

"BEING A MAN IN KOSOVAR SOCIETY"

SIT - Center for Counseling, Social Services and Research



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

GBV	<u>Gender-based violence</u>
DV	<u>Domestic violence</u>
NGO	<u>Non-Governmental Organization</u>
OSCE	<u>Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe</u>
FES	<u>Friedrich Ebert Stiftung</u>
UNFPA	<u>United Nations Population Fund</u>
UNDP	<u>United Nations Development Programme</u>
LGBTQI+	<u>Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex</u>
KCS	<u>Correctional Service of Kosovo</u>
KCGS	<u>Kosovo Center for Gender Studies</u>

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INTRODUCTION

This research aims to explain and analyze what it means to be a young man in Kosovar society, how a young man is expected to behave, and how important it is for him to fulfill these expectations in his life. These questions are of particular importance because of their impact on a young man's identity, role, and behavior, as well as on his relationships with society and with women.

The questions that the research seeks to answer are: What is it to be a young man? How is a man supposed to behave? And how important are these expectations in the lives of young boys and men?

// If we take into account the great diversity that is present in today's world, as well as the fact that Kosovo is going through a great social transition, we have found it reasonable to focus this study at manliness. Precisely in this great social transition, these questions may seem irrelevant and outdated. As long as we see that we have progress in what people are less judgmental about what is expected of a certain gender, there is still a lot of work to be done in a situation of true equality. Although women have made inspiring progress towards overcoming centuries of discrimination based on their gender, there is still much to be done. //

In this new reality, we do not consider that the study of "masculinity", or what it means to be a man, has become less important. On the contrary, this type of transition and social tensions make the study of these phenomena essential. This research aims to understand whether social changes are encouraging young people to reconsider the concept of "being a man" and whether traditional attitudes are changing. Moreover, the research aims to describe the behaviors and attitudes of young men and boys in Kosovo regarding the meaning of "being a man", addressing the oppression, prejudice, and feelings of inadequacy they may feel in this gender category.

Based on previous research, we can see directly or indirectly how men behave in our society and what is expected of them. According to the study "FES Youth Studies Southeastern Europe 2018/2019" carried out by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2019) earlier in Kosovo, it was observed that there is a high level of social distance and low acceptability of the diversity of young people for those addicted drugs, ex-prisoners and homosexuals. Sexual minorities are the population group against which the highest level of intolerance is encountered. This study also showed that 19% of men seem to be regular smokers, while only seven percent of women smoke regularly. As for the consumption of alcohol, men are the ones who consider alcohol more acceptable. Among other things, it has been asserted that sexual experience is also more prevalent in men than in women.

Whereas, regarding the respondents' attitudes towards sex, it should be noted that virginity is seen as a matter of dignity for both sexes; 37% of respondents believe this. 23% state that this is a matter of dignity, especially for girls.

Another analysis of men's attitudes and women's opinions towards gender equality in Kosovo, using the International Men and Gender Equality Questionnaire found that the majority of men and women fall into the moderate category of gender norms (OSCE & UNFPA Kosovo, 2018). However, about 13% of men belong to the low category of gender norms compared to women of which only 1% belong to this category. More specifically regarding domestic violence, 21% of men partially agree and 7.1% of them fully agree that women should tolerate violence to keep the family together. Furthermore, 32.7% partially agree and 7.1% completely agree that there are cases when a woman deserves to be spanked. Moreover, this study points out that men in Kosovo were raised in patriarchal families where women were limited to the kitchen and child-rearing duties, while men were responsible for making important decisions and the financial and physical security of their families. Society was organized in such a way that some roles were strictly for men and others for women. During growth, violence was normalized as part of the disciplinary method, including gender-based violence (GBV). Research has further asserted that, while things are slowly starting to move in the right direction, the power relations in the home for men and women today are not very different from those of their parents. In most households, women are still expected to be responsible for household chores regardless of their employment status, while men continue to bear the full burden of financial provision. Consequently, decision-making powers are either allocated to men, or equally shared, but very rarely in the hands of women. Child care tasks are still considered a woman's domain and, even in the best case scenario, men can only be engaged as a helping hand in these tasks. Thus, paternity leave is also seen more as an adjunct to maternity leave than as a means towards increasing fathers' involvement in their children's education. In addition, violence experienced by boys in childhood was usually associated with displays of violent behavior when those boys grew into men. Homophobic attitudes were widespread in Kosovo given that homosexuality is still considered unnatural and undesirable by most men and women today. Rape culture features were also present in the views of men and women in Kosovo, where victim blaming in cases of rape was not unusual.

Another study conducted by the Kosovo Center for Gender Studies (KCGS, 2021) states that despite the fact that the Legal Framework of Kosovo also provides equal access for men and women to public spaces, obtaining a loan, the opportunity to own property and land, as well as to inherit, there is still a part of Kosovars who think that men and women do not have the same rights though. Up to a tenth of Kosovar citizens believe that women do not have the same rights as men to enter freely and equally in public space (4), bank loans (5), owning or managing a property (7%), be elected to high political decision-making positions (8%), inherit (10%) and own or have access to agricultural land (11%). By law, men and women have authority over their bodies and their civil and parental status, and to make decisions about their children up to the age of 18. Despite this, more than one in four Kosovar citizens (26%) believe that women do not have the same legal rights as men to decide on the number of children they want to have. Although the minimum age of marriage is 16 according to the court's decision for specific circumstances and 18 in general, 15% of Kosovar

citizens claim that women do not have the same legal minimum age for marriage as men. Slightly more than one in 10 Kosovar citizens (13%) claim that women do not have the same legal custody rights over a child after divorce. More than one in 10 Kosovar citizens agree/fully agree that women and men should have different payments, even for the same job, because they are different and have different responsibilities in the family. Furthermore, 9% of Kosovar citizens agree/fully agree that if women are elected to key decision-making positions, they are violating the right of men to hold such positions; 8% that girls should be taught to be good wives and take care of housework, whereas education, career role, business and leadership are for boys; and 6% that if women begin to gain power, they will neglect their duties to take care of household chores and destroy the family balance.

In line with these findings are those from the study conducted by the Riinvest Institute for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2022) in Kosovo on the attitudes of young people towards gender and social norms. From the findings of this study, it is said that traditional cultural norms seem to dominate young people's views on the rights and roles of women in society. For example, boys/young men are more convinced than girls/young women that the most important role of women is to take care of the family. However, it should be noted that about a third of all participants in the survey agreed that creating a family is the most important role for women. The differences are much higher when it comes to the perception of the respondents on the fitness of men to work outside the home compared to women. Most of the participants in this study believe that it is important for all genders to learn how to perform household activities such as cleaning and washing. However, when other household chores such as plumbing and gardening are considered, the findings suggest that most young people agree that men/boys should be more prepared and learn how to do these tasks than women/girls.

From the results of this research by the Riinvest Institute for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2022) gender differences in attitudes are visible on social norms and trends: boys/young men are prejudiced against girls/young women who have sex before marriage, while the latter do not discriminate. Young boys/men tend to think that girls are not as good as boys in studying natural sciences, such as engineering and mathematics. Gender differences are also evident in attitudes towards emotions and sexuality: young boys/men are more willing to justify their use of physical violence if offended; and most participants in the study consider that boys/young people would prefer not to be friends with members of the LGBTQI+ community. Interestingly, only a minority of men and women surveyed think that boys/young people do not need to discuss personal matters with others.

If we rely on these findings from the aforementioned research and if we are to believe that gender equality is not limited to women's concerns, then it follows that this issue is just as important from a woman's perspective and from a man's point of view. Given that for decades, discussions and policies on gender equality have been driven by women and for women, the underlying concept of this research is to focus on exactly that part that has often been overlooked - men's perspective on gender equality.

// The main instrument through which we try to analyze these phenomena is the questionnaire “The Man Box” developed by Promundo, Axe (2016), and which refers to a set of beliefs, communicated by parents, families, media, peers and other members of society, which puts pressure on men to be a certain way. Through this study, we also demonstrate the widespread influence of these beliefs in several areas of young people’s lives. //

These pressures tell men to be self-sufficient, to be tough, to be physically attractive, to stick to rigid gender roles, to be heterosexual, to have sexual prowess, and to use aggression to resolve conflicts. For the purposes of the study, the men in the “Man Box” are the ones who absorb these messages and pressures the most. Young men outside the “Man Box” are those who have stepped out of the “box”, and who reject these ideas and instead embrace more positive, original ideas and attitudes about what men should believe and how they should behave.

METHODOLOGY

Study design and sample selection

A combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology was used for the exploration of perceptions and attitudes towards masculinity and what it means to be a man, as well as the level of perceived stress on a gender basis among the general population in Kosovo. The entire sample of this study is made up of boys and men, a total of 367. Through purposive sampling, (12) young men aged 18-35 were interviewed, through semi-structured interviews. These young men came from different cities, backgrounds and socio-economic statuses. All the interviewees were ethnic Albanians and citizens of Kosovo.

Moreover, 5 focus groups were conducted in different municipalities of Kosovo with high school boys aged 14-18, and one focus group conducted with young boys who are part of the educational measures within the Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS), in the correctional center in Lipjan. As for the questionnaire that was disseminated online, 300 boys/young men aged 18-35 were targeted.

TABLE 1.0 Demographic data on the sample targeted through the online questionnaire

Gender <i>f</i>	Age	Ethnicity <i>f</i>
Men 300	Minimum 18	Ashkali 1
	Maximum 35	Bosnian 3
	Average 23.51	Roma 1
		Albanian 295

Data collection

Data was collected in two phases. All data were collected during the period February - April 2023. Qualitative data were collected through interviews held physically and the virtual platform "Zoom", as well as focus groups held with physical presence in the respective schools. The data were analyzed based on the recordings of the discussions and the notes taken by the researcher. Twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with men from different cities of Kosovo (Gjakovë, Pejë, Gjilan, Prishtina, Rahovec, Kamenica, Fushë Kosovë, Deçan and Lipjan). Information from in-depth interviews enabled us to gain a multi-faceted perspective on current developments, awareness and key barriers to gender equality and manhood in Kosovo. The interviews lasted 45 minutes and were semi-structured. Questions asked during the interviews they had in order to understand more

about the perceptions of masculinity and being a man in Kosovar society, gender equality, as well as perceptions towards gender-based violence as a phenomenon in society. In addition to the conducted interviews, five (5) focus groups were also conducted with students (boys) of secondary schools in Kosovo aged 14-18 (Deçan, Gjilan, Dragash, Mitrovica, and Rahovec) and one focus group conducted with young men who are part of the Kosovo Correctional Service, specifically with the correctional center in Lipjan.

TABLE 2.0. Demographic data for the conducted focus groups

Place of focus group	Number of participants (f)	Average age
Deçan	9	17.1
Dragash	9	16.5
Gjilan	9	16.5
Mitrovica	7	16.42
Rahovec	10	17
KCS - Lipjan	10	18.6

Data from the quantitative phase were collected through online questionnaires. Initially, these data were validated in terms of consistency of answers and time controls for completing each part of the questionnaire, at the individual level of the respondents. After validation, the data were analyzed where the questionnaire was administered to the general population online.

The "Man's Box" questionnaire used in this phase collected information on the respondents' attitudes and perceptions towards masculinity. The "Man Box" refers to a set of beliefs communicated by parents, families, the media, peers, and other members of society that pressure men to be a certain way. The "Man Box" is a 15-item self-report measure of a man's gender normative attitudes, divided into 7 pillars: self-sufficiency, being tough, physical attractiveness, rigid male gender roles, heterosexuality and homophobia, hypersexuality, and aggression and control. The questionnaire measures whether the respondent strongly internalizes masculine societal norms ("inside the man box") or internalizes more gender-equal attitudes ("outside the man box"). Respondents answered from 1-4 for the respective statements (1-strongly agree, 2-agree, 3-strongly disagree and 4-disagree) where higher scores reflect more views of gender equality.

The second questionnaire used as part of this study was the Masculine Gender Role Stress Scale, which consists of 40 statements on the individual experience of self-perceived stress related to masculine gender roles, divided into five sub-degrees: physical disability, emotional inexpressibility, subservience to women, intellectual inferiority, and performance failure. Different aspects of masculine gender role stress captured by the scale include stress related to being portrayed as feminine, being inferior to women, or perceived failure in career or sexual activity. In this part of the questionnaire, the participants stated from 1 to 6, how stressful the statement in question is for them, where 1 stands for not at all stressful and 6 stands for extremely stressful.

Analysis and Results

3.1. Exploring social pressure

When we asked participants in focus groups and interviews what being a man is to them, we also asked them who told them those qualities make a man. Thus, most participants reported that their parents taught them to hide feelings of nervousness or fear, in other words encouraged them to “be strong.” This finding points to the fact that young people are not creating their own rigid and harmful identities, they receive these limiting messages from influential sources, including their parents. Young people also reported experiencing similar pressures from their romantic partners and male friends.

“By masculinity I understand a hegemony that has the norms, the rules, so that for accepting a boy inside the hegemony, that boy must be a ruler, leader, aggressive, that’s the masculinity that has been created, that hegemony has been created. For the society to accept you, you have to walk straight, you have to have a thicker voice, because there are many boys who do not stand out with masculinity, and we can see how society sees it, the masculine hegemony does not accept him in its system, they start bullying him with various words” - an interviewee.

9 out of 12 of those interviewed agree with the fact that society would prejudice them if they see them hanging out with members of the LGBTQI+ community, which lets us understand that homophobia is also reinforced by society. While 11 out of 12 interviewees stated that a man belonging to the LGBTQI+ community is a real man, other results emerged from the focus groups. In all the focus groups conducted, over 95% of the participants stated that a man from the LGBTQI+ community is not a real man.

In addition to the influence of romantic partners, society (mainly male) and family reinforce gender norms in such a way that boys are part of the rules of the “Man Box”. We found out from the interviewees that they were particularly likely to have encountered messages about men’s self-sufficiency, toughness and hypersexuality.

The internalization of “manhood”

To what extent do young men internalize the social pressures to be men inside “Man’s box”? How much are they able to withstand these often oppressive social forces, and how much do they manage to be themselves and embrace their emotional side?

In general, we found that young people distance themselves from the rules of the “Man Box” to some extent, but do not reject them completely. If we compare the findings of online respondents, young people were less likely to report personal compliance with the rules of the “Man Box” than the data we understood from statements obtained in focus groups and interviews in relation to what society expects about these rules about what it is to be a man. Some men may be able to reject the restrictive and negative social pressures associated with masculinity, but a large number embrace these pressures and the version of manhood they promote.

“Pretty late I became aware of this and I am emancipated for this that these moments are absolutely normal, that if we process emotions..., I started to hug my father a little more and I realized that I did not hug my father very much but I hugged my mother and sister. As for father I mainly have shook his hand”

- Interviewee.

In the focus groups, it was observed that the participants expressed contradictory notions about whether they were able to get out of the “Man’s Box”. As one participant reflected: “To be man no longer means being a typical macho, but rather to be the one who protects the woman, who protects the family and that protects himself. Although at first glance it seemed and this young man felt that society had moved on from regressive views “machos” of manhood. At the same time, however, his idea of men being protective suggests an adherence to the rules of “Man’s Box”.

Another participant in one of the focus groups claimed that men still have greater social status than women, but that women have changed a lot compared to their roles they had before:

“Women have the goal of becoming independent, starting with their own family, or if they are someone’s wife, they also want to be independent, to have their own money, I think that both have the fear of the same, both sexes have a specific goal like the majority... The woman is the pillar of the family for all things, that it is not a matter of sensitivity and physicality but of mentality as a collective, since we have the situation with the acceptance of women in society our opinion at the moment is that there are many cases where women are stronger in politics to solve diplomatic problems than men, I think that both sexes have a different physical structure, it gives us positive and negative sides, that’s all we fulfill each other” - From the focus group in Gjilan.

TABLE 3.0. Self-reported responses from the online questionnaire on “The Man Box” rules

	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree
A man who talks a lot about his worries, fears and problems should not be respected that much.	12 (4.0%)	50 (16.7%)	91 (30.3%)	147 (49.0%)
Men should solve their personal problems by themselves, without asking for help from others.	17 (5.7%)	53 (17.7%)	92 (30.7%)	138 (46.0%)
A boy who does not stand up to those who bully him is weak.	23 (7.7%)	62 (20.7%)	76 (25.3%)	139 (46.3%)
Boys should act strong even when they feel scared or troubled inside.	44 (14.7%)	111 (37.0%)	51 (17.0%)	94 (31.3%)
A guy who spends a lot of time about his appearance is not that masculine.	15 (5.0%)	41 (13.7%)	86 (28.7%)	158 (52.7%)
It is very difficult for a man to be successful if he does not look handsome.	7 (2.3%)	32 (10.7%)	101 (33.7%)	160 (53.3%)
Women do not pick men who care too much about clothes, hair and skin.	6 (2.0%)	65 (21.7%)	84 (28.0%)	145 (48.3%)
It is not good for a man to be taught how to cook, sew, clean the house, and take care of small children.	11 (3.7%)	15 (5.0%)	132 (44.0%)	142 (47.3%)
A husband should not do housework.	9 (3.0%)	20 (6.7%)	126 (42.0%)	145 (48.3%)
Men should be the ones bringing home income to support the family, not women.	36 (12.0%)	51 (17.0%)	95 (31.7%)	118 (39.3%)
A gay man is not a real man.	110 (36.7%)	74 (24.7%)	43 (14.3%)	73 (24.3%)
It’s okay and normal for straight guys to be friends with gay guys.	55 (18.3%)	106 (35.3%)	53 (17.7%)	86 (28.7%)
A real man should have as many sexual partners as he can.	13 (4.3%)	16 (5.3%)	103 (34.3%)	168 (56.0%)
A real man would never say no to the opportunity to have sex.	15 (5.0%)	27 (9.0%)	101 (33.7%)	157 (52.3%)
If necessary, men must also use violence to gain respect.	12 (4.0%)	26 (8.7%)	126 (42.0%)	136 (45.3%)
A man should always have the final say on decisions in his relationship or marriage.	22 (7.3%)	46 (15.3%)	90 (30.0%)	142 (47.3%)
If a guy has a girlfriend or wife, he deserves to know where she is at all times.	47 (15.7%)	105 (35.0%)	57 (19.0%)	91 (30.3%)

Young men in the online questionnaire and focus groups were particularly likely to endorse notions of masculinity associated with toughness and suppression of emotions. At least 20% agreed with the notion that “A boy who doesn’t stand up to those who bully him is weak,” and 37% agreed and 15% strongly agreed with the statement that “Boys should act strong even then when they feel

scared or anxious inside". At the same time there were other young people in the focus groups, generally a minority, who said that changes in gender norms i.e. greater equality between men and women and more egalitarian norms serve to disadvantage men.

"There is no gender equality here in Kosovo... because it seems to me a disconnection if we do something, and if a man does it, it doesn't seem like I'm a man" - A young boy from the focus group at KCS.

About 23% of the sample surveyed online agreed with the statement that a man should solve problems by himself without asking for help, which is also consistent with the statements of young people in focus groups where it was affirmed that society always praises those who they face the pressures themselves. And that this very ability to face pressure without help builds character in men, and they are remembered as more successful.

Regarding the pressure that men may feel, there was a general consensus among the participants that for men it is part pressure to provide monetary income for the family and at the same time physical and emotional security for others. As long as they have to remain stoic and not express emotions even when they feel broken.

"You can tell me the pressure, in cases when you can't be sure about your family, when it's difficult to communicate with them or you don't get enough love or attention or these things, in cases when you don't feel good enough value with people around him, or when he can't get enough of other people's talents"

In line with this statement is the finding from the online questionnaire administered on self-perceived stress, where 161 respondents reported that it is extremely stressful for them to be unemployed and 141 who reported that it is also extremely stressful for them not to be able to provide enough income.

"Men strive for the happiness of the family and the future of the children"

Are attitudes about men's and women's roles in relation to home care changing?

Among the areas where respondents to the online questionnaire had the greatest tendency to disagree with the rules of "Man's Box" were those that had to do with taking care of the house and children. There was a big opposition to the statement "A husband should not do housework", where 42% strongly disagreed and 48.3% disagreed with the statement.

Focus group participants and interviewees further voiced these attitudes. A young man interviewed expressed it like this:

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"As long as new mothers have 6 months of maternity leave and 80% of the salary is paid for 6 months, why, for example, in the second part of the first year, i.e. the second 6 months of the child's first year, also fathers don't have a leave for 6 months, even mothers work... "Anyway, a father needs 6 months off to take care of the children while his wife works."

Simultaneously this youngster expresses his desire for such a norm to begin to change in society.

Further, another man from the interviewees expressed himself as follows:

"I remember my grandfather telling me that he didn't dare to hold his children in his lap because others bullied him, while now husband even make coffee in the house for his wife and he does a little bit of housework, in the yard and maintenance, as well as preparing food."

However, the husband's duty to provide income for the family was often emphasized by the participants of this research, as one of the manhood definitions.

"In Kosovar society, it is difficult to be a woman, but on the other hand, it is also difficult to be a man, because you are expected to be the provider of income, because you are a man, you are a boy, and the expectations of the whole community are also important, such that you have to support your family, you probably have to deal with the family economy, it's a lot of pressure. You have to have above-average income, and if you don't have it, you're not considered a real man" - the interviewee.

Such quotes on the one hand may suggest that when it comes to attitudes towards gender roles in Kosovar society, many men are in transition between traditional ideas of the past and more egalitarian or equal attitudes between the sexes in terms of roles.

The personal opinions of respondents and interviewees were much more progressive than social pressures when it came to homophobia, hypersexuality and domestic roles, showing a strong rejection of the "Man Box" rules in these areas.

However, from the statements made with focus groups, we still see regressive ideas about gender equality and embracing the harshest gender norms about masculinity. Two participants from the focus group held in Deçan expressed themselves as follows:

"A woman gives status to her husband, how she behaves with them in the eyes of others, in the eyes of my friends and in the eyes of my family, for example, if my wife serves coffee to all here, she gives me a status, and it is not OK for her to go out and get a job, because no one stops her from having her own money, it is her own choice, but the status she gives to her husband is just as I described it in the case"

"I just said, the man who is a man has his own limits, his own "rules", based on that, his wife should behave with me, don't cross those limits with me, so that he does not embarrass her husband. If she crosses the limits, then she is not your wife any longer..."

These young people undermine the seriousness of the harsh gender norms in society, reducing and merging the role of women as human beings and their personal identity into a predetermined gender and social role, such as one's daughter, wife, and mother.

Friendship and support seeking

What is the relationship between young men's ideas about masculinity and the closeness of their friendships and other supportive relationships? Young people reported having emotional connections with their friends, although focus groups revealed that showing emotional vulnerability to their friends is seen as against the rules of the 'Man Box'.

"I've never relied on anyone...I mean, every time I come across something or some difficult situation, or something that I can't fix myself, it's not that I can't help someone, or when I have sought help someone has helped me and I have helped others in fixing things they could not themselves, they told me, it's something you can do, it's not something you need to put pressure on yourself, I don't know but..." - a statement by an interviewee about where men turn when they have emotional concerns.

"I think that most men do not rely on someone emotionally, I think that this is also the main cause of the large number of suicides, you see them in both sexes, as far as suicides are concerned, it is very disturbing and I think that this is exactly where it originates that the men are not finding someone to support them and to open up to them and eventually find a solution to their problems" - Interviewee.

In general, the men interviewed were more likely to report providing emotional support to others than to report personal emotional vulnerability, or help-seeking.

From the online questionnaire, 134 young men have stated that it is not at all stressful for them that others tell them that they are too emotional, which constitutes 44.7% of the sample surveyed online. While in most of the statements obtained from the interviews and focus groups it is said that boys/young men who cry and are emotional are seen as weaker, and it is acceptable to cry in front of others only in cases of loss of loved ones.

Although some young men express a willingness to open up emotionally with their male friends, findings from this research show that they continue to rely emotionally primarily on the women in their lives. Most of the young men or boys who were part of the focus groups stated that a man's primary source of emotional support is his mother or romantic partner (wife).

“Violence is not a solution”

All the interviewees and participants in the focus groups have declared that, in principle, violence is not a solution and should not be tolerated. However, there have been statements that have justified violence in specific cases, such as self-defense, betrayal in romantic relationships, and there have been statements that have justified violence and hate speech against members of the LGBTQI+ community, which indicates a tolerance low to diversity.

At the same time, all interviewees stated that boys are encouraged to be more violent and participate in activities that are dangerous for them and for the people around them. Among them, smoking, careless driving and engaging in physical fights to demonstrate the virtues of masculinity have been highlighted.

From the findings from the quantitative analysis, more tolerant attitudes were observed by men for not using violence, where 46% of the targeted sample disagreed and 25% strongly disagreed with the statement that “A boy who doesn't stand up to those who bully him is weak,” suggesting that traditional rigid norms that promote toughness in men are beginning to shift toward more progressive ones. As for self-sufficiency and being a supportive figure for others, 37% of the targeted online sample agreed and 14.7% strongly agreed with the statement “Boys should act strong even when they feel scared or troubled inside.”

Subjugation of women and sexuality

Based on previous research and the findings from the qualitative data of this research, Kosovo is a patriarchal society, which means the manifestation and institutionalization of men's dominance over women and children in the family and in society in general. Traditionally, the subordination of women to men has been what has characterized our society. Furthermore, historically women have defined themselves based on their relationships with men. Somewhat in contradiction with these findings are the results we encountered from the quantitative analysis of this research, which suggest that Kosovar men have begun to embrace the idea that women should be an active part of decision-making and leadership in society and have begun to challenge gender stereotypes. From the sample studied online, the statement “Being with a woman who is more successful than you” was rated by 68% of the sample as not at all stressful. Further, 66.3% rated the statement “Marrying someone who earns more money than you” as not stressful at all, as well as 43% rated it as

not stressful at all, and 15% extremely stressful the statement “When your spouse has to work to support the family”.

When asked about self-perceived stress, 48.7% of men surveyed online stated that it is not at all stressful for them to let a woman take control of the situation. At the same time, 57% stated that it is not at all stressful for them when a woman performs better than them in a game, and 52.7% stated that it is not at all stressful for them to be with a woman who is taller than them.

As for sexuality, the dominant norm in the attitudes of Kosovar society, according to the statements of participants in interviews and focus groups, is the one that supports heterosexuality, while other subcategories are not so acceptable. The participants in the focus groups declared themselves disgusted and using hateful language towards the LGBTQI+ community. And among the interviewees, a more supportive spirit towards diversity and persons of the LGBTQI+ community was observed.

Based also on the findings of quantitative data, where more egalitarian gender norms were observed, perhaps we can allude that for at least one layer of Kosovar society with a higher socio-economic status, the attitudes towards the members of this community have begun to change, or at least towards homosexuals.

According to the findings from the quantitative data analysis, 33% rated the statement “Being perceived by someone as “gay” as not at all stressful and about 34% as extremely stressful. “Being perceived as a man with feminine characteristics”, 25% rated it as not at all stressful, 31% rated it as extremely stressful and the others declared somewhere between these extremes. Not being able to perform sexually was rated by 30% as extremely stressful and 15% who see it as not at all stressful, while the rest of the sample mostly fall into the perception of the situation as stressful for them. Not being able to get sexually excited when you want was rated by 20% as not at all stressful and 24% as extremely stressful.

Moving beyond society's rules on traditional masculinity

The process of moving to more egalitarian gender norms, despite those described in the “Man’s Box”, is not linear. As contradictory as some of the findings of this research may seem on the one hand, they are a logical reflection of the dilemmas young men face in maneuvering society’s conflicting ideals of manhood. Young people have several benefits from conforming to the rules that are portrayed in “The Man’s Box”. This gives them a sense of belonging, to live up to what is expected of them. Friends and parents can praise them.

However, when the same rules tell men to be aggressive all the time, suppress their emotions, and fight back whenever someone threatens them, those same rules require them to pretend to be someone they’re not, and the results of the study show how violent and lonely these guys can end up.

Being a man in Kosovar society

Young men need support to break out of this norm of masculinity and therefore cannot do it alone. Weighing the rewards and punishments of being a man under these rules is what makes this a dilemma for young men.

At the same time, the participants in the focus groups have emphasized that self-confidence on the one hand, and being fair and true to yourself, are factors that can help to confront rigid gender norms against what masculinity should embody.

First, social norms and ideals of manhood are complex, and many men have conflicting views about them. Embracing attitudes that are consistent with traditional gender norms on masculinity has benefits because it provides young men with a sense of belonging, to live up to what is expected of them. Consequently, other members of society, such as friends, parents, and romantic partners, may praise them. However, life becomes violent and lonely when conforming to these norms tells men to be unemotional and stoic.

Secondly, it is not easy to confront these traditional gender norms on manhood. It is important that all of society be part of the efforts to embrace more equal gender norms of the definition of manhood. Conformity to traditional gender norms on manhood often provides a superficial sense of security and self-satisfaction, while at the same time forcing men to mask insecurities, feelings of isolation, and a desire for a deeper personal connection that “real men” are not supposed to have.

CONCLUSIONS

In general, we can say that traditional gender norms on masculinity presented as a set of socially reinforced rules for what “real men” should do (as reflected in the “Man’s Box” questionnaire) are present in Kosovar society. At the same time, most of the men interviewed support the ideas of gender equality and they claim that men should be encouraged to engage in what were once considered traditional women’s activities, such as childcare. Some young people find a sense of security within these traditional rules, even though it causes them and others around them harm.

For some young people, these rules seem to be a source of security, perhaps a mechanism by which they pretend that everything is in order. The harmful effects of complying with these harsh norms and rules are serious, real, and disturbing.

Most men and boys who adhere to traditional rules about manhood are more likely to put their health and well-being at risk, disengage from intimate friendships, resist asking for help when they need it, experience depression, and often think about ending their lives. At the same time, young people who conform to these same rules are more likely to have committed violence against others.

Such a trend may also be an indicator that these young people are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as excessive drinking, to be involved in traffic accidents, and are less likely to have close relationships and friendships.

This research shows the need for a change of perspective on gender equality in sensitive situations. Providing more transformational support for gender equality and sustainable peace requires an understanding of gender, conflict, and sensitivity that is deeper, broader, and more politically informed, with a strong focus on men as agents of change delving into the full range of connections between gender, conflict and sensitivity, including how gender inequality shapes conflict and sensitivity; and the understanding of power relations that drive gender inequality, conflict and sensitivity, and the role of women as actors rather than simply passive victims or beneficiaries.

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