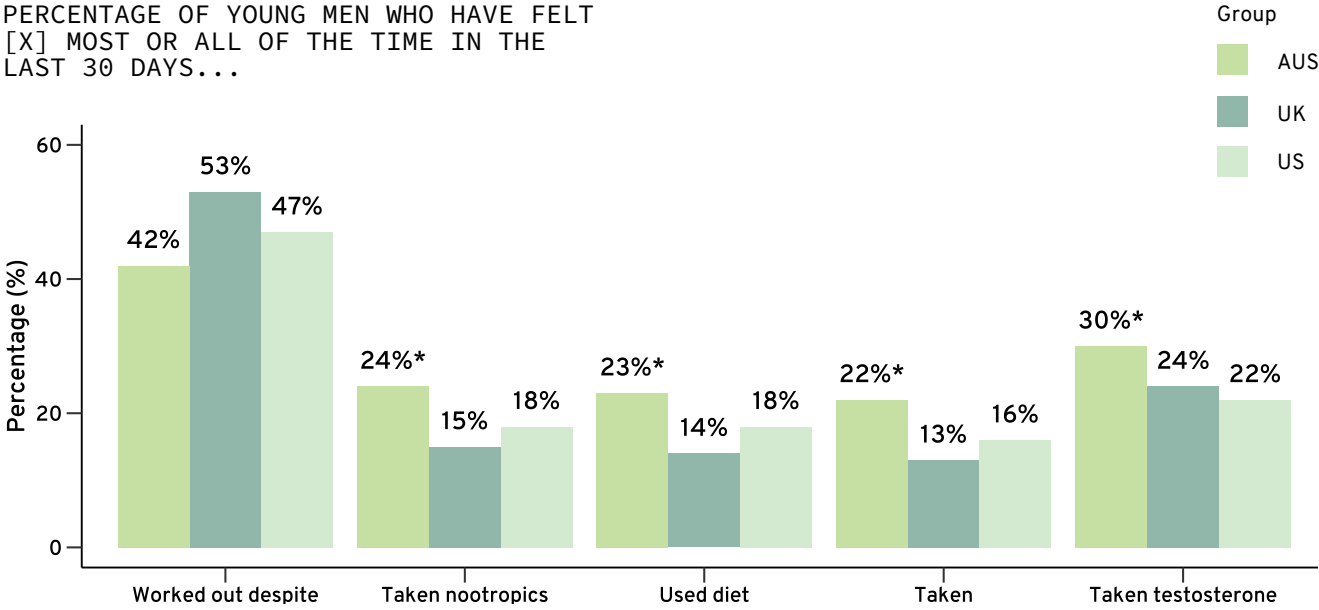
RISKY HEALTH BEHAVIOURS

Additionally, young men in Australia who regularly watched men and masculinity influencers reported engaging in risky or obsessive health behaviours at higher levels, relative to their counterparts in the UK or the US (Supplementary Figure 3).

Similar to mental health outcomes, these market differences were not statistically significant for non-engaged young men (Supplementary Figure 4). Young men in Australia who engaged with these influencers were more likely to report having taken (or would consider taking) nootropics/supplements (30%), steroids (23%) or testosterone injections (22%), relative to young men engaging with these influencers in the US (nootropics/supplements [22%], steroids [18%], testosterone injections [16%]) and UK (nootropics/supplements [24%], steroids [14%], testosterone injections [13%]). Young men regularly watching these influencers in Australia were also more likely to use (or consider using) diet pills: 24% of Australian young men, in comparison to 18% in the US and 14% in the UK.

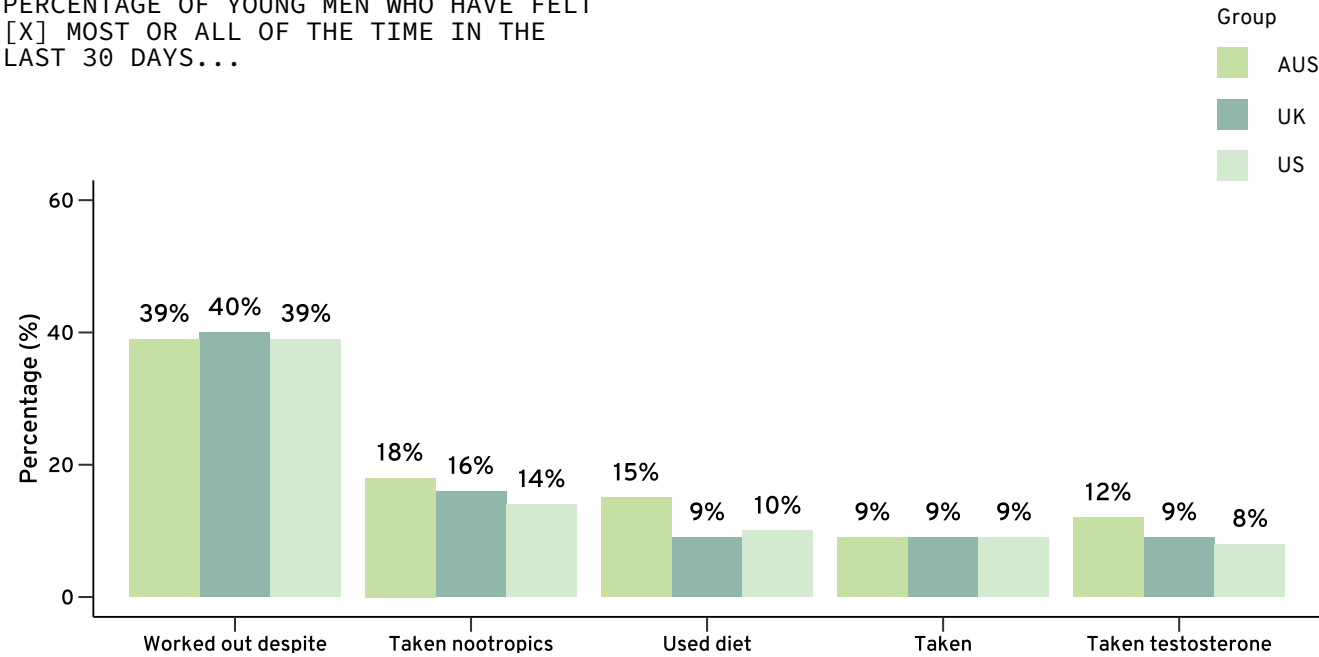
**SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURE 3 – RISKY HEALTH BEHAVIOURS
BY MARKET AMONG YOUNG MEN WHO WERE ENGAGING WITH
MEN AND MASCULINITY INFLUENCERS**

PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG MEN WHO HAVE FELT
[X] MOST OR ALL OF THE TIME IN THE
LAST 30 DAYS...



**SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURE 4 – RISKY HEALTH BEHAVIOURS
BY MARKET AMONG NON-ENGAGED YOUNG MEN**

PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG MEN WHO HAVE FELT
[X] MOST OR ALL OF THE TIME IN THE
LAST 30 DAYS...



These findings suggest young men in Australia regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers, may be experiencing heightened mental and physical health challenges, relative to those watching these influencers in the United Kingdom

and United States. However, further exploration is needed to disentangle key drivers and risk factors, which may underlie these patterns and variance across various geographical locations.

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