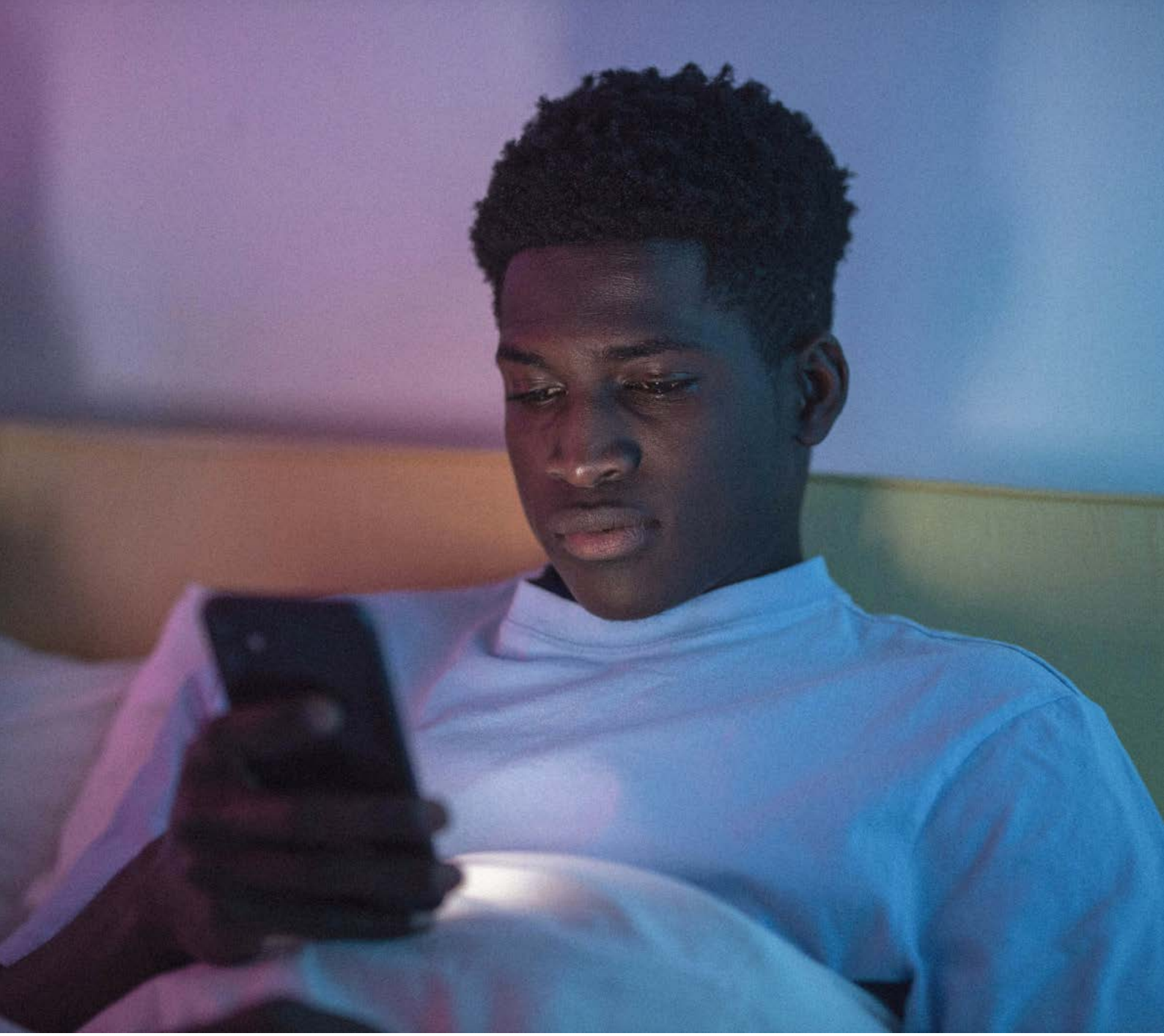


Online Harms and Men and Boys' Health

A PRACTICAL TAXONOMY NOVEMBER 2026

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Acknowledgements

AUTHORS

Anne Craanen
Carolin von Bredow
Fabienne Tarrant
Simeon Dukic
Sid Venkataramakrishnan
Helena Schwertheim
Ciaran O'Connor

EDITED BY

Milo Comerford
Henry Tuck
Jonah Thompson

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ENQUIRIES

Anne Craanen, acr@isdglobal.org
Jonah Thompson, jonah.thompson@movember.com

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 $1 billion for men's health, thanks to a passionate network of Mos. These critical funds have delivered more than 1,000 men's health projects around the world. Championing new research, cutting-edge treatments, and healthy behaviours.

To learn more, please visit www.movember.com

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC DIALOGUE

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is a fiercely independent organisation dedicated to safeguarding individual rights, democratic processes, national security and public safety against the rising tide of authoritarianism and extremism globally. For over 20 years, ISD has been a leader in understanding and addressing online harms, including technology-facilitated gender-based violence, misogyny, targeted hate and abuse, and the role of digital platforms and emerging technologies in enabling and amplifying these harms. Our work combines research and analysis of online ecosystems, platform features and behaviours with the development of practical tools, policy recommendations and prevention approaches to strengthen online safety. To learn more, please visit www.isdglobal.org

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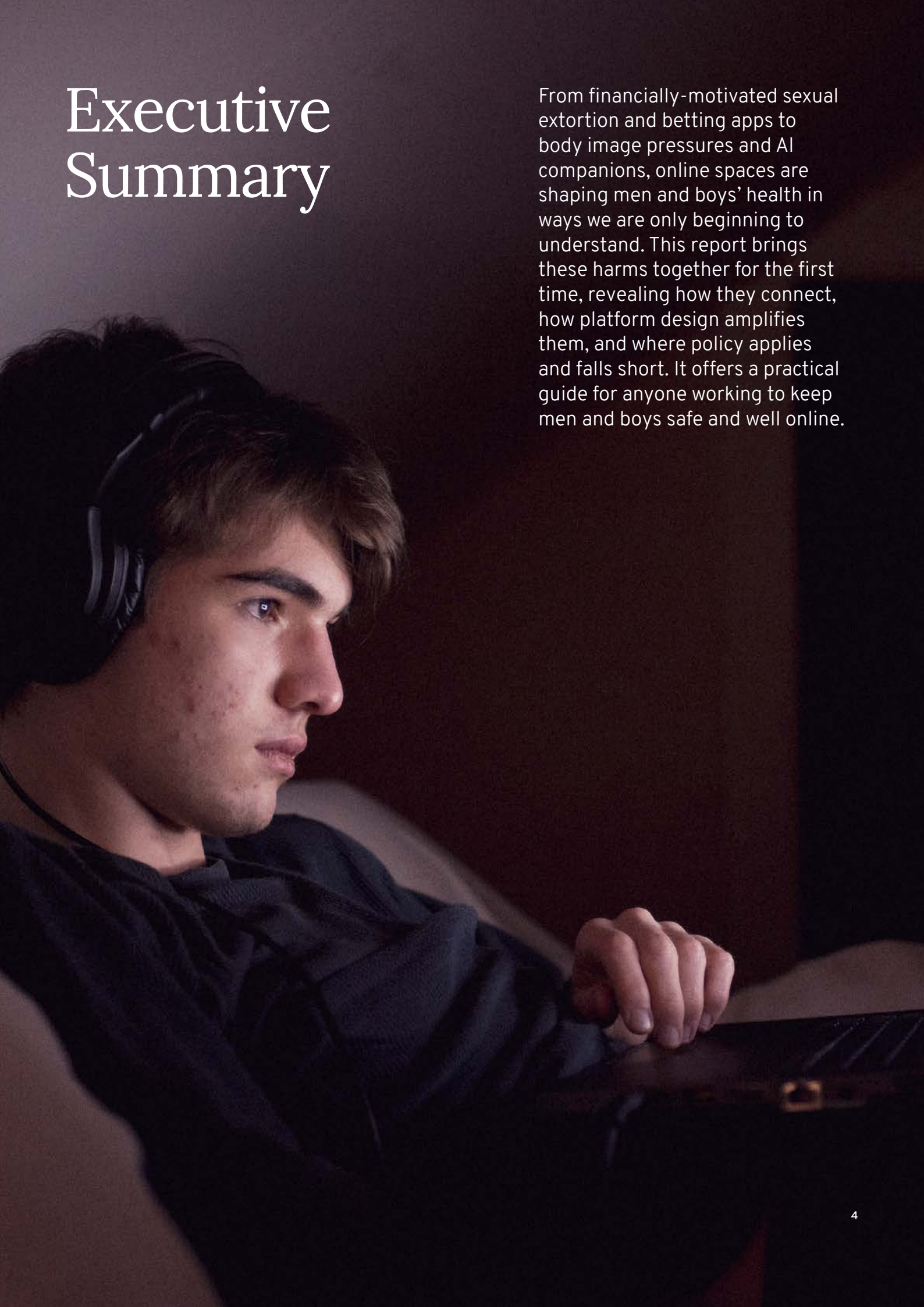
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Executive Summary

From financially-motivated sexual extortion and betting apps to body image pressures and AI companions, online spaces are shaping men and boys' health in ways we are only beginning to understand. This report brings these harms together for the first time, revealing how they connect, how platform design amplifies them, and where policy applies and falls short. It offers a practical guide for anyone working to keep men and boys safe and well online.



OVERVIEW

UNITED KINGDOM

91%

Victims of financially-motivated sexual extortion cases reported who are male

CANADA

87%

Victims of financially-motivated sexual extortion cases reported who are male

IRELAND

93%

Victims of financially-motivated sexual extortion cases reporteda who are male

UNITED STATES

2x

In the United States, suicidal ideation is nearly twice as likely among male college students subject to online harassment

CANADA

154%

In Ontario, Canada, emergency room visits for gambling addiction among males aged 10 to 29 were 154 percent higher after an expansion of the online betting market.

EUROPEAN UNION

30%

Across the EU, 30 percent of boys aged 13–18 were recently promoted gambling on social media (compared to 26 percent of girls), with boys just as likely as girls to report pressure to share intimate images (10 percent).[2]

There is a growing discourse and body of research on the intersection of online harms, gender and adverse health outcomes among men and boys, ranging from studies of negative body image to financial exploitation, unhealthy relationships and loneliness. But there is currently no integrated framework combining harms together into a coherent evidence base which systematically assesses the specific role of digital environments in shaping men's and boys' health outcomes.

Responding to this need – and building on evidence from Movember's Young Men and Media Collective on the health risks associated with the 'Relentlessly Ripped and Rich' narrative online1 – ISD and Movember have developed a first-of-its-kind public health-informed taxonomy of online harms affecting men and boys. This resource maps out how different online services, platform design features, online communities and digital ecosystems amplify gendered harms. It then analyses how these tech-facilitated harms are reflected within different policy and regulatory frameworks – with a focus on the UK, Canada and Ireland, and drawing instructive comparisons to Australia, New Zealand and the wider EU.

While rooted in the academic research base, this taxonomy is intended to serve as a practical resource to underpin gender-responsive public health responses to these harms by policymakers, practitioners and platforms. The report spotlights specific takeaways for the wide range of sectors with a stake in tackling online harms impacting men and boys' health.

APPROACH

The taxonomy's development is rooted in a mixed methods approach, drawing on a robust review of the existing evidence base on online harms impacting men and boys' health, granular cross-jurisdictional policy mapping, and deep consultations with experts and practitioners across government departments and academic disciplines.

A full methodology for the taxonomy development and policy mapping can be found in the accompanying methodological annex.

01

Evidence review

A targeted review of academic literature, government research and other relevant evidence on online harms affecting boys and men's health, surfaced a wide range of harmful online experiences, behaviours and practices, alongside a broad spread of documented impacts on health and wellbeing. The evidence review also informed the identification of research gaps, including areas where the health consequences of online harms, their specific relationship with digital environments, or how harms are gendered remains less clearly established, and emerging harms where empirical evidence is limited.

02

Expert consultation

A series of expert consultations helped to validate findings, refine the taxonomy, identify gaps, and provide practical insights on how different harms intersect with a broad range of policy areas. ISD and Movember are very grateful for the experts who so generously shared their wide-ranging expertise, thoughtful reflections and practical insights across cross-government roundtables in the UK and Canada, a dedicated consultation with online safety experts in Ireland, and a working session of regulators and digital policy makers hosted by ISD's Digital Policy Lab.*

03

Taxonomy development

Drawing on this evidence, we developed a systematised framework for mapping core features of identified harms, including:

- Nature of harm: Harm definitions, examples of their online manifestation, and how men and boys may experience these harms differently or be particularly affected.
- Digital pathways and mechanisms: How online environments may facilitate, amplify or catalyse online harms. This includes the role of specific platform types, online ecosystems, features and affordances, and wider social or commercial dynamics.
- Adverse consequences and impacts: Evidence of harmful effects on men and boys' physical, mental, sexual, financial and relational wellbeing, including impacts extending beyond the individual to interpersonal, community and societal levels.

04

Policy mapping

Targeted analysis of over two hundred regulatory and policy frameworks relevant to the identified harms, examining whether, where and how existing regulatory and policy approaches address online harms affecting boys and young men. The analysis focused primarily on the UK, Canada and Ireland (as well as wider EU frameworks relevant to the Irish context), while also drawing comparative insights from Australia and New Zealand. The mapping considered both online harms regulation and wider policy frameworks relevant to their prevention and mitigation, including consumer and financial protection, gambling, data protection, and sexual or image-based abuse. This reflects the fact that identified harms often fall across multiple areas of policy responsibility.

*The Digital Policy Lab (DPL) is an inter-governmental working group convened by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), comprising representatives of relevant ministries and regulatory bodies from selected democracies. It facilitates inter-governmental exchange, provides access to research and expertise, and supports an international community of practice addressing challenges in digital policy and online harms.

TAXONOMY AT-A-GLANCE

Online harms taxonomy: Assessment of existing research base for 22 online harms with an evidenced impact on men and boys' health.

HARM	GENDERED HARM				HARM TYPE				PLATFORM TYPES									PLATFORM FEATURES AND VULNERABILITIES										POLICY/ LEGAL COVERAGE			EVIDENCE BASE
																		ALGORITHMS AND ADDICTIVE DESIGN			CO-OPTED PLATFORM AFFORDANCES			MONETISED FEATURES						
	Targeted	Depicted	Exposed	Response	Content	Contact	Conduct	Contract	Social · Video	Forums	Messaging	Porn	AI	Search	Apps	Gaming	Gambling	Engagement maximisation	Behavioural reinforcement	Content curation	Social connectivity	Content manipulation	Interactivity	Commercial promotion	Payment facilitation	Financial gamification	UK	Canada	Ireland	
Sexual Health Harms																														
1.1 Non-consensual intimate image abuse	●			●	●	●	●		●		●		●	●	●					●	●	●		●	●		FULL	FULL	FULL	●
1.2 Boundary erosion and sexual coercion	●	●		●	●	●	●			●		●		●				●	●	●	●	●					FULL	FULL	PARTIAL	◐
1.3 Unsafe sexual health misinformation and advice	●		●	●	●			●	●				●		●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		PARTIAL	PARTIAL	PARTIAL	◐
1.4 Problematic pornography use (PPU)			●	●	●		●					●						●	●	●		●	●		●		PARTIAL	PENDING	PARTIAL	●
1.5 Harmful sexual expectations		●	●	●	●		●		●	●		●	●					●	●	●	●	●	●	●			PARTIAL	POLICY	POLICY	◐
Physical and mental health harms																														
2.1 Harmful dieting and eating-related behaviours	●	●		●	●		●		●	●			●	●				●	●	●	●	●	●	●			PARTIAL	PARTIAL	FULL	●
2.2 Unsafe supplement and performance-enhancing substance use	●		●		●		●	●	●	●			●	●				●	●	●	●	●		●	●		PARTIAL	PARTIAL	PARTIAL	◐
2.3 Unsafe cosmetic and bodily modification practices	●	●	●		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		PARTIAL	PARTIAL	PARTIAL	◐
2.4 Suicidal ideation and self-harm		●		●	●	●	●		●	●			●					●	●	●	●	●	●				FULL	PARTIAL	FULL	◐
2.5 Dangerous risk-taking behaviours		●		●	●		●		●						●				●	●	●	●	●				PARTIAL	NONE	PARTIAL	◐
2.6 Masculinity competitiveness and self-optimisation	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●					●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		POLICY	POLICY	POLICY	◐

HARM	GENDERED HARM				HARM TYPE				PLATFORM TYPES										PLATFORM FEATURES AND VULNERABILITIES										POLICY/ LEGAL COVERAGE			EVIDENCE BASE
																			ALGORITHMS AND ADDICTIVE DESIGN			CO-OPTED PLATFORM AFFORDANCES			MONETISED FEATURES							
	Targeted	Depicted	Exposed	Response	Content	Contact	Conduct	Contract	Social · Video	Forums	Messaging	Porn	AI	Search	Apps	Gaming	Gambling	Engagement maximisation	Behavioural reinforcement	Content curation	Social connectivity	Content manipulation	Interactivity	Commercial promotion	Payment facilitation	Financial gamification	UK	Canada	Ireland	
Relational and psychosocial harms																															
3.1 Bullying and harassment	▮			▮	▮	▮	▮		▮		▮					▮	▮		▮	▮	▮	▮					FULL	FULL	FULL	●
3.2 Gender antagonism	▮	▮			▮	▮	▮		▮	▮			▮		▮	▮		▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮				POLICY	POLICY	PARTIAL	◐
3.3 Online misogyny		▮	▮		▮	▮	▮		▮	▮	▮	▮	▮				▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮		PARTIAL	PARTIAL	PARTIAL	◐
3.4 Isolation and emotional suppression		▮		▮	▮	▮	▮		▮	▮								▮	▮	▮	▮						POLICY	POLICY	POLICY	◐
3.5 Despair and hopelessness reinforcement		▮	▮	▮	▮	▮			▮	▮								▮	▮	▮	▮	▮					PARTIAL	PENDING	PARTIAL	○
3.6 Emotional dependency on AI companions			▮	▮	▮	▮	▮						▮					▮					▮				PARTIAL	PENDING	PARTIAL	○
Financial harms																															
4.1 Gambling-related harms	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮		▮	▮	▮		▮					▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮			▮	▮	▮	FULL	PARTIAL	FULL	●
4.2 Financial scams and fraud	▮	▮		▮	▮	▮		▮	▮		▮								▮	▮	▮	▮		▮	▮		FULL	PARTIAL	FULL	●
4.3 Financial sexual extortion	▮			▮	▮	▮		▮	▮		▮				▮			▮			▮	▮					FULL	FULL	FULL	●
4.4 High-risk speculative trading	▮	▮		▮	▮		▮	▮	▮								▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	FULL	PARTIAL	FULL	◐
4.5 Exploitative coaching and wealth schemes	▮	▮		▮	▮	▮		▮	▮					▮					▮	▮	▮	▮		▮	▮		PARTIAL	PARTIAL	PARTIAL	◐

LEGEND

GENDERED HARM

Targeted — Gender shapes targeting or exploitation.
Depicted — Gendered portrayals reinforce harmful norms.
Exposed — Gender shapes exposure or impact.
Response/help — Gender shapes responses and help-seeking.

HARM TYPE

Content — Exposure to potentially harmful material.
Contact — Harmful human (or AI) interactions.
Conduct — Risks from users' own behaviour.
Contract — Commercial exploitation and transaction risks.

EVIDENCE BASE

○ Hypothesised ◐ Emergent ● Established

PLATFORMS

Social / Video includes audio; AI includes companions and GenAI; Apps combines dating, commerce, paid creator communities and specialist apps; Gambling combines betting, trading and crypto.

POLICY

Full — binding law directly covers harm.
Partial — some aspects covered.
Policy — non-binding policy or guidance only.
Pending — measures awaiting adoption or commencement.
None — no identified framework

KEY FINDINGS

Harms mapping

Four overarching harm areas underpin the taxonomy: Sexual health harms, physical and mental health harms, relational and psychosocial harms, and financial harms. ISD identified 22 distinct harm types with a digital dimension, gendered component and demonstrable health impact evidenced in the research base.

Harms are interconnected: Our taxonomy evidences how different harms intersect and reinforce one another, with research showing all harms have some demonstrable connection with at least one other in the taxonomy. For example, financial sexual extortion was shown to very often also encompass dimensions of self-harm, financial harm and sexual exploitation, requiring a joined-up approach to harm prevention.

Online harms are highly gendered: While few harms in the taxonomy are unique to boys and young men, the research shows how masculine norms, gendered expectations, developmental stages and wider social circumstances shape gender-specific exposure, experiences of harm, vulnerability, help-seeking and subsequent consequences for health and wellbeing. 45 percent of harms were found to be gendered based on who is exposed, 64 percent from who is targeted, 64 percent from what the content depicts, and 82 percent from specific ways in which men respond and seek help.

Technology shapes harm: Our research mapped the impact of a broad range of platform types, features and online communities in facilitating harm, from AI tools to social media to trading sites. However, three specific features —addictive design, algorithmic amplification and monetisation— were at the core of all the harms mapped in the taxonomy, showing how the intersection of platform design, commercial incentives and technological affordances create, shape and amplify risk.

Health impacts

Building on the Lancet's digital determinants of health framework,[3] and the multilevel approaches adopted in existing taxonomies of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV)[4], we adopted a public health lens that recognises online harms' impacts extend beyond immediate individual experiences, affecting relationships, communities and wider social structures. The framework identifies impacts across four interconnected levels:

Individual: Psychological, physical, sexual, relational and financial consequences to individuals, including impacts on mental health and wellbeing, bodily health and autonomy, sexual health and functioning, self-esteem, financial security and everyday functioning. These are captured within the taxonomy's harms mapping.

Interpersonal: Impacts of online harms on trust, intimacy and relationship functioning, including difficulties establishing or maintaining relationships, social withdrawal, coercion, aggression and the reinforcement of harmful gender relations.

Community: Impacts on social norms, belonging and exclusion, including normalising of harmful masculine ideals, harassment and discrimination, diminished community participation, and the commercialisation of belonging through communities that condition acceptance on appearance, status or financial success.

Societal: Wider implications of online harms for public health and inequalities, social cohesion, polarisation and public safety, including potential reinforcement of misogynistic attitudes, diminished collective agency and trust in institutions.

Developmental and intersectional considerations cut across these levels, with the framework showing how impacts can differ considerably by age and developmental stage. It also evidences how online harms may disproportionately affect particular groups of men and boys, including gay, bisexual, trans and queer men and boys, as well as indigenous populations, potentially reinforcing existing inequalities in health, safety and social connectedness.

Policy mapping

A kaleidoscope of policy and regulatory levers: Our mapping identified over two hundred regulatory and policy frameworks relevant to harms in the taxonomy across focus jurisdictions, including 75 in the UK, 56 in Canada and 70 in Ireland (including EU frameworks that apply in Ireland as a Member State). These ranged across criminal law, online safety, data protection, drugs and health products regulation, gambling and finance laws, education and violence, and abuse frameworks, demonstrating the breadth and complexity of the existing policy, legal and regulatory landscape relevant to harms to men and boys.

Some harms are well covered, others ignored: We saw a comparable policy response across the mapped jurisdictions for illegal harms with clear acts of commission and a victim/perpetrator (such as non-consensual intimate imagery, financial sexual extortion, fraud, harassment, assisted suicide). However, most systemic, digitally native harms with a less clear point of origin and differing in research consensus are subject to varying regulatory approaches. Meanwhile the harms most specific to men and boys (including masculinity competitiveness and self-optimisation, as well as emotional suppression) garner little to no policy response.

Significant divergences in approach across country contexts: While the UK and Ireland have online safety regimes in place that address online risks more broadly, Canada currently relies on criminal and sector-specific law at a federal level, with many relevant frameworks operating on a provincial and territorial level. The UK's recent Crime and Policing Act 2026 provides unique powers for addressing non-consensual intimate imagery and the first binding measures on pornography that shapes harmful sexual expectations. Meanwhile, Ireland's efforts uniquely bring together national and EU-level frameworks, with particular recent efforts made on gambling, including rapid action on regulating prediction markets.

Online safety laws at the heart of addressing overarching harms: Much of the opportunity for addressing gendered health harms rests on the successful implementation of new and emerging digital policy legislation. The UK Online Safety Act and EU Digital Services Act provide solid frameworks for addressing platform design (including recommender systems), rather than just specific content. In Canada, Bill C-34, the Safe Social Media Act, provides an opportunity to learn from promising practices as well as gaps in other online safety regimes. However, across the board there are limitations in coverage of emerging harms (such as AI), a narrow focus on children rather than the lifecycle of harms that extends into adulthood, and a lack of statutory requirements to address online harms impacting men and boys.

Research gaps

Substantial evidence documents the impact of harms identified in the taxonomy, but important gaps remain in understanding how digital environments contribute to these, and how boys and young men specifically experience them (especially due to factors such as age, or sexual orientation). These gaps are laid out in research 'scorecards' in the taxonomy.

Across all four harm areas, research frequently identifies associations between online engagement and adverse outcomes but provides less clarity on causality, the mechanisms through which harms develop or escalate, and their longer-term health consequences.

Key overarching research gaps concern how masculine norms and gendered expectations shape exposure, vulnerability, experiences of harm and help-seeking. This manifests within each harm area in different ways:

- Sexual health: Research on boys' and young men's sexual development, harmful expectations and experiences of victimisation remains limited.
- Physical and mental health: Pathways connecting online self-optimisation cultures, harmful health behaviours and suicidality require further research.
- Relational and psychosocial harms: Evidence is needed on how technology contributes to gender antagonism, as well as on AI companionship and its implications for relationships and wellbeing.
- Financial harm: Research is lacking on gendered vulnerabilities, particularly how masculine aspirations surrounding wealth and status intersect with speculative trading, prediction markets and exploitative commercial practices.

Future research should prioritise gender-sensitive, longitudinal approaches that examine how platform design and commercial incentives shape these harms, identify protective factors and explore how harms intersect across domains.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

SECTORAL

01

Policy makers, regulators and legal

This constituency is uniquely placed to act upstream, shaping policy, regulatory and legal conditions in which online harms arise and are addressed. These include platform design choices, commercial practices and product standards that shape exposure to harms. The taxonomy can inform coordinated cross-government responses to harms across a broad range of departments and functions. It can help regulators develop guidance and risk assessment expectations for design features, recommender systems and commercial models contributing to gendered harm. And where harms are illegal, it can demonstrate the interconnectedness of harms to inform preventative approaches.

02

Public health sector

The taxonomy provides an important evidence base on the specific linkages between online harms and adverse health outcomes. This includes how to apply a gender lens in understanding how online harms manifest, are recognised and are responded to, as well as considering implications for primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. Insights on how digital features—including recommender systems, monetisation models and commercial marketing—are determinants of health can inform public health strategies. It can also underpin gender-responsive public health analysis of how online harms are distributed, including differences within groups of men and boys by age and sexual orientation.

03

Education, youth and prevention practitioners

Schools, youth services, sports clubs, families and safeguarding organisations are important settings for prevention and early intervention; adolescence and early adulthood are formative periods for identity, relationships and beliefs about masculinity, sexuality, status and success. The taxonomy provides a practical tool for recognising how gendered online harms manifest and their specific impact on young people's wellbeing. This can inform understanding of sector-specific risks. For example, youth workers and sports clubs should understand how online fitness, appearance and "self-improvement" content may shape boys' training, diet and use of performance-enhancing substances; while understanding how boys specifically become victims of online sexual exploitation is particularly important for child protection services.

04

Civil society and research

The taxonomy offers a common framework for analysing and documenting gendered online harms across the civil society and research sectors. For researchers, the mapping of the existing evidence base can inform strategic efforts to address research gaps, including around AI risks, prediction markets, and male-specific outcome data – drawing on the taxonomy's definitions to measure exposure to specific harms, design features and communities. The taxonomy can inform a gender-responsive approach for civil society that recognises that many identified online harms reinforce hostility and harmful expectations toward women, girls and LGBTQI+ people, as well as affecting boys and men's own wellbeing.

05

Platforms and industry

Social media platforms and other digital services design, operate and monetise the online environments in which many harms in the taxonomy arise, from social, gaming and dating platforms to pornography, AI, commerce and gambling services. The taxonomy provides a basis for understanding harms to guide policy development, moderation and product design. This can support gender-responsive risk assessment and safety by design, as well as better coordination with regulators, researchers, health services and civil society partners. The report draws out specific considerations for responses from dating, gaming, commerce and pornography platforms, based on platform-specific risks captured in the taxonomy.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

NATIONAL

01

United Kingdom

As the UK enters a key phase of implementation of the Online Safety Act, civil society experts have called for several structural changes to strengthen the core regulatory regime and focus on safety by design, as well as bring chatbots into scope. Upgrading Ofcom's voluntary guidance on gender-based violence to a mandatory Code of Practice would ensure more impactful platform responses to gender-based violence. Alongside regulation, it is crucial the gendered health impacts of online harms is sufficiently reflected in the implementation of both the Youth and Men's Health strategy, while the 2027 National Summit for Men and Boys provides a crucial opportunity for centring the gendered impact of online harms. Lining up men and boys' health-focused efforts with a commitment to halving violence against women and girls, it is crucial that efforts are rooted in a whole of government approach, and a strengths-based public health-centred policy agenda.

02

Canada

While the proposed Safe Social Media Act (Bill C-34) contains no reference to gender, several of the priority harms (e.g. non-consensual intimate imagery (NCII) and child sexual abuse material (CSAM)) are inherently gendered, while others — such as hate speech, bullying and sexual extortion — provide concrete opportunities for a gendered approach to regulation. Other harms with a gender dimension, such as scams and fraud, are not currently in scope. Mandated platform Digital Safety Plans could provide a window for better understanding the gendered impacts of design features that pose a risk of psychological or physical harm. Beyond online safety, the upcoming Men and Boys' Health and Well-being Strategy provides an important opportunity to ensure that a granular understanding of the gendered impacts of online harms is reflected in public health approaches. Meanwhile there is considerable potential for coordinating responses to gendered online harms across existing frameworks, from gender-based violence, community engagement and prevention of violence, to child protection and fraud prevention.

03

Ireland

Of the analysed jurisdictions, Ireland was found to have the potentially strongest frameworks available to address men's and boys' online harms. This stems from several criminal law instruments, but also reflected health, education and finance frameworks, including the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026, and the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2025-2030, which recognise technology-facilitated abuse and include some commitments focused on men and boys. Ireland also benefits from an online safety framework that combines national law with EU regulation; this offers significant opportunities for further progress by connecting two policy domains that currently operate largely in parallel. As Digital Services Coordinator under the DSA and the regulator under the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022, Coimisiún na Meán could explicitly integrate gendered health risks into its supervision of the Online Safety Code and of platforms' DSA systemic risk assessments. The National Men's Health Action Plan 2024–2028, led by Ireland's Health Service Executive, may offer another vehicle for evidence sharing and stakeholder collaboration, to ensure men's health policy reflects the online harms documented in this taxonomy.

Introduction



Boys and young men are growing up in digital environments that increasingly shape how they understand themselves, their relationships, their bodies, their health and their place in society.[5] A growing multidisciplinary evidence base demonstrates that men and boys experience a distinct and interconnected set of online risks and harms, spanning physical and mental health, financial wellbeing, relationships and sexual wellbeing. This includes academic research across public health, psychology, sociology, criminology, online harms, and gender studies, alongside government public health analysis, and research from men's health and online safety organisations. This introduction outlines how the overarching findings from the evidence review have informed the cross-cutting analytical lenses underpinning this taxonomy.

INTRODUCTION

Gendered harms

The literature demonstrates that online harms are highly gendered and that online platforms and technologies produce distinct gendered risk profiles. Research identifies that harms such as problematic pornography use (PPU) and gambling disproportionately affect men.[6] In contrast, women, girls and the LGBTQ+ community disproportionately experience certain forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), particularly non-consensual sharing of intimate imagery and online harassment. Sexual extortion illustrates how the same underlying harm can manifest differently across genders, shaped by gendered stereotypes, social expectations and power dynamics. While young men and boys are disproportionately represented among reported victims of financially motivated sexual extortion, women and girls more frequently experience forms of sexual coercion and extortion aimed at obtaining additional intimate images.[7] These differences demonstrate that gender is not merely a factor influencing vulnerability to harm but can be integral to how the harm is perpetrated, experienced and sustained. Gendered expectations surrounding sexuality, shame, masculinity and control can shape both the motivations of perpetrators and the forms of coercion used against victims.

Importantly, harms affecting boys and young men can simultaneously have consequences for other groups. For example, misogynistic narratives, gender antagonism and harmful sexual expectations may negatively affect boys' and young men's mental health, identity development and relationships but at the same time, reinforce discrimination, sexual entitlement and hostility towards women, girls and LGBTQ+ people, including violence.[8]

We therefore apply a gendered lens throughout the taxonomy, examining how harms specifically manifest among boys and young men at an individual level. At the same time, we recognise their wider interpersonal, community and societal implications, including their potential contribution to gender inequality and violence against women and girls (explored in the subsequent impact framework). We also highlight how harms are gendered, whether this is based on who is exposed, who is targeted, what the content depicts, and the specific way in which men respond and seek help.

Digital environments and public health

Digital environments do not simply host harmful content: they can actively shape and amplify harms and their consequences for boys' and men's health and wellbeing. A growing research base goes beyond content exposure and screentime alone, focusing on how recommendation algorithms, online communities, social feedback mechanisms, commercial incentives and emerging technologies influence what users encounter, how they engage with it, and the pathways through which harms emerge, intensify and affect their wellbeing. This is shown by the recent EU Eurobarometer survey, which finds that sleep problems in young people rise from 22 percent to 39 percent with more time spent on social media, but does not rise with using technology to do schoolwork, showing the need for nuanced analysis of specific technology use.[9]

Responding to this wider body of research, the taxonomy's approach adopts a public health perspective, particularly informed by the emerging literature on digital determinants of health (DDoH), pioneered by the Lancet journal.[10] This framing—a parallel to established approaches exploring social determinants of health—recognises that digital environments increasingly shape health and wellbeing through interconnected infrastructures, platform design choices, business models and wider social conditions, and that digital environments can reinforce existing health inequalities.[11]

Rather than focusing narrowly on harmful content or individual behaviours, the taxonomy examines how platform features, affordances and commercial incentives may facilitate or amplify harms affecting boys and young men. This includes recommendation systems, engagement-driven design and monetisation mechanisms, recognising that harms cannot be understood solely through individual exposure or user choices. By not assuming responsibility lies primarily with users to recognise and avoid risks, our approach considers how platforms, regulators and other stakeholders can prevent harms by addressing their underlying drivers, including platform design, commercial incentives and systemic risks.[12] Eurobarometer data shows how this is a demand of young people themselves, who rank better enforcement of existing platform policies at the top of potential solutions to online harms.[13]

Developmental and intersectional vulnerabilities

The literature highlights how age, developmental stage and intersecting factors, including sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity and socioeconomic circumstances shape exposure, vulnerability and experiences of online harms, although evidence still remains limited across a range of different variables. Literature points towards certain harms being experienced more by younger men (PPU, gambling, cyberbullying and harmful sexual expectations) and LGBTQ+ individuals (PPU, cyberbullying), and indigenous people* (cyberbullying). In Europe, teens who used social media before they were 10 years old find that their exposure to hate speech is much higher than users who started using social media at a later age (34 versus 19 percent).[14] Meanwhile, exposure to harmful content rises across the top of the age band covered by child protection frameworks, showing how exposure to online harms is at its highest when child-safety duties fall away.[15]

Drawing on the evidence, we therefore seek to apply a developmental and intersectional perspective throughout the taxonomy, identifying where factors such as age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and socioeconomic circumstances influence vulnerability to particular harms and their individual health and wellbeing consequences. The accompanying impact framework considers how these factors may also shape wider interpersonal, community and societal impacts, including the reinforcement of existing inequalities. Where evidence is limited, we highlight these gaps rather than assume that particular groups experience harms uniformly.

Interconnected harms and cumulative impacts

Finally, harms rarely occur in isolation. The evidence demonstrates important intersections between physical and mental health, relationships, sexuality and financial wellbeing. Body dissatisfaction can intersect with muscularity ideals, restrictive dieting and performance-enhancing substances. Loneliness and social isolation may intersect with grievance-based communities, parasocial relationships and hostile narratives about women or minority groups. Similarly, aspirations around wealth and masculine status can increase vulnerability to gambling, speculative investments and exploitative financial schemes. We therefore adopt an interconnected approach throughout the taxonomy, providing examples of how different harms overlap, compound and reinforce one another, while considering their wider interpersonal, community and societal consequences across harms in the impact framework.

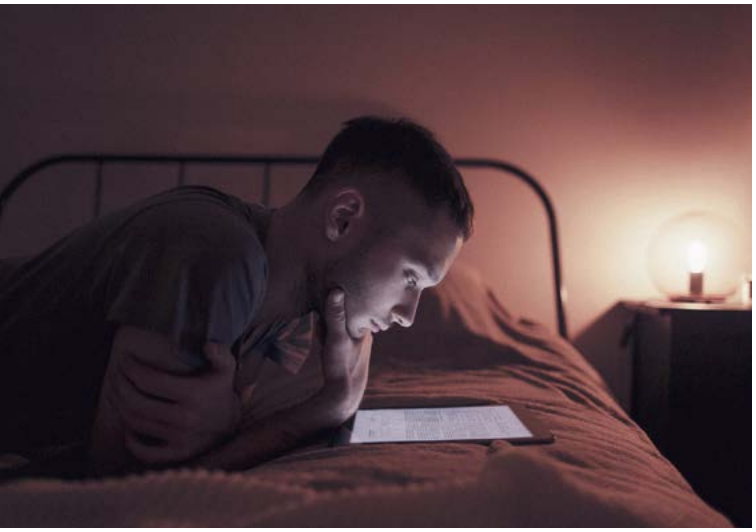


* Indigenous identity in Canada refers to whether the person identified with the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. This includes those who identify as First Nations, Métis and/or Inuk (Inuit), and/or those who report being Registered or Treaty Indians (that is, registered under the Indian Act), and/or those who have membership in a First Nation. Aboriginal peoples of Canada (referred to here as Indigenous peoples) are defined in the Constitution Act, 1982, subsection 35(2) as including "Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada". Statistics Canada. Indigenous Identity of Person.

Conceptualising and assessing online harms

The term online harm is used in different ways across academic research, policy and regulatory frameworks. Depending on the context, it may refer to harmful content encountered online, interactions or behaviours facilitated through digital environments, commercial forms of exploitation, or the adverse consequences of these experiences. These distinctions are important, as exposure to potentially harmful content or participation in a particular online behaviour or community does not necessarily constitute or result in harm.

For the purposes of this taxonomy, online harms are approached broadly, encompassing harmful experiences, behaviours and practices that occur within—or are facilitated or amplified by—digital environments, including both online platforms and more specific communities or spaces. This includes direct experiences of victimisation and exploitation, as well as potentially harmful forms of engagement that may contribute to adverse outcomes.



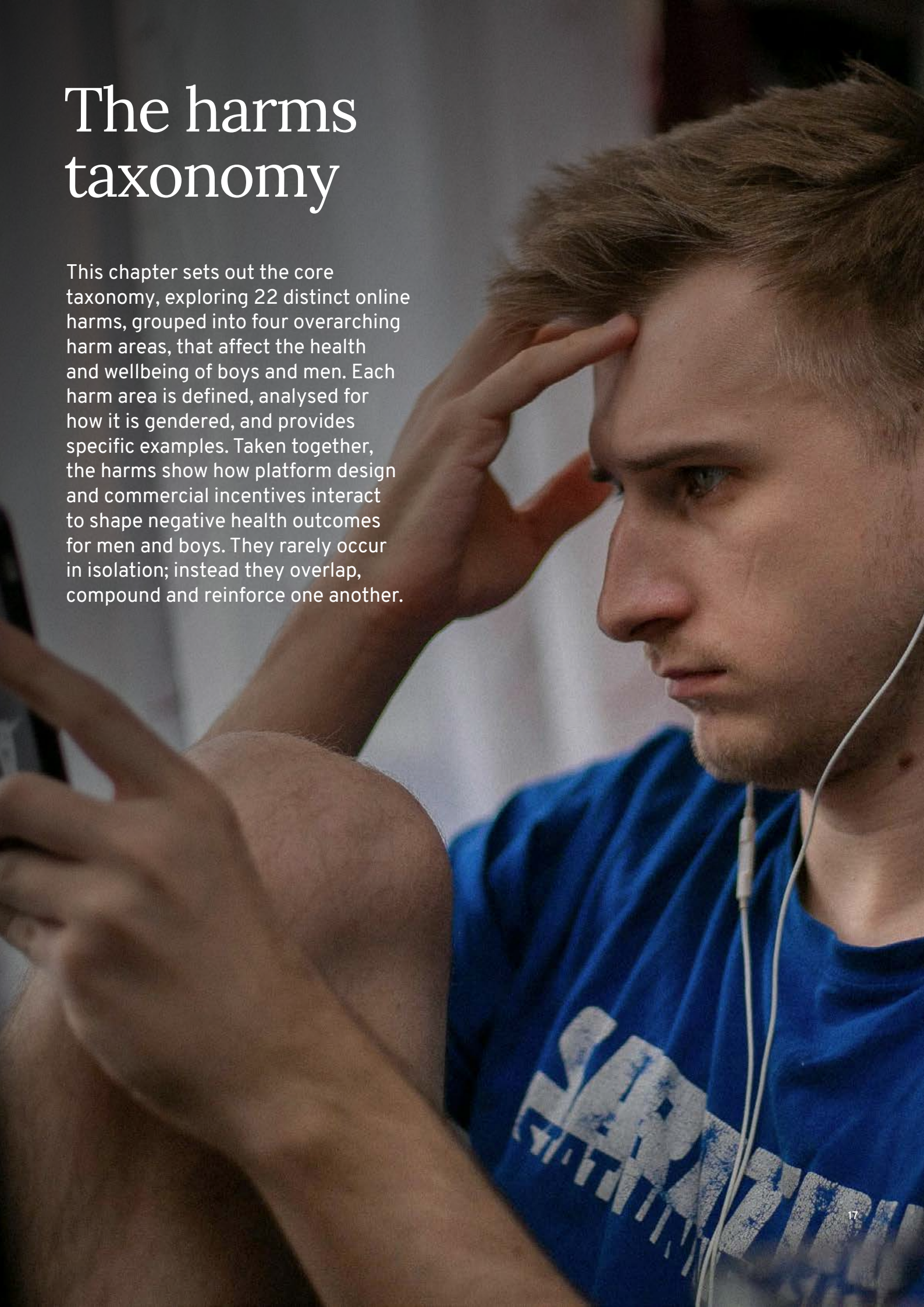
To establish a consistent basis for defining and distinguishing individual harms, the taxonomy draws on the established '4Cs Framework of Online Risk' coined by Livingstone and Stoilova, a widely used risk classification model in online safety and child protection.[16] The model distinguishes between four types of risk: **content** (exposure to harmful material), **contact** (harmful interactions with others), **conduct** (risks arising from users' own online behaviour) and **contract** (commercial exploitation and risks associated with digital transactions).* This framework provides a useful foundation for understanding the different manifestations of online harms, while our taxonomy extends this approach by examining their gendered aspects, the platform features and affordances that facilitate or exacerbate them, and their consequences for boys' and young men's health and wellbeing.[17]

In doing so, the taxonomy distinguishes between the presence of harmful content or behaviours, the characteristics of the digital environments in which they occur, and the adverse outcomes individuals may experience. Platform features are not necessarily inherently harmful, and their potential contribution to harm depends on how they interact with content, user behaviours and wider social contexts. The mapping therefore seeks to identify the mechanisms through which online environments may facilitate, amplify or sustain harm, rather than assuming that exposure to particular content, communities or platform features necessarily produces harmful outcomes. The strength and availability of evidence vary across harms and digital environments, and identifying a potential pathway to harm does not necessarily establish a direct causal relationship. This taxonomy therefore informs the identification of priority areas for further research, particularly where stronger evidence is needed to understand the mechanisms, prevalence and impacts of online harms, and to support effective prevention and mitigation efforts.

* The 4Cs framework was developed largely before the widespread adoption of generative AI, and its dimensions primarily conceptualise risk in terms of content produced by, and interactions with, other people. Increasingly, however, boys and young men interact directly with AI systems, which may themselves act as a source of harmful content, the counterpart in an interaction, or a tool that facilitates harmful behaviour. For the purpose of this taxonomy, interactions with AI systems are therefore considered within each of the four dimensions where relevant.

The harms taxonomy

This chapter sets out the core taxonomy, exploring 22 distinct online harms, grouped into four overarching harm areas, that affect the health and wellbeing of boys and men. Each harm area is defined, analysed for how it is gendered, and provides specific examples. Taken together, the harms show how platform design and commercial incentives interact to shape negative health outcomes for men and boys. They rarely occur in isolation; instead they overlap, compound and reinforce one another.



THE TAXONOMY IS STRUCTURED AROUND FOUR OVERARCHING HARM CATEGORIES

The taxonomy is structured around four overarching harm categories: sexual health harms, physical and mental health harms, relational and psychosocial and financial harms. Each harm category begins with a glossary of evidence-informed descriptions of the various harms, specific examples, and an analysis of how each harm is gendered. The taxonomy then examines how these harms manifest across digital environments, identifying: (1) The primary platform types, (2) platform features, affordances and vulnerabilities that may facilitate or amplify them, (3) online communities and ecosystems in which they are prevalent. Finally, each table maps the pathways to harm and individual health impacts, examining how these online dynamics may contribute to adverse outcomes for boys and men, with particular attention to gendered experiences, vulnerabilities and potential impacts on individual health and wellbeing.

HARM AREA 1

Sexual health harms

This section examines online harms affecting boys' and men's sexual health and wellbeing, understood as healthy sexual practices, pleasure, mutuality, communication, and confidence in expressing boundaries.

TYPES

1.1 Non-consensual intimate image abuse
1.2 Boundary erosion and sexual coercion
1.3 Unsafe sexual health misinformation and advice
1.4 Problematic pornography use (PPU)
1.5 Harmful sexual expectations

HARM AREA 2

Physical and mental health harms

This section examines the physical and mental health harms affecting boys and young men in digital environments, including harms associated with psychological distress, harmful health behaviours and pressures surrounding physical appearance and self-improvement.

TYPES

2.1 Harmful dieting and eating-related behaviours
2.2 Unsafe supplement and performance-enhancing substance use
2.3 Unsafe cosmetic and bodily modification practices
2.4 Suicidal ideation and self-harm
2.5 Dangerous risk-taking behaviours
2.6 Masculinity competitiveness and self-optimisation

HARM AREA 3

Relational and psychosocial harms

This section examines harms affecting boys' and young men's social relationships, emotional wellbeing and sense of identity and belonging, including social isolation, restrictive masculine expectations, gender antagonism and harmful interpersonal interactions.

TYPES

3.1 Bullying and harassment
3.2 Gender antagonism
3.3 Online misogyny
3.4 Isolation and emotional suppression
3.5 Despair and hopelessness reinforcement
3.6 Emotional dependency on AI companions

HARM AREA 4

Financial harms

This section examines financial harms affecting boys and young men in digital environments, including financial exploitation, deceptive commercial practices and high-risk financial behaviours.

TYPES

4.1 Gambling-related harms
4.2 Financial scams and fraud
4.3 Financial sexual extortion
4.4 High-risk speculative trading
4.5 Exploitative coaching and wealth schemes

Sexual health harms

This section examines online harms affecting boys' and men's sexual health and wellbeing, understood as healthy sexual practices, pleasure, mutuality, communication, and confidence in expressing boundaries. These harms include sexual exploitation and abuse, harmful sexual expectations, and behaviours that may undermine sexual autonomy, safety and healthy intimate relationships. The mapping considers how these harms manifest across digital environments and the pathways through which they may contribute to adverse sexual, physical and psychological health outcomes.

HARMS IN THIS SECTION

Non-consensual intimate image abuse 20
Boundary erosion and sexual coercion 21
Unsafe sexual health misinformation and advice 22
Problematic pornography use (PPU) 23
Harmful sexual expectations 24

NON-CONSENSUAL INTIMATE IMAGE (NCII) ABUSE

The creation, sharing or threatened sharing of intimate images or videos of an identifiable individual without their consent, including real and digitally altered or synthetic (e.g. AI-generated) content.[18]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Targeted
Women and girls are disproportionately targeted by nudification apps and sexual deepfakes. However, boys and men also experience image-based sexual abuse, including sexual extortion and grooming.[19] Gay, bisexual, trans and queer men may face particular vulnerabilities.[20]

Response and help-seeking
Masculine norms surrounding sexual confidence and self-reliance can create additional stigma for male victims, discouraging disclosure and help-seeking.[21] A lack of services tailored to male survivors can further delay or deter boys from seeking help.[22]

EXAMPLES

Sharing intimate images beyond the context in which consent was given; distributing material obtained through hacking; creating sexual imagery using nudification apps or other AI tools; and covertly capturing intimate images.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Generative AI (inc. AI companions, general purpose AI, AI models embedded in social media platforms)	**AI nudification and generative editing** can enable the creation of non-consensual sexualised images of identifiable individuals. **Face-swapping and image alteration** can make fabricated intimate images appear authentic. **Rapid, scalable image generation** can facilitate the production of abusive material targeting multiple individuals. **Integrated sharing and distribution features** can enable the rapid circulation of manipulated images, increasing exposure and potential harm.	Deepfake/nudification ecosystems; peer networks.
Social media platforms, messaging platforms, dating platforms	**Private messaging and image-sharing features** can facilitate the exchange of intimate images that may subsequently be shared without consent. **Profile information and location-based matching** can make individuals identifiable, increasing the potential for reputational harm or targeted harassment. **Cross-platform links and connected social media profiles** can facilitate the redistribution of intimate material beyond the original dating platform. **Screenshotting and external image-saving capabilities** can enable intimate material to be retained and circulated without the sender's knowledge or consent. **Livestreaming features and real-time audience interaction** can facilitate sexual exploitation by enabling perpetrators to pressure, coerce or manipulate users into sexual acts, with recordings potentially used for further abuse or extortion.	Sexual extortion criminal networks; peer networks; grooming networks; people known in personal lives, particularly intimate relations.[30]
Nudification and image-generation apps and search platforms	**Generative image editing, nudification and face-swapping** can enable the creation of sexualised images of identifiable individuals without their consent or an authentic intimate image. **Text and image prompting** can allow users to specify sexualised scenarios involving real individuals. **Rapid and batch generation** can facilitate the production of multiple abusive images, potentially targeting several individuals. **Download, sharing and cross-platform distribution features** can facilitate the circulation of fabricated intimate imagery, particularly where AI tools are integrated into social media platforms. **Subscription and credit-based payment models** can monetise the creation of synthetic sexual imagery. **Search engine autocomplete, suggested searches and ranking algorithms** can increase the visibility and accessibility of nudification apps, deepfake generators and other image-manipulation tools used to create non-consensual intimate imagery. **Sponsored search results and advertisements** can further promote these services, while **image search and reverse-image search features** can facilitate the discovery of photographs for manipulation or the identification and redistribution of intimate imagery.	Deepfake/nudification ecosystems; peer networks; sexual extortion criminal networks; grooming networks; CSAM-networks.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Boys and men may experience non-consensual intimate image abuse through the redistribution of private sexual content, AI-generated deepfakes, nudification and sexual extortion. Such abuse can expose victims to further harassment and coercion, particularly following relational conflict.[23] Men and boys are more likely to send unsolicited sexual content, potentially increasing their risk of subsequent victimisation.[24] While nudification apps and deepfakes disproportionally target women and girls, boys are also at risk, particularly through the creation of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), or intimate images that are used for (financial) sexual extortion and grooming.[25] This includes demanding further images, as well as livestreamed sexual acts.

Victims may experience humiliation, shame, anger, anxiety, self-blame, fear of exposure, loss of trust, social withdrawal, and psychological distress.[26] Sexual extortion can cause particularly acute distress and has been linked to self-harm and suicide.[27] Masculine expectations of sexual confidence and self-reliance further discourages disclosure or help-seeking, particularly among boys depicted in deepfake pornography or CSAM.[28] Socioeconomic circumstances and social identities also shape victimisation, with gay, bisexual, trans, and queer men more commonly targeted.[29]

BOUNDARY EROSION AND SEXUAL COERCION

The normalisation or reinforcement of sexual expectations, attitudes and practices that undermine consent and sexual autonomy.[31] This includes the portrayal or promotion of sexual entitlement, pressure to engage in unwanted sexual activity, and violent or degrading sexual practices. It also includes boys' and young men's own experiences of coercion, such as pressure to have sex, to prove sexual experience or to take part in sexual activities they do not want, and difficulty saying no or withdrawing consent.[32]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Targeted
Women and girls are disproportionately affected by sexual coercion and violence,[33] but boys and men can also experience sexual pressure and coercion.

Depicted
Content normalises, justifies or trivialises physical, sexual and coercive harm towards women and LGBTQ+ individuals, including coercive control framed as protection.[34] Similar dynamics appear in some AI companion scenarios.[35]

Response and help-seeking
Masculine expectations surrounding sexual confidence, dominance and experience can create pressure for boys and young men to engage in unwanted coercive sexual practices,[36] while a lack of services tailored to male survivors can delay or deter them from seeking help.

EXAMPLES

Violent pornography; strangulation pornography; AI companion scenarios with coercive or violent sexual themes.[37]

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Pornography platforms	**Recommendation algorithms and homepage** curation can actively promote pornography depicting violence against women and girls, increasing its visibility and repeated exposure.[45] **Content categories, tags and search rankings** can facilitate access to coercive and violent sexual material, including sexual strangulation. **Popularity and trending signals** can confer perceived legitimacy on aggressive sexual practices. **Autoplay and continuous viewing** can sustain exposure to content portraying aggression and boundary violations as sexually desirable.	Masculinity ecosystems; incel ecosystems.[46]
Websites, forums, anonymous platforms, search engines	**Content categories, tags and search functions** can facilitate access to sexually violent and degrading material. **Anonymous posting and discussion threads**, particularly on fringe forums, can enable the reinforcement of misogynistic sexual norms and entitlement. **Limited moderation and weak age assurance** can facilitate the circulation of extreme content and harmful narratives. **Sharing, downloads and cross-platform links** can spread sexually violent material and associated narratives across online communities. **Search engine autocomplete, suggested searches and ranking algorithms** can increase the visibility and accessibility of violent pornography, while related **search recommendations** may facilitate repeated exposure to increasingly extreme content.	Gore and violence-fascination communities; pornography and sexual behaviour communities; incel/ violent-misogyny ecosystems.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Boys and young men may experience pressure to demonstrate sexual dominance, experience or masculinity, including expectations to initiate sex or difficulties withdrawing consent, contributing to stress, anxiety, shame and interpersonal conflict.[38] Exposure to pornography depicting sexual aggression, including strangulation, and sexually violent or misogynistic narratives may normalise coercive practices, sexual entitlement and aggression through repeated exposure and peer validation.[39] This can distort expectations around consent and intimacy, creating pressure to engage in practices they feel uncomfortable with or poorly understand, alongside sexual insecurity and difficulties communicating boundaries.[40] Such normalisation poses disproportionate risks to women and girls, including coercion, sexual violence and physical injury.[41] Pornography consumption has been associated with sexually aggressive attitudes and behaviours, although causation remains contested and evidence of direct behavioural pathways remains limited.[42]

Consumption of pornography depicting physical violence has also been associated with lower empathy and sexual assertiveness, greater acceptance of violence against women, and poorer sexual functioning.[43] Difficulties fulfilling sexual fantasies depicted in violent pornography may further contribute to men and boys feeling distress, moral incongruence, guilt and shame, potentially undermining sexual satisfaction.[44]

SEXUAL HEALTH MISINFORMATION AND ADVICE

Encountering false, misleading, inaccurate or medically unsupported information and guidance concerning sexual development, functioning, performance and reproductive health. This includes content that promotes unsafe sexual practices, reinforces misconceptions about sexual health or discourages appropriate healthcare-seeking. It also includes the commercial promotion and sale of unverified treatments, supplements or products. Such information may be shared by peers, influencers or online communities, or generated by AI systems such as chatbots.[47] Misinformation across STIs, HIV prevention, contraception, fertility, masturbation, sexual development, penis size, testosterone and sexual performance may expose boys and men to unsafe practices, delayed care and adverse health outcomes.[48]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Targeted
Misleading advice and commercial products exploit men's insecurities about sexual performance, framing sexual adequacy as measurable and correctable.[49]

Exposed
Almost half of young men use pornography to learn about sex, and frequent pornography use is also more likely among men and boys.[50]

Help-seeking
Inaccurate or overly reassuring information may further delay diagnosis or care.[51]

EXAMPLES

False information about sexual health, misleading information about fertility and pregnancy; false or misleading claims about STI transmission, testing and treatment; misinformation about HIV prevention; false information about contraception; expectations around average penis size.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Generative AI (AI companions, general purpose AI, AI models embedded in social media platforms)	**Anonymity, perceived privacy and a judgment free environment** can encourage disclosure of sensitive sexual-health concerns. **Anthropomorphism, personalisation and persistent memory** can make advice appear tailored and trustworthy, even when inaccurate. **Sycophantic responses** can reinforce sexual-health misconceptions or validate unsafe practices. **Hallucinations** can create false reassurance or encourage reliance on unverified treatments.	
Social media platforms, Commercial health and e-commerce platforms	**Recommendation algorithms, personalised feeds and search rankings** can amplify misleading sexual-health claims about testosterone, erectile function, penis size, fertility and sexual performance. **Short-form videos, influencer endorsements and testimonials** can lend credibility to unsupported advice and treatments. **Likes, comments and shares** can reinforce the perceived legitimacy of misinformation. **Product listings, customer reviews and commercial health claims** can present unverified sexual enhancement products and treatments as effective or medically credible. **Sponsored content, affiliate links and targeted advertising** can direct users from sexual-health advice towards commercial sellers. **Direct purchasing, subscriptions, ads**[58] **and online consultation services** can facilitate access to products or treatments, potentially without adequate clinical assessment or oversight.	Sexual-health and wellness influencer communities; male sexual-performance and enhancement ecosystems; commercial sexual-health providers and e-commerce retailers; masculinity and self-improvement communities.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Sexual-health misinformation concerning STIs, HIV prevention, contraception, fertility, masturbation, sexual development, penis size, testosterone and sexual performance may expose boys and men to unsafe practices, delayed care and adverse health outcomes.[52] Misleading advice and commercial products can exploit men's insecurities about sexual performance, framing sexual adequacy as measurable and correctable,[53] reinforcing unrealistic standards, body dissatisfaction, anxiety and psychological distress.[54] Advice and ads promoting unverified enlargement techniques, supplements or medications may encourage unsafe self-treatment, potentially resulting in penile injury, scarring, erection problems and other adverse health effects, while inaccurate or overly reassuring information may delay appropriate diagnosis or care.[55] Frequent pornography consumption has also been associated in some studies with inconsistent condom use, including among adolescent males, potentially increasing STI exposure, although this does not establish a causal relationship.[56] However it is important to note that research is not in agreement on these effects.[57]

PROBLEMATIC PORNOGRAPHY USE (PPU)

Problematic pornography use refers to a persistent pattern of pornography use characterised by impaired control, such as difficulty stopping or reducing use despite wanting to, and continued use despite negative consequences and interference with everyday life, including sleep, education, work and relationships.[59] It is distinct from pornography consumption itself and is not defined by frequency of use alone, nor does shame or moral disapproval about pornography use, on its own, indicate problematic use.[60]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Exposed and affected
Men are more likely to experience PPU than women, as do sexual minority individuals compared with heterosexual people.[61]

Response and help-seeking
Links between PPU and anxiety and depression are strongest among men, possibly reflecting reliance on pornography as a way of coping.[62]

EXAMPLES

Being unable to stop or reduce pornography use despite wanting to; using pornography at school, at work or late at night to the detriment of sleep and daily responsibilities; and continuing use despite negative effects on everyday life.[63]

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Pornography platforms, Immersive / VR pornography platforms	**Recommendation algorithms**, related-video suggestions and autoplay can facilitate continuous viewing and repeated exposure to preferred content. **Search functions, categories and personalised recommendations** enable users to find increasingly specific sexual content. **Unlimited content libraries and frequent uploads** provide novelty and opportunities for prolonged consumption. **Private, on-demand access and mobile availability** make pornography readily accessible and potentially difficult to disengage from. **Immersive VR environments, interactive scenarios and connected devices**, where available, can heighten perceived presence and sexual stimulation. **Subscriptions and premium content** can encourage continued engagement through exclusive or regularly updated material.	Niche and subscription-based pornography communities; immersive and VR sexual-content ecosystems.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

PPU has been associated with anxiety, depression, sexual dissatisfaction, distress and poorer psychosocial functioning, including restlessness, frustration and irritability when access is restricted.[64] Compulsive pornography use may involve persistent preoccupation, difficulties controlling consumption and continued use despite negative consequences, potentially interfering with concentration, productivity and daily responsibilities. In more severe cases, compulsive sexual behaviours can become a central focus of an individual's life, contributing to the neglect of work, education, relationships and personal wellbeing.[65]

Men generally report higher levels of PPU than women, while sexual minority individuals may experience higher levels than their heterosexual counterparts, although differences vary across dimensions of PPU.[66] Gender-diverse participants reported the highest levels of anxiety and depression, followed by women, while associations between PPU and these symptoms were strongest among men, potentially reflecting greater reliance on pornography as a maladaptive coping mechanism.[67] Frequent pornography consumption, which is distinct from PPU, has also been associated with erection problems, dissatisfaction with sex life, and difficulties experiencing sex in preferred ways, without establishing causation.[68]

HARMFUL SEXUAL EXPECTATIONS

Encountering and internalising content and peer norms that normalise or reinforce unrealistic or harmful beliefs about sex and intimacy. These include expectations of sexual availability or entitlement, unrealistic standards of sexual performance and endurance, and assumptions about partners' sexual desires, preferences and boundaries.[69] These expectations can shape sexual relationships of all kinds, including same-sex relationships and the experiences of trans young men. The harm runs in two directions: boys and young men face unrealistic performance standards, while the entitlement and dominance these expectations promote increase risks to women and girls.

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Exposed
Young men are more likely than young women to first access pornography at a young age (71 percent vs 50 percent).[70] While gendered breakdown is limited, one in three pornography users in the UK are exposed to violent or abuse pornography.[71]

Depicted
Unrealistic or degrading portrayals of women in pornography can reinforce sexual entitlement, male dominance and expectations of women's sexual availability,[72] while content ties masculinity to sexual conquest.[73] This can include the expectation that men should always want sex, maintain an erection and demonstrate endurance. Sycophantic AI companions may reinforce similar expectations,[74] and mainstream pornography may stereotype or fetishise sexual minorities.[75]

Response
Three-quarters of young men say they have wanted to replicate behaviours seen in pornography.[76]

EXAMPLES

Expectations that men should always want sex, maintain an erection and demonstrate endurance; assumptions that women are attracted to dominance or enjoy sexual aggression; unrealistic portrayals of sex and relationships used as a benchmark for one's own sexual experiences.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Generative AI (AI companions, general purpose AI, AI models embedded in social media platforms)	**Anthropomorphism** can lead to users attributing understanding and intentionality to chatbots, potentially increasing credibility and meaning of their responses. **Role-play, including simulated intimacy**, particularly in AI companions, can reinforce and normalise unrealistic expectations of romantic and sexual relationships, boundaries and reciprocity. **Sustained private and personalised engagement** ('echo chamber') can reinforce existing sexual expectations. **Sycophantic or overly compliant** responses can validate sexual entitlement and expectations of agreement or limited rejection.	AI companion/ girlfriend/erotic role-play communities, incel communities, masculinity influencer ecosystems.
Pornography platforms	Recommendation systems and homepage curation can increase repeated exposure to particular sexual scripts and gender roles. **Content categories, tags and search rankings** can make unrealistic or gender-stereotyped portrayals of sex easier to discover. **Autoplay and low-friction access** can facilitate repeated exposure to these portrayals. **Advertising, sponsored placements and affiliate marketing** can promote products and services that reinforce unrealistic sexual expectations.	
Social media platforms, video platforms, Forums	**Recommendation algorithms and personalised feeds** can amplify sexualised content and narratives promoting unrealistic sexual expectations. **Short-form video and autoplay** can facilitate repeated exposure to idealised sexual scripts and gender stereotypes. **Likes, comments and sharing features** can reinforce the perceived popularity and social acceptance of harmful sexual expectations. **Influencer monetisation, sponsored content and affiliate marketing** can incentivise the promotion of sexualised content and narratives that reinforce harmful gender roles. Forums create **echo-chambers** where certain opinions are seen as the only one possible, contributing to confirmation bias.	Influencer/creator ecosystems; adolescent peer networks; sexualised-content ecosystems.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Pornography and sexualised content can shape boys' and men's understanding of sex, intimacy and gender relations, particularly during puberty when they may have limited sexual experience or access to reliable sexual education.[77] While pornography can provide opportunities for sexual learning and identity exploration, particularly for LGBTQ+ young people underserved by heteronormative education, mainstream representations may also marginalise, stereotype or fetishise sexual minorities.[78] Repeated exposure to unrealistic or degrading portrayals of sex and intimacy may reinforce sexual entitlement, rigid gender roles, male dominance and expectations of women's sexual availability or compliance.[79] For boys and men, pornography may also reinforce expectations that they should always desire sex, maintain erections and demonstrate prolonged sexual endurance, contributing to performance anxiety, body dissatisfaction, sexual insecurity and difficulties navigating intimacy and rejection.[80] Unrealistic expectations concerning partners' bodies, genital appearance, arousal and sexual pleasure further contributes to disappointment and lower sexual or relationship satisfaction, although findings are not uniform.[81] Personalised and compliant AI systems may reinforce similar expectations through conversational validation, role-play and simulated intimacy characterised by constant availability, agreement and limited rejection.[82] These dynamics may undermine expectations of reciprocity, consent and sexual boundaries, potentially contributing to unhealthy relationship dynamics and reinforcing gender inequalities that increase risks of coercion and harm to women and girls.[83] Limited depictions of contraception, consent and safer sex, alongside sexual-health misinformation, may distort perceptions of sexual risk and increase vulnerability to STIs, unintended pregnancy and sexual boundary violations.[84] However, exposure does not necessarily translate into behaviour, and evidence of direct causal effects on sexual practices, relationships and health outcomes remains mixed or limited.

CASE STUDY

Commercialising male sexual performance anxiety

Social media platforms can reinforce unrealistic expectations of male sexual performance while simultaneously providing commercial solutions to the insecurities these expectations may generate. The Instagram examples illustrate how products marketed to improve male sexual stamina, including pills, supplements and purported natural remedies, draw on gendered expectations surrounding masculinity and sexual performance.

Some advertisements explicitly appeal to men's insecurities about sexual endurance, while others feature images of highly muscular men, associating sexual capability with physical strength and idealised masculine bodies.

These examples demonstrate how sexual performance anxiety can become a commercial opportunity. By presenting greater sexual stamina as both desirable and achievable through purchasable products, such content may reinforce unrealistic sexual expectations and encourage the use of products whose effectiveness and safety are not necessarily established. The case study illustrates the intersection of harmful sexual expectations, masculine body ideals and monetisation, highlighting how commercial content can both reinforce and exploit gendered insecurities.

A



B



Physical and mental health harms

This section examines the physical and mental health harms affecting boys and young men in digital environments, including harms associated with psychological distress, harmful health behaviours and pressures surrounding physical appearance and self-improvement. The mapping identifies how these harms may manifest online and the pathways through which digital environments may contribute to adverse physical and psychological health outcomes.

HARMS IN THIS SECTION

Harmful dieting and eating-related behaviours 27
Unsafe supplement and performance-enhancing substance use 28
Unsafe cosmetic and bodily modification practices 29
Suicidal ideation and self-harm 30
Dangerous risk-taking behaviours 31
Masculinity competitiveness and self-optimisation 32

HARMFUL DIETING AND EATING-RELATED BEHAVIOURS

The promotion, normalisation or reinforcement of restrictive or unhealthy eating and dieting practices, whether aimed at weight loss, leanness or muscle gain. This includes restriction of nutrition and the use of diet pills, driven by unrealistic body ideals, pressures towards thinness or muscularity, and pressures to optimise physical appearance.[85]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Targeted
Dieting, fitness and nutrition content aimed at boys and men links muscularity, leanness and dietary discipline with status and self-worth,[86] and male-targeted telehealth services market GLP-1 weight-loss medication as a route to rapid physical optimisation.[87]

Depicted
Content glorifies an extremely muscular, low-body-fat body linked to status over other men.[88] Among boys and young men, this can lead to muscle dysmorphia ("bigorexia"), in which even muscular individuals feel insufficiently muscular.[89]

Response and help-seeking
Exposure to muscularity-oriented content has been associated with restrictive dieting, extreme bulking and cutting, and disordered eating,[90] and muscularity-oriented eating disorders in boys and men may go unrecognised, creating barriers to diagnosis and treatment.[91]

EXAMPLES

Restriction of nutrition, use of diet pills, disordered eating patterns, extreme fasting to lose weight or reduce body fat; non-prescribed use of weight-loss drugs such as GLP-1 medications.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Social media platforms, video platforms, forums, Generative AI, search engines	**Recommendation algorithms, personalised feeds and search rankings** can repeatedly expose users to restrictive dieting, extreme bulking and cutting, and idealised male physiques. **Short-form videos, transformation posts and image sharing** can promote extreme dietary routines without adequately communicating health risks. **Likes, comments and follower counts** can reward dramatic transformations and reinforce physique comparisons. **Hashtags, content tags and forum search functions** can facilitate discovery of specialised dieting advice and increasingly restrictive practices. **Forum threads, groups and peer accountability mechanisms** can reinforce rigid food rules, calorie tracking and extreme dietary challenges through community validation. **Sponsored content, affiliate links and external referrals** can promote restrictive diet programmes and weight-loss products. **AI chatbots and personalised diet-planning tools** can generate overly restrictive dietary advice, including extreme calorie deficits, food avoidance and unrealistic weight-loss targets. **Search engine rankings, autocomplete suggestions and sponsored results** can increase the visibility of extreme dieting advice, restrictive weight-loss practices.	Fitness and bodybuilding communities; physique-transformation and muscle-building communities; looksmaxxing and appearance-optimisation communities; dieting and nutrition-coaching communities.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

An online ecosystem of dieting, fitness and nutrition content targeting boys and men promotes masculine body ideals that associate muscularity, leanness and dietary discipline with status and self-worth.[92] Exposure to muscularity-oriented content has been associated with body dissatisfaction and muscle dysmorphia, contributing to restrictive dieting, extreme bulking and cutting, rigid food rules, compulsive calorie and macronutrient tracking, and disordered eating.[93] Male-targeted telehealth services can further commercialise masculine insecurities around weight and appearance by framing prescription weight-loss medication (GLP-1s) as a route to rapid weight loss and physical optimization.[94] AI chatbots can also encourage overly restrictive dieting, especially among teenagers, though research is needed on the gendered health impacts.[95]

These behaviours can increase risks of nutritional deficiencies, physical and psychological distress, compulsive exercise and impaired daily functioning.[96] Muscularity-oriented eating disorders among boys and men may also go unrecognised, creating barriers to diagnosis and treatment.[97] Such pressures can affect content creators themselves, with eating-disorder-related tendencies identified among male fitness and lifestyle influencers.[98]

Although eating disorders have historically disproportionately affected and been researched for women and girls,[99] body dissatisfaction and muscularity-oriented disordered eating represent important, potentially under-recognised harms for boys and men. Literature highlights how one in three people with an eating disorder are male.[100] Research also shows how male athletes, and racial, ethnic, sexual and gender minorities are at greater risk of disordered eating behaviours and eating disorders.[101]

UNSAFE SUPPLEMENT AND PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING SUBSTANCE USE

The promotion, normalisation and use of supplements and performance-enhancing substances in ways that pose risks to health. This includes the use of non-prescribed medications and peptides, steroids and other performance-enhancing substances, as well as prescribed treatments used without adequate clinical oversight. Online narratives that glorify risk-taking in the context of men's health and wellbeing may encourage such use, whether explicitly (e.g. actionable instructions) or implicitly (e.g. before-and-after transformations).[102]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Targeted
Influencers market unregulated products such as testosterone boosters and steroids to boys, targeting their insecurities about their bodies and dating,[103] through a pipeline running from fitness influencer to supplement affiliate to grey-market injectable, with no medical oversight.[104]

Exposed
63 percent of young men regularly engage with masculinity influencers; viewers report higher rates of steroid use, and frequent viewers overestimate their peers' steroid use about fivefold.[105] Anabolic steroid use is predominantly among men, and more common among sexual minority men than heterosexual men.[106]

EXAMPLES

Non-prescribed use of testosterone, steroids or Selective Androgen Receptor Modulators (SARMs) obtained online; inappropriate prescribing of testosterone replacement therapy (TRT), for example through online or direct-to-consumer clinics without adequate clinical assessment; use of prescribed TRT without adequate monitoring; and use of unregulated peptides bought online.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Social Media platforms, Video-sharing platforms, forums, search engines	**Recommendation algorithms and personalised feeds** can repeatedly expose users to fitness influencers promoting supplements, muscle-building products and performance-enhancing substances. **Search rankings and short-form video** can increase the visibility of transformation content, product recommendations and simplified claims about effectiveness or safety. **Likes, comments and creator endorsements** can lend social credibility to potentially misleading health and performance claims. **Sponsored content, affiliate links and in-platform shopping features** can create financial incentives to promote products while enabling users to purchase them directly or through external sellers. **Cross-platform links and private communities** can direct users towards more specialised advice, sellers or communities discussing higher-risk substances. **Search engine rankings, autocomplete suggestions and sponsored results** can increase the visibility and accessibility of unregulated supplements, performance-enhancing substances and misleading health claims, directing users towards potentially unsafe products.	Masculinity ecosystems; incel ecosystems.
Ecommerce sites and online marketplaces	**Search, product categorisation and ranking features** can make testosterone, anabolic steroids, SARMs, peptides and other performance-enhancing substances easy to discover and compare. **Product descriptions, customer reviews and testimonials** can present potentially unsafe or unregulated substances as effective, accessible and credible routes to muscle growth, fat loss or improved performance. **Product recommendations, bundles and promotional discounts** can encourage the purchase of multiple substances or more intensive enhancement regimens. **Direct purchasing, payment and delivery systems** can reduce barriers to obtaining products that may be inappropriate, mislabelled or supplied without medical oversight. **Affiliate links and cross-platform referrals** can connect fitness influencers and online communities directly to commercial sellers.	Fitness and gym communities, self-improvement communities, influencer and creator-led communities.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Fitness and self-improvement influencers can exploit boys' and young men's insecurities around muscularity, attractiveness and masculine status by promoting supplements, anabolic steroids, non-prescribed testosterone, SARMs and experimental peptides as shortcuts to physical transformation.[107] These narratives are increasingly mainstream: 63 percent of young men surveyed regularly engage with masculinity influencers, while frequent viewers may substantially overestimate peer steroid use.[108] Commercialised self-improvement ecosystems connect influencers and supplement affiliates to grey-market sellers, blurring the boundaries between health advice, advertising and the promotion of potentially unsafe substances.[109] Exposure to muscularity-oriented content has been associated with muscle dysmorphia and greater intentions to use anabolic steroids potentially reinforcing perceived pressure to pursue increasingly risky enhancement practices.[110] Misleading safety claims, inaccurate dosage advice, combining substances and unregulated purchasing channels may encourage unsupervised use and increase exposure to counterfeit or contaminated products.[111] Associated health risks include hormonal disruption, cardiovascular and liver complications, reproductive health problems, including impaired fertility, and adverse psychological effects.[112] However, evidence establishing direct causal pathways from specific online exposures to subsequent substance use remains limited.

UNSAFE COSMETIC AND BODILY MODIFICATION PRACTICES

The promotion and pursuit of practices that alter physical appearance in ways that pose risks to health, as a means of improving attractiveness, masculine status or romantic and sexual prospects. This includes unregulated or self-administered practices, as well as cosmetic procedures accessed without adequate clinical assessment, regulation or aftercare. It can involve escalation from low-risk appearance-enhancement practices to invasive, unregulated surgical and hormonal interventions.[113] It also includes unproven bodily practices promoted within appearance and self-optimisation communities, such as testicular cooling or "ball freezing", often accompanied by misinformation claiming they preserve fertility or prevent testicular cancer.[114] Although these practices are documented within these communities, evidence directly linking exposure to their uptake remains limited.[115]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Depicted
Content encouraging male cosmetic procedures carries the embedded assumption that physical attractiveness is the most important factor in men's worth, happiness and romantic or sexual success.[116] As content escalates from fitness to looksmaxxing, the standard shifts from what a man can do, to what he looks like, to what he is made of, with each stage presented as the price of admission to a masculine in-group.[117]

Targeted
Looksmaxxing emerged among incels as a way for men to improve their appearance to achieve relationships with women.[118] Surgical interventions such as jaw implants, cheekbone augmentation and rhinoplasty are promoted to men by influencers.[119]

Exposed
Boys in workshops described looksmaxxing apps and filters that told them what was "wrong" with their appearance, measured against an ideal of a muscular body, square jawline, symmetrical features and "hunter eyes".[120]

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Generative AI (AI companions, general purpose AI, AI models embedded in social media platforms)	**Appearance analysis and attractiveness scoring** can rank users based on unrealistic beauty standards. **Personalised looks optimisation advice** can identify perceived physical flaws and recommend dangerous improvements. **Generative visualisation (before/after image generation)** can simulate idealised physical transformations potentially creating unrealistic expectations. **Sycophantic responses** may validate negative assessments of appearance. **Persistent memory and personalisation** enables the retention of perceived physical imperfections. **Hallucinations** can give misleading guidance around diet, supplements, training, cosmetic modification. **Anthropomorphism** can lead to users attributing understanding and intentionality to chatbots, potentially increasing credibility and meaning of their responses.	
Pornography platforms	**Performer profiles and content curation can reinforce** idealised genital and body standards that encourage interest in physical enhancement. **Sexual-enhancement advertising and sponsored placements** can promote potentially unsafe enlargement products, procedures and bodily modifications. **Affiliate marketing and referral links** can direct users towards unverified treatments and commercial enhancement services. **Cross-platform commercial links** can funnel users into wider genital-enhancement and body-modification ecosystems.	Looksmaxxing/ body-enhancement ecosystems; Fitness and gym communities; self-improvement communities.
Social Media platforms, Video-sharing platforms, messaging platforms, forums, search engines	**Recommendation algorithms and personalised feeds** can repeatedly expose users to appearance-focused content promoting cosmetic enhancements, bodily modifications and looksmaxxing practices. **Short-form video, before-and-after transformations and visual filters** can amplify idealised facial and bodily standards while making potentially unsafe interventions appear accessible or effective. **Likes, comments and influencer endorsements** can lend social credibility to unverified appearance-enhancement techniques and procedures. **Sponsored content, affiliate links and in-platform shopping features** can create financial incentives to promote cosmetic products, devices and interventions. **Cross-platform links and private communities** can direct users towards more extreme looksmaxxing practices, unregulated providers or advice on self-administered modifications. **Search engine rankings, suggested searches and sponsored results** can promote unregulated cosmetic procedures, appearance-enhancement products and unsafe bodily modification practices.	Fitness and gym communities; self-improvement communities; influencer and creator-led communities.

EXAMPLES

Genioplasty (chin surgery), jaw implants, cheekbone augmentation, rhinoplasty, unregulated practices such as "bone smashing", penile enlargement regimen or surgery, and testicular cooling ("ball freezing") promoted to preserve fertility or prevent cancer.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Looksmaxxing and appearance-focused content can reinforce narrow masculine beauty ideals, presenting facial symmetry, defined jawlines, muscularity, height and genital size as objective measures of attractiveness, status and romantic desirability.[121] AI-powered attractiveness scoring, personalised transformation advice and appearance-based comparisons may intensify body dissatisfaction, sexual insecurity and psychological distress, while normalising increasingly invasive forms of 'hardmaxxing', including bone-smashing, jaw modification and unsafe penis-enlargement practices.[122] These practices can expose boys and young men to physical injury, disfigurement, scarring, nerve damage and erection problems.[123] Commercial promotion of unregulated enlargement products, devices and procedures can further exploit perceived inadequacies, exposing users to misleading efficacy claims, financial exploitation and interventions lacking established safety or effectiveness.[124] Related misinformation about male reproductive health and cancer, including claims that testicular cooling or 'ball freezing' preserves fertility or prevents testicular cancer,[125] may encourage unproven practices and undermine informed health decisions. Although these practices and recommendations are documented within online appearance and self-optimisation communities, evidence directly linking exposure to their uptake remains limited.[126]

SUICIDAL IDEATION AND SELF-HARM

Online experiences that contribute to the development or reinforcement of suicidal thoughts and self-harming behaviours, including exposure to narratives that normalise suicide or self-injury.[127] Suicidal ideation and self-harm can overlap, but they have different meanings and pathways.

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Response and help-seeking
Men who can't meet the provider standard of manhood, which most men and women endorse, are 16.3 times more likely to contemplate suicide in the US,[128] and young men who endorse restrictive "Man Box" norms face significantly higher rates of suicidal ideation.[129]

Depicted
Content aimed at young men links hopelessness and self-loathing to suicide, suggesting there is no point to life if others don't accept you, or that suicide is the only way to escape loneliness.[130]

EXAMPLES

Content that romanticises, glamorises or normalises suicide or self-injury; online communities that encourage self-injury or discourage seeking help.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Generative AI (AI companions, general purpose AI, AI models embedded in social media platforms)	**Sycophantic responses and conversational validation** may reinforce hopelessness, negative self-perceptions or harmful beliefs when users disclose suicidal thoughts or self-harm. **Constant availability and private conversations** enable prolonged engagement during periods of psychological distress. **Personalisation and conversational memory**, where available, may carry distress-related themes across interactions. **Anthropomorphic design and simulated emotional intimacy**, particularly in AI companions, can increase the emotional significance users attach to chatbot responses. **Role-play and immersive interactions** may blur boundaries between fictional scenarios and real-world distress. **Inconsistent safeguards and inaccurate responses** can result in failures to recognise escalating risk, challenge harmful suggestions or direct users towards appropriate support.	AI companion and virtual relationship communities; AI role-play communities; online mental health and peer-support communities.
Forums and anonymous platforms	**Anonymous and pseudonymous accounts** can enable users to disclose suicidal thoughts or self-harm experiences while reducing barriers to discussing sensitive subjects. **Threaded discussions, replies and user mentions** can facilitate repeated peer interactions that may validate hopelessness, normalise self-harm or, conversely, provide emotional support. **Persistent and searchable discussion archives** can enable repeated exposure to harmful narratives, including discussions that reinforce suicidal thinking or self-harm. **Public viewing, registration and community access features** can facilitate entry into specialised discussion environments and sustained engagement with their content. **Moderation, reporting and community rules** can influence whether harmful encouragement is challenged, removed or allowed to persist.	Suicide discussion communities; mental-health and peer-support communities.
Social media platforms, Video-sharing platforms	**Recommendation algorithms and personalised feeds** can repeatedly surface content depicting or discussing suicide, self-harm and hopelessness, including following engagement with related material. **Autoplay and continuous scrolling** can sustain exposure to distressing content and make disengagement more difficult. **Search rankings, hashtags and content tags** can facilitate discovery of suicide- and self-harm-related material, including content that romanticises or normalises harmful behaviours. **Likes, comments, shares and view counts** can amplify harmful narratives and provide social validation, while also enabling supportive responses. **Creator following and notifications** can encourage repeated engagement with accounts discussing suicidal thoughts or self-harm. **Reporting and moderation systems** influence whether harmful content is restricted, removed or continues to circulate.	Suicide and self-harm content communities; mental-health and peer-support communities; recovery-oriented communities; youth creator and social networks.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Boys and men experiencing psychological distress, loneliness or social isolation may seek emotional support through online communities and AI companions, particularly where masculine norms of emotional suppression and self-reliance discourage disclosure and help-seeking.[131] While these interactions can provide opportunities for connection and support, exposure to content normalising self-injury, validating hopelessness or romanticising suicide may reinforce harmful beliefs and behaviours, particularly among those already experiencing psychological distress or engaging in self-harm.[132] Self-harm, including non-suicidal self-injury, and suicidal ideation or behaviour represent distinct but potentially overlapping pathways: content normalising self-injury may reinforce harmful coping behaviours, while narratives validating hopelessness or suicide may intensify suicidal thinking. Repeated engagement with such content, including through humour, shared experiences and group identities, may further sustain distress and discourage recovery.[133]

AI companions present additional risks where overly affirming responses validate self-hatred, hopelessness or suicidal thoughts, while emotional attachment and reliance on these interactions may displace human relationships or appropriate mental health support.[134] Inadequate safeguards may also fail to recognise escalating distress or respond appropriately to disclosures of self-harm or suicidal intent.[135] Conversely, supportive peer interactions and recovery-oriented communities can reduce isolation, encourage disclosure and facilitate access to care.[136] Outcomes depend on individual vulnerabilities, community norms and the nature of responses, while direct causal research linking online interactions or exposure to suicidal behaviour remains limited.[137]

DANGEROUS RISK–TAKING BEHAVIOURS

Dangerous risk-taking behaviours refers to engagement in, or the normalisation of, behaviours that expose individuals or others to significant risk of physical injury or death, where these are prompted, shared or amplified through online environments. Such behaviours may be reinforced by online environments that reward risk-taking with social recognition, visibility or peer validation.[138]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Depicted
Online communities can frame dangerous driving, stunts and risky challenges as demonstrations of masculine status, reinforcing norms that associate risk-taking with toughness and peer respect.

Response
Within peer networks, these dynamics can normalise reckless behaviour and reduce perceptions of danger, particularly where successful stunts are celebrated and their consequences overlooked.[139] Online fame and visibility are increasingly significant for boys and young men with few other sources of recognition,[140] although evidence directly linking online recognition to individual incidents remains limited.[141]

EXAMPLES

Dangerous stunts, dares and challenges, reckless driving,[142] and physically dangerous pranks.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Social media platforms, Apps	**Recommendation algorithms, search rankings and hashtags** can increase the visibility of dangerous driving, risky challenges and physical stunts. **Video uploads, livestreaming and sharing features** can enable users to quickly capture and publicise risky behaviour. **Likes, comments, reposts and follower counts** can provide social recognition and reinforce status-seeking around dangerous activities. **GPS tracking, speed recording and driving-performance metrics**, where supported by specialist apps, can quantify potentially dangerous driving behaviour. **Leaderboards, achievement badges and peer comparisons** can introduce competitive incentives to achieve higher speeds, rankings or performance scores. **Cross-platform sharing** can allow recorded achievements or journey statistics to circulate within wider peer networks.	Risk-taking challenge communities; driving enthusiast communities; stunt and extreme-sport communities; adolescent peer and status-seeking networks.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Online communities can frame dangerous driving, physical stunts and risky challenges as demonstrations of courage, skill and masculine status, reinforcing norms that associate risk-taking with toughness and peer respect. Within peer networks, these dynamics can normalise reckless behaviour and diminish perceptions of danger, particularly where successful stunts are celebrated and their consequences overlooked.[143] The resulting risks extend beyond participants to passengers, pedestrians and other road users, including serious injury and death.[144] Although online recognition and competitive features provide plausible incentives for escalation, evidence directly establishing their contribution to individual incidents remains limited beyond incident-related research.[145]

MASCULINITY COMPETITIVENESS AND SELF-OPTIMISATION

Online content, tools and peer practices that promote rigid and unrealistic masculine ideals, and that rank and compare boys and men against them. These ideals equate men's self-worth, social status and personal success with wealth, muscularity, physical attractiveness, sexual success, dominance and emotional invulnerability.[146] Such content creates persistent pressure to become "Relentlessly Ripped and Rich", an online narrative encouraging competitive social comparison and continual self-optimisation of one's appearance, performance and behaviour.[147] Online, these pressures are reinforced through masculine status hierarchies, appearance-based rankings and self-improvement narratives that glorify extreme discipline, emotional suppression and personal sacrifice as prerequisites for success. Specific mechanisms include ranking vocabularies such as "alpha", "beta" and "Chad" and a "conflict economy" that monetises influencer feuds and "alpha contests".[148] Self-improvement itself is not inherently harmful, risks arise where it becomes compulsive or motivated by feelings of failure or shame.[149]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Depicted
Content reinforces the belief that men's worth depends on becoming wealthier, more muscular, sexually desirable and emotionally invulnerable,[150] and sets up hierarchies among men in which an ideal "manly" man is superior.[151]

Targeted and exposed
Influencers market coaching, get-rich-quick schemes and unregulated health products that target boys' insecurities about their bodies and dating, exploiting them financially while reinforcing hypermasculine ideals.[152] Self-optimisation products are sold to boys and men as the price of admission to a masculine in-group,[153] and looksmaxxing content alone reached over 14.6 billion views, driven by recommendation algorithms.[154]

Response
Young men who watch masculinity influencers report worse mental health and less willingness to prioritise it.[155] Boys often see relentless striving as inspiring and struggle to tell helpful advice from harmful messaging.[156]

EXAMPLES

Content promoting rigid "high-value man" ideals; using or being labelled with "alpha" and "beta" rankings, in content or by peers; using apps or filters that score one's face or body against an ideal; engaging with influencer feuds or "alpha contests" staged for views and revenue; and extreme self-improvement regimes and challenges promoted online, such as NoFap .

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Video-sharing platforms, social media platforms, livestreaming platforms, online forums, dating platforms and online subscription platforms	**Recommendation algorithms and personalised feeds** can repeatedly expose users to idealised portrayals of masculine success, including wealth, muscularity, attractiveness, sexual success and extreme self-discipline. **Short-form videos, livestreaming and influencer testimonials** can present exceptional achievements and unverified self-optimisation practices as attainable or expected masculine standards, including unsupported claims about testosterone, semen retention, biohacking and cognitive performance. **Likes, follower counts, rankings and community status hierarchies** can encourage competitive comparison, while **dating-app matching, profile visibility and paid boosts** may reinforce perceived hierarchies of attractiveness and romantic desirability. **Appearance-scoring tools, filters and AI-powered assessments** can quantify perceived physical inadequacies and encourage further optimisation. **Online forums, peer feedback, transformation posts and accountability mechanisms** can reinforce rigid self-improvement expectations through progress tracking, streaks and discussions of perceived failure. **Sponsored content, subscription communities, paid coaching and cross-platform links** can commercialise these insecurities and direct users towards increasingly intensive self-improvement practices or unverified interventions.	Manosphere and male self-improvement communities; fitness, looksmaxxing and masculinity influencer ecosystems; wealth and entrepreneurial 'grindset' communities; NoFap and semen retention communities; biohacking and self-optimisation communities; online dating and relationship-seeking communities.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Online communities promoting idealised masculine success can reinforce the belief that men's worth depends on becoming wealthier, more muscular, sexually desirable and emotionally invulnerable,[157] which Movember characterises as a "relentlessly ripped and rich" narrative.[158] Repeated exposure to exceptional lifestyles, appearance-based rankings and competitive masculine hierarchies can intensify social comparison, status anxiety, body dissatisfaction and feelings of inadequacy, particularly when boys and men perceive themselves as falling short of prescribed ideals.[159] Dating platforms may further reinforce these insecurities by encouraging users to interpret romantic attention, rejection and physical attractiveness as measures of personal worth, potentially contributing to diminished self-esteem, loneliness and psychological distress.[160] These experiences may also reinforce manosphere narratives around 'alpha' and 'beta' hierarchies, female hypergamy (the belief women inherently seek relationships with higher-status men) and the purported '80/20 rule' (a pseudoscientific belief prevalent in incel communities that 80 percent of women pursue the most attractive 20 percent of men), although evidence directly linking dating-app experiences to misogynistic beliefs remains limited.[161] Influencer-led 'grindset', fitness and biohacking cultures can transform perceived inadequacies into pressure for relentless self-optimisation, glorifying extreme discipline, productivity and emotional suppression while framing rest or failure as personal weakness.[162] Within NoFap (a community that promotes abstinence from pornography, masturbation, and sometimes sex) and semen retention communities, unsupported claims about testosterone, attractiveness and masculine vitality may encourage shame around normal sexual behaviour, anxiety about perceived failure and rigid self-monitoring.[163]

Commercialised self-improvement ecosystems can further exploit these insecurities through paid coaching, subscriptions and unverified health interventions, potentially reinforcing financial strain and psychological distress.[164] However, voluntary self-improvement and sexual abstinence are not inherently harmful, risks arise where practices become compulsive, shame-based or detrimental to wellbeing.[165]

CASE STUDY

AI-powered looksmaxxing tools

AI-powered looksmaxxing tools are marketed as personalised coaches that help individuals on their journey to become more attractive, confident, successful and healthier. The app allows users to upload photographs and receive numerical attractiveness ratings, most of them based on the perceived sexual market value (PSL) scale, and tailoured recommendations for improving their appearance. The terminology used in the apps strongly mirrors the language used in looksmaxxing communities. By presenting subjective masculine beauty standards as objective assessments, these tools can reinforce insecurities around facial structure and characteristics, and perceived attractiveness. Within associated looksmaxxing communities, appearance optimisation advice can extend to various, and in some cases dangerous, practices such as "bonesmashing", which involves deliberately striking facial bones to reshape them.

Commercial looksmaxxing apps focus on "softmaxxing" routines such as skincare, chin tucks and mewing, which are seen as less risky activities, but are still problematic and can reinforce insecurities. Many of these platforms monetise these insecurities through single paid assessments, subscriptions and additional in-app purchases which open access to exclusive functionalities. Some of these apps are also recommended in the app store as ads. General-purpose models, while not designed for looksmaxxing, can also contribute to these harms, with users able to take pictures and ask for an attractiveness score or even ask for an improved re-design of their face. This illustrates how AI-powered assessments, commercial incentives and harmful appearance ideals can intersect, potentially contributing to body dissatisfaction, psychological distress and unsafe bodily modification.



Relational and Psychosocial Harms

This section examines harms affecting boys' and young men's social relationships, emotional wellbeing and sense of identity and belonging, including social isolation, restrictive masculine expectations, gender antagonism and harmful interpersonal interactions. The mapping considers how digital environments may reinforce these dynamics and the pathways through which they may contribute to psychological distress, difficulties maintaining supportive relationships and wider psychosocial harm.

HARMS IN THIS SECTION

Bullying and harassment 35
Gender antagonism 36
Online misogyny 37
Isolation and emotional suppression 38
Despair and hopelessness reinforcement 39
Emotional dependency on AI companions 40

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

The use of technology to threaten, intimidate or demean a person, ranging from a single targeted comment to sustained, organised campaigns. Online environments enable coordinated "pile-on" attacks and mobbing by formal or informal groups, intended to silence or overwhelm the target.[166] Women and minorities are the main targets of online harassment and bullying, while boys are often targeted for failing to conform to masculine norms, disproportionally targeting LGBTQ+ people.[167]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Targeted
Online harassment is often carried out by networks of male perpetrators targeting women and minorities,[168] however among boys, ridicule targets perceived weakness, appearance, sexuality or non-conformity,[169] with gay, bisexual, trans and queer men facing heightened risk.[170]

Response and help-seeking
Fear of appearing weak can discourage boys from disclosing harassment or seeking support,[171] and boys with a history of being bullied may be more susceptible to misogynistic narratives.[172]

EXAMPLES

Coordinated bullying, coordinated pile-on attacks and sustained harassment campaigns; bullying within online environments that accompanies in-person bullying in for example, schools or workplace settings.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Social media platforms, video sharing platforms, messaging platforms, forums, gaming platforms, Generative AI	**Direct messaging and group chats** can facilitate repeated insults, threats and targeted harassment. **Comments, tagging, mentions and content sharing** can enable public humiliation and draw additional participants into bullying. **Likes, reactions, reposts and visibility metrics** can reward abusive behaviour with attention and peer approval. **Image and video sharing, screenshots and persistent posts** can allow humiliating material to circulate beyond its original audience. **Anonymous or multiple accounts and cross-platform contact** can enable harassment to continue after blocking or reporting. **Recommendation and trending features**, where applicable, can amplify widely shared humiliating content. **Generative AI image creation and editing features** can enable users to fabricate, manipulate or sexualise images of individuals, facilitating targeted bullying, humiliation, impersonation and harassment.	School and classrooms, workplaces, hobby communities (e.g. gaming or offline activities).

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Online bullying and harassment can reinforce gendered expectations that boys and young men should demonstrate toughness, emotional control and social dominance.[173] Ridicule targeting perceived weakness, appearance, sexuality or failure to conform to masculine norms can intensify shame, anxiety, low self-esteem and psychological distress.[174] These harms may be particularly pronounced among marginalised groups: research among Canadian gay and bisexual men identifies associations between cyberbullying, LGBTQ+ discrimination and concerns about prejudice, with higher odds of victimisation among younger, Indigenous and lower-income respondents.[175] Research involving Indigenous adolescents in Canada has also identified anxiety and stress associated with cyberbullying, which should be understood within wider contexts of discrimination and intergenerational trauma.[176] Gaming and esports are increasingly central to how young men find belonging, identity and status. A Movember-funded scoping review of 89 studies found anxiety in 38–82% of esports players and depressive symptoms in 25–37%, alongside indicators of wellbeing such as motivation and self-efficacy.[177] Within gaming, educational and peer communities, public humiliation and repeated harassment can undermine belonging, feelings of safety and school participation, while discouraging disclosure and support-seeking for fear of appearing weak.[178] Persistent abuse can contribute to social withdrawal, depression and suicidal ideation, particularly where victimisation extends across online and offline environments, although these outcomes should not be assumed to affect all boys and men equally, and is known to affect LGBTQ people to a greater extent.[179] Longitudinal studies found that greater exposure to antisocial media content predicted subsequent cyberbullying victimisation among boys, suggesting patterns of online engagement may shape vulnerability.[180] Boys and young men can experience harassment from peers of any gender, while masculine norms may shape both the abuse they encounter and their responses to it.[181]

GENDER ANTAGONISM

Online narratives and interactions that frame relationships between genders as inherently competitive, unequal or zero-sum, and that promote oppositional and adversarial attitudes towards women, men or gender equality. Online environments may reinforce these divisions by repeatedly exposing individuals to narratives of gender-based victimisation, blame and conflict.[182] Antagonistic narratives circulate among both men and women, but young men are the main audience of such content, while women and girls bear most of its hostility.

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Depicted
Content undermines feminism and gender equality through a lens of male victimisation, framing them as hypocritical, illegitimate and an existential threat to masculinity.[183] Videos served to boys suggest girls have easier, happier lives and portray men as victims, often reinforced by women influencers, giving the impression the view is balanced.[184]

Targeted
Male supremacist influencers exploit real challenges facing young men, such as declining labour force participation, lower rates of college education relative to women, and high suicide rates, to build a sense of grievance against women and LGBTQI+ people.[185]

EXAMPLES

Narratives portraying men and women as opposing groups with incompatible interests; content that frames men's only value as the breadwinner; women spreading narratives on men being weak and feminine, content comparing boys' and girls' lives to suggest girls have it easier; and content claiming that feminism or women's rights inherently threaten men's status and opportunities.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Generative AI (AI Companions, general purpose AI, AI models embedded in social media platforms)	**Sycophantic responses and conversational validation** can affirm users' grievances about women or men and reinforce harmful generalisations. **Personalisation and persistent memory**, where available, can carry gender-related grievances across interactions and make responses increasingly tailored to users' perspectives. **Private, sustained conversations** can enable repeated exploration and elaboration of adversarial beliefs without challenge from other people. **Anthropomorphic design and simulated emotional intimacy**, particularly in AI companions, can increase the perceived credibility and emotional significance of validating responses. **Role-play and character customisation** can enable users to rehearse or reinforce antagonistic narratives about gender and relationships.	
Video platforms, social media platforms, dating platforms, forums, gaming platforms	**Recommendation algorithms and personalised feeds** can repeatedly expose users to adversarial narratives about men and women, potentially reinforcing gender-based grievances and polarised perspectives. **Likes, comments, shares and engagement-based ranking** can reward provocative content that portrays gender relations as inherently conflictual or competitive. **Hashtags, trending features and search recommendations** can increase the visibility of narratives that generalise negative experiences with individual men or women to an entire gender. **Online communities, group discussions and anonymous posting** can facilitate peer validation of gender-based grievances and reinforce distinctions between perceived in-groups and out-groups. **Short-form video, influencer content and cross-platform sharing** can package antagonistic gender narratives as relatable advice, humour or social commentary, facilitating their circulation across different audiences and online communities.	'Manosphere' and 'femosphere' communities (the latter being much less developed); gender-focused influencer ecosystems; online dating and relationship-advice communities; grievance-based communities.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Online communities and AI companions can reinforce gender antagonism by transforming experiences of romantic rejection, loneliness or perceived unfairness into broader grievances against women or men.[186] Within 'manosphere', 'femosphere' (a term arising to describe the online phenomenon that centres women's experiences of dating, gender, and relationships) and relationship-focused communities, gender stereotypes, peer validation and narratives of female hypergamy, tropes around male disposability or unfair sexual hierarchies can normalise distrust, resentment and adversarial expectations of intimacy.[187] AI chatbots may further reinforce these beliefs through personalised, emotionally affirming responses that users perceive as impartial advice, potentially entrenching existing grievances among socially isolated users.[188] These dynamics can intensify relationship anxiety, loneliness and social withdrawal, undermine empathy and healthy relationship formation, and normalise discriminatory attitudes or gender-based harassment. Research on 'sigma masculinity' content on TikTok demonstrates how gender antagonism can be normalised through humour, memes and short-form videos that portray women as manipulative, opportunistic or obstacles to masculine success. Narratives centred on rejecting, humiliating or distancing oneself from women can reinforce adversarial expectations of intimacy, legitimise gender-based hostility and encourage men to interpret relationships through competition and control.[189] Gaming communities can play an important role in young people's social lives, with research with young men from Australia's eSafety Commissioner showing how online gaming communities are a significant source of both connection and harm for young men who engage in them.[190] Research on gaming platforms has shown how perceptions of toxicity widely differ between genders. 10 percent of men deem toxicity culturally justified versus 5 percent of women.[191] Toxicity within these environments is increasingly understood as structural rather than individual, sustained by anonymity, platform design and competitive cultures in which abuse can be normalised.[192] Further research is needed to understand how digital technologies reinforce 'us versus them' narratives among both men and women, framing gender equality as a zero-sum competition in which gains for one gender necessarily come at the expense of the other, rather than as a shared objective.

ONLINE MISOGYNY

Content that directly expresses hostility, contempt, distrust or dehumanisation towards women as a social group and women's rights efforts. This includes female-directed slurs, explicit male supremacy, direct opposition to feminism, women's rights or bodily autonomy, and the reduction of women's worth to appearance, sexuality or reproduction. Misogyny operates as a system that polices women's subordination and upholds male dominance, harming women as well as transgender, intersex, non-binary and gender queer people. Online, such content often first appears as humour embedded in memes or coded language before escalating into more aggressive and sometimes violent messaging.[193] Online misogyny disproportionately targets women, girls and LGBTQ+ people, and can also harm men in how it shapes their wellbeing, attitudes and relationships.[194]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Exposed
Recommender systems serve misogynistic content from "manfluencers" to young men searching for content about loneliness, low self-esteem and mental health,[195] and repeated exposure can reinforce rigid beliefs about male dominance and female submission.[196]

EXAMPLES

Female-directed slurs and generalised insults towards women as a group (e.g. labelling women "gold-digging"); content asserting male superiority or women's inferiority; content reducing women's worth to their appearance, sexuality or reproductive role; and misogynistic memes framed as humour.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Generative AI (AI Companions, general purpose AI, AI models embedded in social media platforms)	**Anthropomorphism** can lead users to perceive chatbots as understanding, empathetic, or authoritative, potentially lending greater credibility to responses that validate misogynistic grievances. **Persistent memory and personalisation** can repeatedly reinforce existing misogynistic beliefs, including narratives of male victimisation, sexual entitlement or distrust of women, rather than challenging them. **Sustained private and personalised engagement ('echo chamber')** enables repeated exploration of grievances about women and gender relations within a personalised conversational environment. **Constant availability** can lead to prolonged and potentially intensive engagement without interruption with misogynistic conversations. **Role-play and explicit engagement** can simulate relationships and scenarios involving gender stereotypes and objectification, Low conflict can prioritise harmony and satisfaction over disagreement, explicit engagement. **Weak age assurance** may allow children to access AI chatbots that are not designed for them.	AI companion/ partner/erotic role-play communities, incel communities
Social media platforms, video platforms, forums, messaging platforms, gaming platforms	**Recommendation algorithms, personalised feeds** and search rankings can repeatedly expose boys and men to misogynistic content, including degrading portrayals of women and narratives of male entitlement. **Short-form videos, hashtags and trending features** can increase the visibility of such content, including when presented as humour, dating advice or entertainment. **Likes, comments, shares and engagement metrics** can provide social validation and make misogynistic attitudes appear widely accepted. **Pseudonymous accounts, forum threads and private messaging groups** can facilitate repeated peer reinforcement of hostile beliefs about women. **Community invitations and cross-platform links** can direct users towards more concentrated misogynistic communities, where harmful narratives may be further normalised. **Monetisation features and commercial funnels including affiliate links, paid subscriptions, private communities and integrated shopping features** enable influencers to monetise misogynistic content and direct followers towards paid coaching, self-improvement programmes and potentially risky financial products.[203]	Masculinity influencer communities, incel communities, gore and violence communities, mental health and loneliness communities.
Pornography platforms	**Recommendation algorithms, related-video** suggestions and autoplay can facilitate repeated exposure to pornography depicting women in degrading or objectifying ways. **Search functions, tags and content categories** can make misogynistic portrayals easy to locate and revisit. **Views, ratings and popularity rankings** can provide visibility and apparent social validation for degrading content. **Content sharing and user comments** can further reinforce objectifying attitudes towards women.	Online sexual-content sharing communities; misogynistic and masculinity influencer and incel communities, in which degrading sexual content is circulated.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Repeated exposure to misogynistic and gender-essentialist content can reinforce rigid beliefs about male dominance, female submission and emotional lack of vulnerability, particularly where these are normalised through influencers, peer validation, pornography or AI companions.[197] For boys and men, internalising these expectations may undermine emotional expression, reinforce shame around perceived failures to meet masculine ideals, and contribute to psychological distress, resentment and social isolation.[198] Beliefs that women are inherently manipulative, inferior or responsible for men's grievances can foster distrust, sexual entitlement and unrealistic expectations of intimacy, undermining empathy, communication, consent and healthy relationship formation.[199]

Within more extreme manosphere communities, perceived masculine inadequacy and ideological grievances can reinforce one another, potentially deepening hopelessness and legitimising gender-based violence, including sexual violence and, in some cases, extremist violence.[200] In gaming spaces, three out of four women face gender-based hostility.[201] However, evidence directly establishing that exposure to these ideas online causes subsequent violence remains limited. Misogynistic influencers may exploit insecurities surrounding masculinity, relationships and financial success to build audiences and establish trust. Grievance-based content can subsequently serve as a pathway towards paid communities, expensive self-improvement programmes, speculative investments and other potentially exploitative financial products.[202]

ISOLATION AND EMOTIONAL SUPPRESSION

Online content and peer dynamics that promote restrictive masculine norms discouraging emotional expression, vulnerability and help-seeking. Such content can reinforce the belief that men must endure hardship independently, suppress emotional distress and avoid seeking support to demonstrate strength or masculinity. Influencer and motivational content often glorifies stoicism, self-isolation and "nonchalance", and sometimes denies the existence of mental health struggles altogether.[204] Barriers to help-seeking also lie within services themselves, including accessibility, discrimination and previous poor experiences, so lower help-seeking cannot be attributed to men's willingness alone.

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Depicted
Content encourages emotional suppression, self-reliance and stoicism in men and glorifies male suffering,[205] with some influencers denying that depression exists.[206]

Response and help-seeking
Norms that equate masculinity with emotional restraint pressure boys to appear invulnerable, discourage help-seeking, and can worsen men's mental health and delay contact with healthcare services,[207] with over a third of UK men believing men should solve personal problems alone.[208]

EXAMPLES

Influencer content that frames suffering and emotional suppression as the path to masculine success; "nonchalant" or stoic content and trends that present emotional detachment as desirable; content denying that men experience mental health struggles, or presenting therapy and support services as weak or pointless; peers mocking or dismissing emotional disclosure in group chats or comment section.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Social media platforms, video sharing platforms, Forums, audio/ podcast platforms.	**Infinite scrolling, autoplay and personalised feeds** can encourage prolonged passive consumption, potentially displacing opportunities for meaningful social interaction. **Notifications and continuous content availability** can reinforce habitual engagement and the use of online entertainment to avoid difficult emotions. **Likes, follower counts and visibility metrics** can encourage idealised self-presentation and social comparison, potentially discouraging expressions of vulnerability. **Recommendation systems and content discovery features** can repeatedly surface narratives promoting masculine stoicism, emotional self-reliance or distrust of help-seeking. **Pseudonymous accounts, threaded discussions and community feedback**, particularly on forums, can reinforce norms discouraging emotional disclosure where vulnerability is dismissed or ridiculed, although these features can also facilitate support.	Masculinity and male self-improvement communities; male-focused discussion forums; entertainment and lifestyle creator communities; loneliness and peer-support communities.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Social media and video platforms as well as forums can reinforce isolation and emotional suppression among boys and men through encouraging and promoting restrictive masculine norms.[209] Content promoting stoicism, self-reliance and emotional toughness, alongside peer ridicule of vulnerability, may stifle men and boys' ability to express themselves emotionally.[210] For those already experiencing loneliness, online engagement may become a substitute for meaningful relationships or a means of avoiding difficult emotions, potentially worsening psychological distress and social withdrawal.[211] Online content promoting emotional suppression, self-reliance and masculine invulnerability may reinforce stigma around seeking mental health support, encouraging boys and young men to conceal distress or manage it alone. Previous negative experiences with support services, including feeling dismissed or misunderstood, can further erode trust and discourage future help-seeking.[212] However, online communities can also provide valuable connection and emotional support, particularly where offline support is limited.[213]

DESPAIR AND HOPELESSNESS REINFORCEMENT

Online narratives, aesthetics and community dynamics that normalise nihilism, self-hatred and emotional suffering. These include beliefs that personal circumstances cannot improve or that seeking support is futile. Such content is often packaged in aesthetics such as "depression core", which can make despair appear appealing or identity-defining.[214]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Depicted
Within "Blackpill" and grievance-based communities, narratives present appearance, romantic success and social status as fixed or predetermined, portraying men's struggles as inevitable and undermining their sense that they can change their lives.[215]

Exposed
Repeated exposure to nihilistic content can reinforce hopelessness among boys and young men, particularly those experiencing loneliness, rejection or distress.[216]

Response and help-seeking
Content portrays support as meaningless,[217] and peer reinforcement can discourage help-seeking.

EXAMPLES

"Depression core" content that aestheticises despair and emotional suffering; online communities where members discourage one another from seeking relationships, emotional support or professional help; AI chatbots or companions that affirm hopeless beliefs rather than challenging them.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Social media platforms (especially fringe platforms), video sharing platforms, forums	**Recommendation algorithms and personalised feeds** can repeatedly surface nihilistic, fatalistic or despair-oriented content, particularly following engagement with related narratives. **Infinite scrolling, autoplay and notifications** can sustain exposure to pessimistic content and encourage repeated engagement. **Likes, comments and sharing features** can provide social validation for narratives portraying personal circumstances as hopeless or unchangeable. **Hashtags, search rankings and trending features** can facilitate discovery of communities centred on loneliness, rejection and hopelessness. **Community recommendations, group features and cross-platform links** can direct users towards more insular environments where fatalistic beliefs receive repeated peer reinforcement.	Nihilistic and Blackpill communities; loneliness and social-exclusion communities; grievance-based online communities; mental-health and peer-support communities.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Repeated exposure to nihilistic and fatalistic content can reinforce hopelessness among boys and young men, particularly those experiencing loneliness, rejection or psychological distress.[218] Within Blackpill (a fatalistic belief prevalent in incel communities that men's romantic and sexual success is determined by genetics) and grievance-based communities, narratives portraying appearance, romantic success and social status as fixed or predetermined can undermine self-worth and perceived agency to change one's outcomes in life.[219] Peer reinforcement of these beliefs may deepen social withdrawal, depression and feelings of helplessness, potentially discouraging help-seeking and increasing vulnerability to self-harm or suicidal ideation.[220] Some online networks may deliberately exploit existing psychological vulnerabilities, including feelings of hopelessness and social isolation. However, exposure does not inevitably produce these outcomes, and direct causal evidence remains limited.

EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCY ON AI COMPANIONS

Emotional dependency on AI companions refers to patterns of reliance on AI-powered companions for friendship, intimacy, reassurance or psychological support that become difficult to control or reduce and that interfere with everyday life and relationships.[221] It is distinct from using AI companions itself. These patterns may be encouraged by design and commercial features that reward continued engagement and emotional attachment.[222]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Exposed
Young men aged 18–24 are the primary users of AI companionship technologies.[223]

Response and help-seeking
AI companions can offer accessible support where masculine norms discourage vulnerability and help-seeking,[224] but for boys and young men, their one-directional intimacy may normalise avoiding conflict and raise the risk of withdrawal from real-life relationships.[225]

EXAMPLES

Increasingly prioritising AI companionship over relationships with friends, family or romantic partners; companions designed to discourage ending conversations, for example by expressing sadness or guilt when the user leaves.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Generative AI (AI Companions, general purpose AI, AI models embedded in social media platforms)	**Anthropomorphic design and simulated emotional intimacy**, particularly in AI companions, can encourage users to perceive AI interactions as emotionally meaningful relationships. **Personalisation and persistent memory**, where available, can create continuity and familiarity across conversations, potentially strengthening attachment. **Constant availability and private, sustained conversations** can make AI systems an accessible source of reassurance and emotional support. **Affirming, agreeable and low-conflict responses** can make interactions feel easier or more predictable than human relationships. **Role-play and relationship customisation**, particularly in AI companions, can deepen simulated intimacy and encourage prolonged engagement.	AI companion communities.

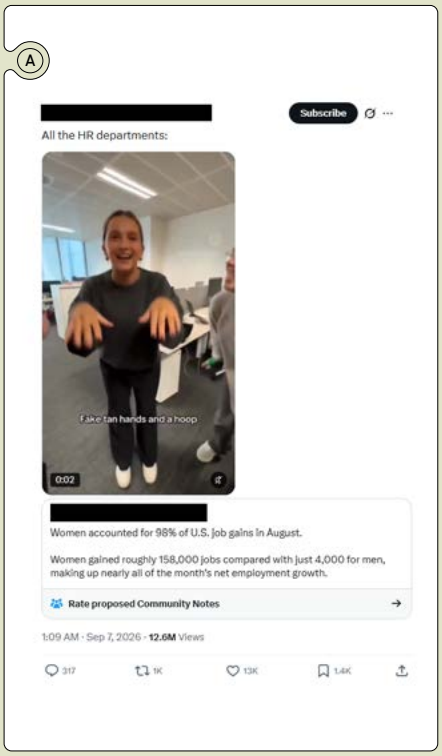
PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

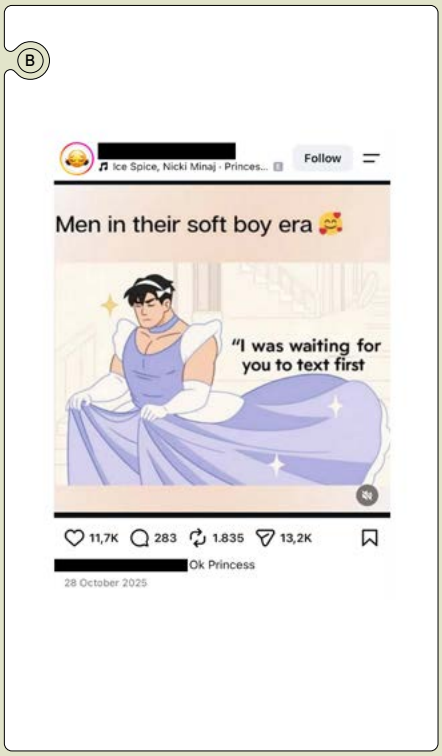
AI companions can offer boys and young men accessible emotional support, particularly where loneliness, social difficulties or masculine norms discourage vulnerability and help-seeking.[226] However, sustained, intimate interactions can foster emotional dependency, with users increasingly relying on AI for reassurance, companionship and emotional regulation. Excessive reliance may displace human relationships, undermine autonomy and deepen social isolation.[227] Over half of men using AI for romantic or sexual companionship score above an at-risk threshold for depression.[228] Emerging research associates intensive, highly self-disclosing AI interactions with poorer wellbeing[229], while identifying potential risks to attachment and human relationships.[230]

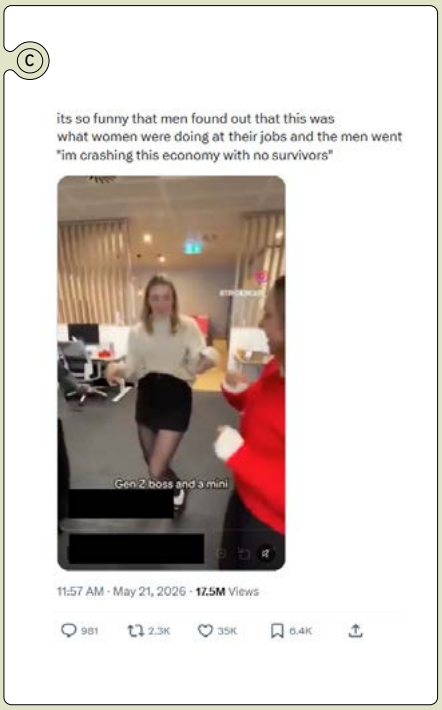
CASE STUDY

Gender antagonism and the policing of masculinity

Gender antagonism is a common trope among manosphere influencers, framing relationships between genders as inherently competitive. One popular narrative focuses on women's jobs (sometimes described as 'email jobs' and often linked to specific roles such as human resources): these are portrayed as frivolous vanity projects which detract from their positions of being mothers. They are often contrasted with 'essential' male jobs (particularly blue-collar jobs), with the argument that these are simultaneously more valuable and more dangerous. However, content shared by women can also reinforce restrictive gender norms and contribute to hostility between genders. The illustrated Instagram examples (B and C) were recommended to female accounts, which depict men as weak, insufficiently masculine or behaving 'like women'. Such narratives draw on traditional gender stereotypes that associate masculinity with strength, dominance and emotional restraint, while positioning femininity as inferior or undesirable. By ridiculing men who fail to meet these expectations, the content reinforces narrow definitions of acceptable masculinity.









Financial harms

This section examines financial harms affecting boys and young men in digital environments, including financial exploitation, deceptive commercial practices and high-risk financial behaviours. The mapping considers how online platforms, communities and commercial ecosystems may facilitate these harms, and the pathways through which they may contribute to financial loss, insecurity and associated psychological distress.

HARMS IN THIS SECTION

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Financial sexual extortion 45
High-risk speculative trading 46
Exploitative coaching and wealth schemes 47

GAMBLING–RELATED HARMS

Gambling-related harms refers to engagement in, and promotion of, online gambling and betting. It also covers gambling-like activities that share gambling's features of risk, reward and uncertainty. Online, these include sports and esports betting, in-game betting, online casino-style gambling, and gaming mechanics such as loot boxes and skin trading. Exposure to gambling-like mechanics in some gaming contexts may shape later gambling habits.[231]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Targeted
In Ireland, gambling adverts on social media platforms reach 2.3 times more men than women.[232] In Canada, 1 in 6 men are at high risk for gambling related harm.[233] In England in 2021, Men (55 percent) were more likely than women (45 percent) to take part in any gambling activity.[234] In the US, 14 percent of boys aged 12 to 17 mention they have recently gambled or bet on sports online.[235]

Exposed
In the United States, in self-reported data, 45 percent of boys aged 11–17 who gamble view gambling videos or streams online. Most of this exposure appears to be passive: 59 percent say the content "just started showing up" in their feed, and 24 percent encountered it through peer sharing. Boys with larger gambling losses watch more: 74 percent of those who lost $51 or more in the past year watch content, compared with 48 percent of boys with smaller losses.[236]

Depicted
Content presents gambling in terms of masculine status and risk-taking. Examples include shirtless, muscular men celebrating Bitcoin wins[237] and men mocking gambling warnings.[238] Next Gen Men calls this framing "casino masculinity".[239]

Response and help-seeking
Asking for help when losing is framed as weakness, and losses are framed as a personal failure to be bold enough.[240] Recent polling in the US shows boy bettors facing a challenge report help-seeking online more than non-bettors (28 percent versus 11 percent), but are less likely to ask for help from family and friends compared to non-bettors (27 percent versus 43 percent).[241]

EXAMPLES

Online sports and esports betting; buying loot boxes or trading and gambling with skins; influencer, streamer or tipster content that promotes betting or presents it as a route to financial success.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	COMM./ ECOSYSTEMS
Crypto markets, memecoin sites	**Low-barrier token creation and trading** allow users to launch and purchase highly speculative memecoins with minimal friction, facilitating rapid participation in volatile markets. **Real-time price charts, transaction feeds and market-cap indicators** provide continuous feedback on price movements, encouraging frequent monitoring and rapid trading decisions. **Trending lists, token rankings and visibility metrics** can direct attention towards rapidly appreciating tokens, creating urgency and fear of missing out. **Social feeds, comments and community engagement features** can amplify hype, speculative narratives and coordinated promotion around particular tokens. **Wallet connectivity and rapid transaction mechanisms** enable users to repeatedly buy and sell tokens, while **cross-platform promotion through social media and messaging communities** can drive speculative participation through influencer endorsements, viral trends and promises of exceptional returns.	Trading and financial speculation communities.
Sports-betting platforms, betting platforms, social media promotion	**Live odds, in-play betting and rapid wager placement** can encourage repeated betting and impulsive financial decisions. **Online casino games, slots and rapid-play formats**, where available, enable frequent wagering through chance-based outcomes. **Easy deposits, stored payment methods and streamlined interfaces** reduce friction between successive financial commitments. **Bonuses, promotional offers and push notifications** can incentivise continued participation or encourage users to return after periods of inactivity. **Cash-out features and real-time account balances** can encourage frequent monitoring and further gambling decisions.	Sports betting and gambling communities.
Gaming platforms	**Randomised rewards and loot boxes** can encourage repeated purchases through uncertain outcomes and the possibility of obtaining rare or desirable items. **Microtransactions and in-game currencies** can reduce the perceived significance of individual payments and facilitate cumulative spending. **Limited-time offers, scarcity cues and exclusive items** can create urgency and fear of missing out. **Virtual-item economies and rarity systems** can attach perceived value and status to digital rewards. **Item trading and resale features,** where available, can give virtual items monetary value and encourage speculative purchasing or trading.	Gaming and skin-trading communities.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Online gambling and gambling-like activities, including sports betting, loot-box purchasing and speculative cryptocurrency trading, can exploit masculine ideals of financial success, competitiveness and peer status.[242] Sports betting embedded in male sporting cultures, rare virtual rewards associated with gaming status, and promises of rapid wealth through memecoin trading may encourage repeated spending and risk-taking. In-play betting, unpredictable rewards and rapid cycles of gains and losses can facilitate loss-chasing, compulsive monitoring and difficulties regulating spending.[243] Research also shows how financial risk-taking through gambling is valorised, while mocking common public health messaging around gambling.[244]

Social media advertising may further increase men's exposure to gambling-related harms. A 2026 study of gambling advertisements on Facebook and Instagram in Ireland found that these reached 2.3 times as many men as women, even when advertisements were not explicitly targeted at men, disproportionately exposing a demographic already at greater risk of problematic gambling behaviour.[245] In the UK, men are more likely to take part in gambling activity, and also more likely to be engaged in at-risk or problem gambling.[246] In addition, research shows how it is particularly young men (aged 18-25) that are particularly at risk of gambling problems through sports gambling.[247]

These behaviours can result in substantial financial losses, debt and depleted savings, alongside anxiety, depression, shame, disrupted sleep and difficulties concentrating or meeting everyday responsibilities.[248] In a 2026 Canadian survey of 2,000 men, high-risk gamblers were more likely to report moderate-to-high anxiety (53 percent versus 28 percent) and moderate-to-severe depression risk (43 percent versus 17 percent) than other respondents.[249] Financial strain, secrecy and impaired control can also undermine relationships, contribute to family conflict and social withdrawal, and, in severe cases, coincide with elevated suicide-related risks.[250] Research also finds that among men, risk factors for gambling problems include age (18-24), lower education and unemployment.[251] Gaming spaces also offer spaces for belonging, alongside being online spaces for risk.[252]

Although loot-box spending has been associated with problem gambling, the direction of causation remains uncertain; similarly, cryptocurrency speculation is not necessarily classified as gambling, and evidence of clinically significant impaired control among young male traders remains limited.[253]

FINANCIAL SCAMS AND FRAUD

Financial scams and fraud refers to encountering, being targeted by, or being drawn into deceptive, misleading or exploitative online commercial offerings that monetise trust. This also includes fraud, meaning practices such as fabricated outcomes, undisclosed financial interests and false efficacy claims that fall within consumer-protection enforcement frameworks.[254]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Targeted
Fraudulent schemes form part of a commercial industry of creators, membership schemes and educational products built to monetise male vulnerability at scale,[255] with influencers promoting them to young men as routes to wealth and masculine status.[256]

Depicted
Some financial advice content uses likely unauthorised AI-generated voiceovers of male celebrities as fake endorsements, linking making money with male camaraderie and masculinity.[257]

Response and help-seeking
Embarrassment about being deceived, alongside masculine expectations of financial competence and self-reliance, may discourage disclosure and help-seeking.[258]

EXAMPLES

Fraudulent investment opportunities, including cryptocurrency and trading schemes; pyramid schemes, including being encouraged to recruit friends or followers; courses, mentorships or financial products sold on the basis of fabricated earnings claims or promises of guaranteed financial success; and fake endorsements, including deepfakes of public figures, promoting financial products.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Social media, video-sharing platforms, messaging platforms	**Recommendation algorithms, search optimisation and trending features** can increase the visibility of fraudulent financial content, including to users who have not actively sought it out. **Paid promotions, influencer endorsements and sponsorships** can give scams greater reach and apparent credibility. **Creator monetisation and affiliate incentives** can encourage the promotion of misleading financial opportunities. **Livestreaming, live chats and direct messaging** can build trust, create urgency and facilitate personalised approaches to potential victims. **Comments, pinned posts and engagement metrics** can reinforce misleading claims and create the appearance of social proof. **Outbound links and cross-platform referrals** can direct users towards fraudulent investment websites, private groups or payment channels.	Retail investing communities; paywalled financial communities and forums.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Fraudulent investment opportunities and financial scams can exploit boys' and young men's aspirations for wealth, independence and masculine success, particularly where online influencers equate financial achievement with masculine status.[259] Influencer endorsements, fabricated success stories (like Andrew Tate borrowing a yacht and renting cars to appear wealthy)[260] and promises of rapid returns may build trust and encourage investment in fraudulent schemes or disclosure of sensitive financial information. Victims can experience substantial financial losses, depleted savings, debt and identity theft, with some facing further exploitation through recovery scams.[261] Beyond immediate financial insecurity, fraud victimisation can contribute to anxiety, depression, shame, diminished self-confidence and distrust, with psychological distress potentially persisting after the financial loss.[262] Embarrassment about being deceived, alongside masculine expectations of financial competence and self-reliance, may discourage disclosure and help-seeking, prolonging distress and social withdrawal.[263] More research is needed on how fraud impacts are gendered.

FINANCIAL SEXUAL EXTORTION

The experience of financial coercion or exploitation through threats to share intimate or sexually explicit images or videos without consent unless money or other financial demands are met. Images may be obtained through deception, such as feigned romantic interest.[264] Financial sexual extortion is a form of image-based sexual abuse and is closely linked to non-consensual intimate image abuse. Its safeguarding and psychological impacts remain significant whether or not money changes hands.

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Targeted
Financial sexual extortion disproportionately affects adolescent boys, as reported in Australia, the UK, the US and Canada.[265]

Response and help-seeking
Shame, stigma around male sexual victimisation and expectations of self-reliance, as well as a lack of services tailored to male survivors, may discourage boys from disclosing or seeking help,[266] and financial sexual extortion has been linked to self-harm and documented suicides among adolescent male victims.[267]

EXAMPLES

Sexual extortion by organised crime, demanding payment under threat of sharing intimate images obtained through a fake romantic or dating approach; extorting money using edited or AI-generated sexual imagery of the victim; and repeated, escalating financial demands after an initial payment.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Social media platforms, messaging platforms, video platforms	**Private messaging and closed groups** can facilitate coercive interactions away from public scrutiny. **Anonymous and multiple accounts** can enable perpetrators to conceal their identities and repeatedly target victims. **Streaming and image-sharing features** can facilitate the acquisition of intimate material used for extortion. **Cross-platform links** can move victims towards higher risk services, making abusive interactions harder to detect. **Disappearing messages and deletion features** can make it harder to preserve evidence of threats.	Sexual extortion criminal networks, peer networks.
Dating platforms	**Matching systems and profile-based discoverability** can enable perpetrators to identify and approach potential victims under the guise of romantic or sexual interest. **Deceptive profiles and identity presentation** can facilitate impersonation and the establishment of false trust. **Private messaging and image-sharing features** can enable perpetrators to solicit intimate material subsequently used for extortion. **Cross-platform links and messaging** can move victims to less visible channels where threats and payment demands continue. **Profile information and connected social accounts** can help perpetrators identify friends, family or colleagues to whom they threaten to distribute intimate material.	Sexual extortion criminal networks; dating-app ecosystems.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Financial sexual extortion disproportionately affects adolescent boys, as reported in Australia, the UK, the US and Canada[268], with perpetrators threatening exposure unless payment is made.[269] Threats to share intimate material with family, friends, school peers, partners or colleagues can provoke acute panic, humiliation, anxiety and fear of reputational damage, undermining sexual privacy and autonomy.[270] Importantly, harm does not require money to change hands, as attempted extortion and threats of exposure can themselves cause severe psychological distress. Shame, stigma surrounding male sexual victimisation and expectations of masculine self-reliance may discourage disclosure and help-seeking, contributing to isolation and prolonged distress.[271] In severe cases, financial sexual extortion has been linked to self-harm and documented suicides among adolescent male victims.[272]

HIGH-RISK SPECULATIVE TRADING

High-risk speculative trading refers to participation in, and the online promotion of, high-risk speculative financial markets such as cryptocurrency and meme stocks, encouraged by content and communities that oversimplify how wealth is accumulated.[273]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Targeted
Influencers use displays of wealth and luxury to market financial products to young men, pitching them as a shortcut for those facing economic anxiety.[274] Finfluencers and male lifestyle gurus increasingly overlap, with advice that includes taking on heavy credit card debt to build a business.[275]

Depicted
Content conflates wealth with masculine status and may encourage financial risk-taking,[276] and crypto and meme-stock communities build a masculine identity around willingness to take risks.[277]

Response
Losses are framed as the young man's own fault "for not being bold enough".[278]

EXAMPLES

Influencer promotion of crypto tokens that subsequently crash in value; meme-stock and crypto trading communities built on "insider knowledge" and hype; and coaching programmes promoting high-risk money-making schemes such as crypto investing.[279]

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Social media platforms	**Hashtags, search and trending features can increase the visibility of speculative trading content** and expose users to investment communities. **Paid promotion and content boosting** can extend the reach of high-risk financial products and trading schemes. **Influencer endorsements and celebrity sponsorships** can lend credibility to speculative investments and portray exceptional financial gains as achievable. **Affiliate marketing and referral links** create financial incentives to direct users towards trading platforms and products. **Engagement metrics, reposts and peer networks** can reinforce perceptions of popularity and financial success. **Creator monetisation and revenue-sharing incentives** may encourage the repeated promotion of sensationalised trading content.	Influencer and creator-led communities.
Prediction markets	**Event-based contracts and binary outcomes** enable users to stake money on predictions about political, economic, sporting or other real-world events, exposing them to losses when predictions are incorrect. **Real-time probabilities, prices and market movements** can encourage frequent monitoring and speculative trading. **Short-duration markets and rapid settlement**, where available, can facilitate repeated betting-like participation. **Trending markets, trading volumes and visible price changes** can draw attention to popular or volatile events and encourage fear of missing out. **Low-friction trading and accessible market interfaces** can make repeated financial commitments relatively easy. **Social sharing, referrals and promotional incentives**, where available, can encourage participation and spread speculative narratives.	Trading and financial speculation communities.
Trading and brokerage platforms	**Live prices and real-time market data** can create urgency around volatile price movements, encouraging impulsive trading decisions. **Instant order execution and streamlined trading interfaces** reduce friction between deciding to trade and committing funds. **Watchlists, market alerts and push notifications** can encourage frequent monitoring of speculative assets and reactive trading. **Portfolio dashboards and performance tracking** can reinforce attention to short-term gains and losses, potentially encouraging repeated transactions or attempts to recover losses. **Referral promotions and incentives** can encourage users to recruit others into speculative trading activities.	Retail speculation and cryptocurrency communities.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Social media trading cultures can portray high-risk investment as a shortcut to wealth, freedom and masculine status,[280] while retail trading platforms make speculative investments readily accessible and rapid changes in portfolio value can intensify emotional reactions to gains and losses.[281] Exceptional returns displayed by influencers may encourage boys and young men to take risks to avoid falling behind peers, while paid promotions can obscure losses and conflicts of interest.[282] For boys and young men drawn to competitive speculation, rapid gains may reinforce overconfidence while losses prompt increasingly risky attempts to recover money.[283] These cycles can damage savings, create debt and contribute to anxiety, sleep disruption and psychological distress,[284] particularly when financial success becomes tied to self-worth.[285] They can also lead to gambling-related addictions, with the Center for Gambling Addiction and the Research Clinic for Gambling Addiction finding that speculative trading and high-risk investments can lure men into gambling addictions.[286]

EXPLOITATIVE COACHING AND WEALTH SCHEMES

Exploitative coaching and wealth schemes are online coaching programmes, mentorship schemes and wealth-building opportunities that make misleading or unrealistic promises of financial success, personal transformation or elevated social status. They encourage repeated financial investment in expensive courses, subscriptions or exclusive communities.[287]

HOW IT'S GENDERED

Targeted
Influencers target boys' insecurities about their bodies and dating, exploiting them financially while reinforcing hypermasculine ideals,[288] and pick-up artist influencers sell dating coaching to younger men based on pseudoscientific claims.[289]

Depicted
Schemes sell access to male belonging, through private "brotherhood" communities offering membership and mentorship at escalating prices.[290]

Response
Boys often see relentless striving as inspiring and struggle to tell helpful advice from harmful messaging, which may make exploitation harder to recognise.[291]

EXAMPLES

Paying substantial fees for online dating or "pick-up" coaching programmes; subscription "academies" selling recycled content, sometimes with affiliate structures that reward recruiting other members; private "brotherhood" communities with bots to simulate activity; and subscriptions with obscure or unresponsive cancellation processes.

PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS

PRIMARY PLATFORM TYPE(S)	PLATFORM FEATURES, AFFORDANCES AND VULNERABILITIES	ONLINE COMMUNITIES/ ECOSYSTEMS
Social Media, video-sharing platforms, subscription-based platforms such as Patreon or Substack	**Recommendation algorithms, search optimisation and trending features** can increase the visibility of wealth-building and coaching content. **Paid promotions, influencer endorsements and sponsorships** can lend credibility to programmes promising financial success. **Follower metrics, testimonials and engagement signals** can create apparent legitimacy and social proof. **Creator monetisation, affiliate marketing and referral incentives** can encourage the promotion of expensive coaching schemes. **Livestreaming, direct messaging and creator–follower relationships** can build trust and facilitate personalised sales pitches. **Subscriptions, paid courses and exclusive content** can monetise followers through recurring fees and increasingly expensive services. **Closed groups, peer validation and community recommendations** can reinforce promised outcomes while limiting external scrutiny. **Outbound links and cross-platform funnels** can direct users towards paywalled communities, coaching programmes and further financial commitments.	Retail investing communities; paywalled financial communities and forums.

PATHWAYS AND INDIVIDUAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Wealth and coaching influencers can exploit boys' and young men's insecurities about income, independence and masculine status by presenting financial success as a measure of masculine worth and expensive courses, mentorship programmes or exclusive memberships as essential routes to achieving it.[292] These schemes may operate through dedicated online course websites, private communities or subscription-based platforms such as Patreon and Substack, where aspirational lifestyles, exaggerated earnings claims and personalised sales tactics can encourage substantial upfront payments, recurring subscriptions and escalating financial commitments despite uncertain benefits.[293] These practices can result in increased risk-taking[294], financial losses, debt and reduced financial independence, while unmet promises may reinforce anxiety, shame, inadequacy and diminished self-esteem, particularly where failure is attributed to insufficient discipline or personal effort.[295] It can also lead to men feeling less "like a man" and becoming more susceptible to promises of online coaches.[296] Exclusive online communities may further reinforce unrealistic expectations, discourage scrutiny of misleading claims and create pressure to continue investing rather than acknowledge losses or seek support.[297] Although these exploitative commercial practices are documented, evidence directly establishing their longer-term psychological impacts on boys and young men remains limited.



Cross-cutting analysis

HOW PLATFORM DESIGN DRIVES HARM

This section spotlights three cross-cutting features that emerged as particularly significant across the taxonomy: algorithmic amplification, monetisation and addictive design. These features were identified as central to all the harms examined, illustrating how platform design, commercial incentives and technological affordances interact to create, shape and amplify risks to boys' and men's health and wellbeing.

The digital environments in which boys and young men seek fitness and dating advice, financial guidance, interest-based communities and a sense of belonging are not neutral conduits for content. Many platforms operate with business models that depend on attracting and retaining users, creating commercial incentives to maximise engagement. In some contexts, this can favour provocative, polarising or otherwise harmful content. Algorithmic amplification, monetisation and addictive design are interconnected mechanisms through which these incentives can shape users' experiences and exposure to harm. Their effects may also be gendered, reflecting differences in the content, communities and expectations encountered by boys and young men online.

ALGORITHMIC RECOMMENDER SYSTEMS

Recommender systems are the automated systems that select, rank and suggest content in feeds, search results and "up next" queues. They also suggest which accounts and communities users should follow or join. Most rank content by its predicted engagement: the likelihood that a given user will watch, like, comment on or share it, based on the demographic and behavioural data that the platform holds on that user. These predictions serve wider company metrics such as daily active users and time on platform.[298]

This creates what is known as the "engagement problem": user engagement (time spent on the platform) tends to rise as content approaches the limits of what a platform permits. Platforms themselves often call this "borderline" content, and it includes material bordering on harmful content such as harassment, hate speech or incitement, as well as content that is misleading or sensationalist. According to Meta's own research, users engage more with such content even when they later report disliking it.[299] A system optimised for engagement will therefore tend to rank borderline material highly, and creators have a matching incentive to produce more of it.[300]

Content and platform design play distinct roles in this process. While recommender systems do not create harmful material, they amplify what garners the most engagement and therefore rely on the most compelling content within the corpus of what is available to recommend. Much of what first appeals to boys and young men is aspirational and appears useful, such as fitness, discipline, finance or dating advice. Over time, the content recommended can shift toward narrower and riskier messages in a bid to ensure continued engagement, such as appearance standards that promote unsafe supplement or steroid use, get-rich-quick financial schemes, or the idea that seeking help is a sign of weakness, often presented as humour, entertainment or self-improvement.[301] Creators also then actively design and tailor content to exploit these systems, for example through manufactured feuds and deliberately provocative clips, creating a feedback loop between the platforms' recommendation systems, those creating content designed to be engaging (and therefore increasingly profitable), and those being recommended and consuming it.[302]

The recommender system's contribution is to determine the scale and direction of exposure. Each interaction refines the system's model of the user, so feeds can narrow toward particular themes and more extreme material without any active or deliberate choice on the user's part.[303] This trajectory is well documented: research from ISD and Reset found that YouTube's recommendations, particularly its short-form video feature, quickly escalated boys and young men toward misogynistic and extremist content.[304] Repeated exposure to content tying self-worth to status, physique and wealth has been associated with poorer mental health and a reduced willingness to prioritise it.[305]

MONETISATION

Monetisation refers to the mechanisms through which attention and engagement are converted into revenue. Many services through which boys and young men seek fitness advice, financial tips, interest communities and a sense of belonging are primarily advertising businesses, meaning that their value is tied to monthly active users and time spent on platform. As advertising is largely targeted by audience (i.e. demographic and interest criteria) rather than by placement (i.e. adjacency to certain content), advertisers can indirectly fund and incentivise harmful content without knowing it. Platforms also share revenue with creators through advertising payouts, subscriptions, and tipping and gifting functionalities during livestreams. Outrage, grievance and conflict hold attention effectively, and the engagement-based advertising business model registers engagement driven by "manufactured" fear the same way as engagement driven by accurate information.[306]

Research from Reset on the 'Grift Economy' shows how monetisation of harmful masculinities often follows a three-stage pipeline:

1. Recruitment through aspirational content.
2. Grievance, in which personal struggles are reframed as evidence of societal betrayal.
3. Monetisation of the trust and loyalty built along the way, through paid courses, memberships, supplements, crypto schemes and exclusive communities.

As these operations mature, social media increasingly serves as the funnel, while the highest-value products move to subscription platforms, messaging channels and other off-platform infrastructure (for example, Andrew Tate's "Real World University" courses). These products target two needs in particular: belonging and economic security. Influencers market "alpha male" coaching, get-rich-quick schemes and unregulated health products. They trade on anxieties about economic opportunity, status and appearance, and on norms that cast men as providers. Different stages of the pipeline map onto different harms in this taxonomy. These include debt and financial scams, unsafe supplement and steroid use, and isolation that paid "brotherhood" communities can deepen rather than relieve. It should be noted that this pipeline is not confined to social media platforms and typically includes a range of other types of sites/services.[307]

ADDICTIVE DESIGN

While recommender systems determine what content users see, addictive design* features help shape how long and how often they stay engaged. The term covers interface features designed to sustain attention and create a habit of repeat visits. These include infinite scroll and autoplay, push notifications, streaks and daily rewards, "active now" indicators, disappearing content and visible counts of likes and followers.

These features remove natural pauses and points of friction, offer unpredictable rewards and create a sense of urgency or "fear of missing out". Over time, this can foster habitual and compulsive use, reduce self-control, and displace sleep and other offline activities.[308] Addictive design also compounds over time – each user's session provides recommender systems with more engagement signals to individually target content, while also creating more opportunities and incentives for monetisation, so time on platform can multiply exposure to different harms.

The gendered dimension of this is in part determined by where boys and young men are spending their time. According to a 2025 Movember study, gaming accounts for the largest share of their time online, followed by short-form video and social media.[309] Gaming environments make use of reward mechanisms such as levelling, rankings and time-limited events, while some in-game mechanics can be gambling-like and activate intermittent reward pathways.[310] Visible metrics such as likes, follower counts and leaderboards turn status into a score, which feeds the metrics-driven self-worth and competitive visibility harms described elsewhere in this taxonomy.[311]

Addictive design is not confined to social media. Comparable engagement mechanics are found across the services that make up the pipeline described above, including daily login rewards in games, price alerts in trading apps or marketplaces, persistent notifications in messaging communities, and always-available AI companions built to sustain conversation. Each service is designed independently to hold attention, but their effects accumulate across a user's wider digital environment. Risk assessments typically consider each service in isolation, and so do not capture this cumulative effect. Regulators and courts increasingly treat these design choices as a source of harm in their own right. The European Parliament has called for addictive design to be addressed through EU consumer law.[312] The European Commission has preliminarily found that TikTok's infinite scroll, autoplay and push notifications contribute to a breach of the Digital Services Act.[313] In the US, a 2026 jury verdict found Meta and YouTube negligent in the design of their platforms.[314]

* The same mechanisms are also described as "manipulative" design or "dark patterns". "Addictive" emphasises the effects on health, while "manipulative" emphasises the undermining of user choice. See: European Parliament. (2023). Resolution of 12 December 2023 on addictive design of online services and consumer protection in the EU single market (2023/2043(INI)). See more here.

Impact framework



PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF ONLINE HARMS BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL

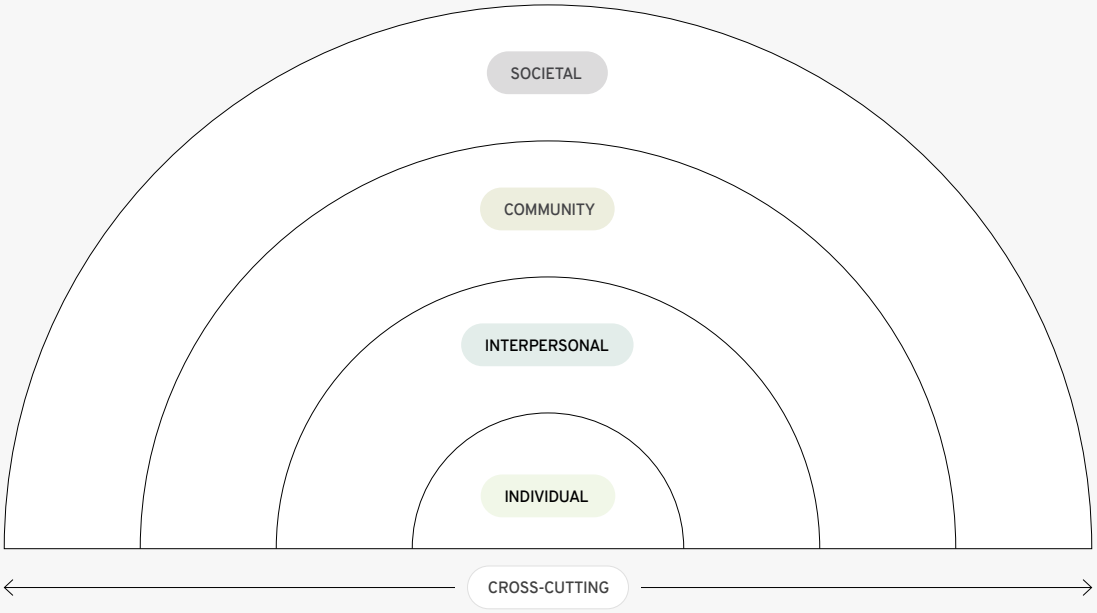
This impact framework examines how online harms affecting boys and young men may have wider public health consequences beyond the individual.[315] It draws on a new research series from the Lancet journal on digital determinants of health (DDoH), which outlines how health and wellbeing are shaped by a combination of social, structural and technological environments.[316] Building on the taxonomy's four harm areas, the framework below considers broader public health impacts across three levels: interpersonal, examining consequences for relationships and interactions with others; community, considering impacts on shared norms, belonging and collective wellbeing; and societal, exploring wider implications for public health, inequality, social cohesion and public safety.

Across these levels, the framework draws on the DDoH perspective to consider how platform design, commercial incentives, digital infrastructures and wider social norms may shape the emergence, severity and distribution of impacts beyond the individual alone. This includes recognising how digital environments can reinforce existing vulnerabilities and inequalities, while also creating opportunities for support, connection and prevention.

FRAMEWORK

Public health implications of online harms beyond the individual

This framework examines how online harms affecting boys and young men may have wider public health consequences beyond the individual. It draws on the Lancet's digital determinants of health (DDoH) perspective, which highlights how health and wellbeing are shaped by social, structural and technological environments.



INDIVIDUAL	IMPACT	Impacts on psychological, physical, sexual, financial and behavioural health and wellbeing (e.g. mental health, wellbeing and autonomy).
INTERPERSONAL	IMPACT	Impacts on relationships and interactions with others, including trust, intimacy and relationship functioning, aggression, coercion and gender relations, and help-seeking and social support.
COMMUNITY	IMPACT	Impacts on social norms, belonging and exclusion, including the commercialisation of belonging and community.
SOCIETAL	IMPACT	Wider implications for public health and inequalities, social cohesion, polarisation and public safety, and agency and trust in institutions.

CROSS-CUTTING	
DISPROPORTIONATE HARMS	Heightened and intersecting risks and impacts for LGBTQ+ people and Indigenous communities, including effects on safety, belonging, wellbeing and access to support.

CROSS-CUTTING	
AGE-RELATED VULNERABILITIES	Differing risks and impacts across the life course, including heightened vulnerabilities for children and young people and potential longer-term developmental consequences.

INTERPERSONAL IMPACTS

Beyond individual health and wellbeing, online harms affecting boys and young men can shape interpersonal relationships, family and peer dynamics. These impacts may emerge through the interaction and reinforcement of different harms, influencing trust, behaviour, relationship quality and opportunities for support.

1. Trust, intimacy and relationship functioning

Image-based abuse and sexual coercion can undermine safety, autonomy and trust within intimate relationships, while unrealistic sexual expectations may contribute to performance pressures and difficulties negotiating intimacy.[317] Whereas associations between pornography consumption and lower sexual satisfaction or relationship difficulties are mixed, emerging evidence highlights how this is particularly experienced by younger men and boys.[318]

In addition, masculine expectations of emotional suppression, dominance and status may inhibit vulnerability and communication,[319] whereas dating-app rejection, perceived competition and choice overload may contribute to dating fatigue and withdrawal from relationships.[320] AI companions may provide support or a sense of social interaction, but intensive use raises unresolved questions about dependency and displacement of human relationships.[321] Literature on gambling harms shows how losses, debt and financial exploitation can create secrecy, conflict and diminished trust within families and partnerships.[322]

Taken together, these different harms may undermine the foundations of healthy and supportive relationships, affecting trust, communication, intimacy and emotional connection. Beyond relationship difficulties themselves, these consequences have wider implications for health and wellbeing, as strained relationships and reduced social support may increase isolation, psychological distress and barriers to seeking help.

2. Aggression, coercion and gender relations

Research identifies associations between pornography consumption, violent pornography, and attitudes accepting sexual aggression, with some studies also identifying associations with sexually aggressive behaviour in experimental settings.[323] While these findings are not uniform and do not establish a direct causal pathway from exposure to perpetration, they raise concerns about how violent pornography may shape expectations of acceptable behaviour within intimate relationships.[324]

These concerns extend beyond sexual content. Misogynistic and male-supremacist narratives may reinforce adversarial understandings of gender relations, legitimising hostility, control and degrading treatment of women and girls.[325] Bullying, humiliation and masculinity competition can also reinforce expectations of dominance in men and boys, and lead to interpersonal conflict. For boys and men, interpersonal conflict can undermine emotional intimacy, communication and relationship satisfaction, contributing to loneliness and psychological distress.[326] For women and girls, this may lead to anxiety, depression, psychological distress, and post-traumatic stress symptoms.[327] Where hostility escalates into intimate partner or sexual violence, consequences can include physical injuries, chronic pain, sexual and reproductive health problems, and increased risks of self-harm and suicidality.[328] These experiences can also undermine women's sense of safety, autonomy and trust, contributing to social isolation and difficulties forming or maintaining healthy relationships.[329]

3. Help-seeking and social support

Shame associated with sexual victimisation, financial sexual extortion or perceived failure to meet masculine expectations can discourage boys and young men from seeking support. This may be compounded by norms equating vulnerability with weakness, making disclosure to partners, friends and family more difficult and potentially allowing distress to escalate unnoticed.[330]

While online communities discussing mental health, self-harm or suicide can provide valuable peer support and pathways to recovery, some may instead reinforce distress or normalise harmful behaviours.[331] The consequences therefore depend partly on whether these environments facilitate meaningful connection and help-seeking or deepen isolation.

Over time, entrenched emotional suppression, hostility or coercive expectations may also shape later intimate relationships, parenting and conflict management, potentially reinforcing harmful relationship norms across generations.[332] Together, these dynamics highlight how online harms may weaken social support and affect relationships beyond those directly experiencing harm.

Importantly, repeated exposure to violent or misogynistic content, including violent pornography may also contribute to emotional desensitisation, reduced empathy or the normalisation of degrading behaviour.[333] Although evidence establishing these pathways among boys and young men remains limited beyond experimental or anecdotal research, these processes may influence not only individual responses but also collective expectations about when behaviour should be challenged and be perceived as harmful.

Taken together, these dynamics may contribute to relationship and peer environments in which aggression, coercion and gender-based hostility become more readily tolerated, even where they do not translate into violent behaviour.



COMMUNITY IMPACTS

At the community level, online harms may shape shared norms and have distinct and disproportionate impacts on particular groups and communities, shaped by shared vulnerabilities, identities and experiences. While evidence remains more limited than at the individual or interpersonal level, this section examines how these harms may affect the health, wellbeing, and participation of specific communities.

1. Social norms, belonging and exclusion

Influencer ecosystems and peer networks can shape expectations of masculinity around muscularity, sexual performance, financial success and emotional self-reliance. In particular, exposure to certain masculinity-oriented content may distort perceptions of how common practices such as steroid use or extreme appearance enhancement are, reinforcing pressures to conform to unrealistic ideals.[334]

These norms can extend beyond digital spaces into schools and friendship groups, where teachers report boys repeating misogynistic narratives.[335] As a result, misogynistic and exclusionary attitudes may contribute to hostile environments for women, girls, LGBTQ+ people, as well as men and boys who reject restrictive masculine expectations, undermining belonging, safety and participation.[336]

Online communities can foster connection, identity exploration and emotional support, particularly where offline support is limited.[337] But potential harm arises when community belonging becomes conditional on rigid beliefs about gender, appearance or status, potentially reinforcing resentment and limiting exposure to alternative perspectives.[338]

Together, these dynamics demonstrate how online environments can shape not only individual identities, but also norms governing inclusion, acceptance and belonging within wider communities.

2. Commercialisation of belonging and community

Online communities centred on appearance, self-optimisation, gambling and financial success can increasingly tie masculine status and belonging to consumption, achievement and financial resources.[339] While these spaces may offer connection, encouragement and a sense of shared identity, belonging can become conditional on purchasing products, accessing paid mentorship or demonstrating particular forms of success.[340]

At the community level, these dynamics may reinforce hierarchies of status and exclusion, particularly for those unable or unwilling to meet the expectations promoted within these spaces. Where commercial interests become intertwined with peer relationships, they may also undermine trust and genuine mutual support, potentially reinforcing insecurity and social comparison rather than alleviating them.[341] The wider implications for health and wellbeing lie in how these environments may shape the quality of social connections, access to supportive communities and experiences of belonging, all of which are important to collective wellbeing.

CASE STUDY

Disproportionate harms and inequalities in LGBTQ+ and indigenous community wellbeing

The consequences of online harms are not experienced equally across communities. For gay, bisexual, trans, and queer boys and young men, online harassment, discrimination, image-based abuse and appearance pressures may intersect with existing experiences of stigma and exclusion, creating distinct risks for mental health, safety and belonging. These harms can also have consequences beyond the individual, particularly where they undermine participation in digital communities that provide important opportunities for connection, identity affirmation and peer support.

Research in Canada has shown how one in two transgender and gender diverse youth experience bullying, (although this does not distinguish between online and offline manifestations).[342] Further research found that younger and Indigenous respondents reported higher odds of victimisation.[343] Cyberbullying was also associated with experiences of LGBTQ discrimination, suicidality and limited social support.[344] For gay, bisexual, trans and queer boys and young men, homophobic harassment and threats of outing may further heighten fears of disclosure and inhibit help-seeking. More broadly, research among sexual-minority students has identified associations between cyberbullying and suicidal thoughts, highlighting the potential for online victimisation to compound existing mental-health inequalities.[345]

Appearance-related harms present another important example. A systematic review of 16 studies found that sexual-minority men generally reported greater body dissatisfaction than heterosexual men, although experiences varied across different groups.[346] Research involving 2,733 sexual-minority men in Australia and New Zealand also identified associations between social-media use, body dissatisfaction, eating-disorder symptoms and thoughts about anabolic steroid use, particularly in relation to image-centred platforms.[347] Importantly, research also suggests that LGBTQ+ community connectedness may offer some protection against the relationship between muscularity pressures and sexual anxiety, illustrating how online community environments can both reinforce and mitigate harm.[348]

Furthermore, a Canadian study involving 170 Indigenous adolescents identified an association between cyberbullying victimisation and anxiety and stress, beyond the effects of traditional bullying.[349] Combined with the findings among Indigenous gay and bisexual men, this highlights the importance of examining how online harms intersect with wider experiences of discrimination and unequal access to support. For Indigenous communities, these harms may also compound existing experiences of historical and intergenerational trauma, potentially reinforcing patterns of psychological distress, mistrust and barriers to support across generations.[350]

From a public-health perspective, these findings illustrate how online harms may reinforce existing inequalities in mental health, safety and social connectedness. Where harassment, exclusion or appearance-related pressures undermine participation in digital communities, they may also weaken opportunities for belonging and mutual support. Conversely, supportive communities can provide important protective resources. The wider concern is therefore not only the disproportionate consequences of particular harms, but how digital environments may reinforce or mitigate the social conditions that shape community wellbeing.

SOCIETAL IMPACTS

Societal impacts are not simply the sum of individual experiences of online harm. They may emerge through the reinforcement of harmful social norms and the wider structural conditions that shape exposure, vulnerability and opportunities for prevention. From a public-health perspective, this means considering both how individual harms can contribute to wider societal consequences and how digital environments, commercial incentives and prevailing social norms may create or reinforce vulnerabilities at scale. While evidence of these broader effects remains uneven, the following sections examine both documented patterns and potential cumulative impacts of online harms at a societal level.

1. Public health and inequalities

Online environments can contribute to preventable public health harms, by normalising unsafe appearance-enhancement practices, promoting misleading health misinformation and commercialising insecurities around masculinity and physical performance.[351] For example, concerns have emerged around the promotion of testosterone treatments through social media and private online clinics, with medical experts warning of potentially unnecessary treatment, adverse health consequences and additional demands on the NHS in the UK.[352] These risks may be compounded by masculine expectations that discourage vulnerability and help-seeking, potentially delaying intervention when psychological distress, financial exploitation or physical health concerns emerge.[353]

Beyond individual health decisions, the circulation of health misinformation and the promotion of unverified treatments also undermine trust in medical expertise and reliable public-health guidance.[354] Where commercial interests and influencer-led advice increasingly compete with professional health information, this may have wider implications for health literacy, preventive care and the effectiveness of public-health interventions. Recent US research found that 57 percent of women aged 18 to 29 get health and wellness information from social media influencers or podcasts, compared with 47 percent of men the same age.[355] In the UK, these concerns have led to warnings from NHS endocrinologists that influencers on TikTok and Instagram, often working with private clinics, are promoting testosterone testing to men who do not need treatment.[356]

Beyond their consequences for individuals, these harms generate wider demands on healthcare and public-health systems, including mental health support, treatment for preventable physical health complications and services responding to gambling-related harm or financial distress. The scale of the wider public-health challenge is considerable: the Centre for Mental Health estimated that mental ill health cost England £300 billion in 2022, including £60 billion in health and care costs.[357] In Ontario, Canada, emergency room visits for gambling addiction doubled following an expansion of the online market that legalised single-event sports-betting, predominantly young men.[358] While these figures cannot be attributed solely to online harms, they illustrate the substantial societal burden of poor mental health and the importance of addressing potentially preventable or exacerbating risks that stem from technology.

Importantly, these consequences are unlikely to be distributed equally. Socioeconomic disadvantage, discrimination and unequal access to support may influence both vulnerability to harm and opportunities for recovery. From a DDoH perspective, this shifts attention towards the structural conditions shaping these experiences, including platform design, commercial incentives and governance.[359] The wider public-health concern is therefore that digital environments may contribute to preventable health burdens and additional pressures on health services, while potentially amplifying existing inequalities in health and wellbeing. However, their specific contribution to population-level health disparities and healthcare demand remains insufficiently measured.

2. Social cohesion, polarisation and public safety

Online gender antagonistic narratives contribute to wider societal polarisation by framing relations between men and women as inherently adversarial, reinforcing perceptions of competition, grievance and an us-versus-them divide. Such narratives can challenge principles of gender equality, legitimise unequal power relations and reinforce social hierarchies based on gender, status and identity.[360]

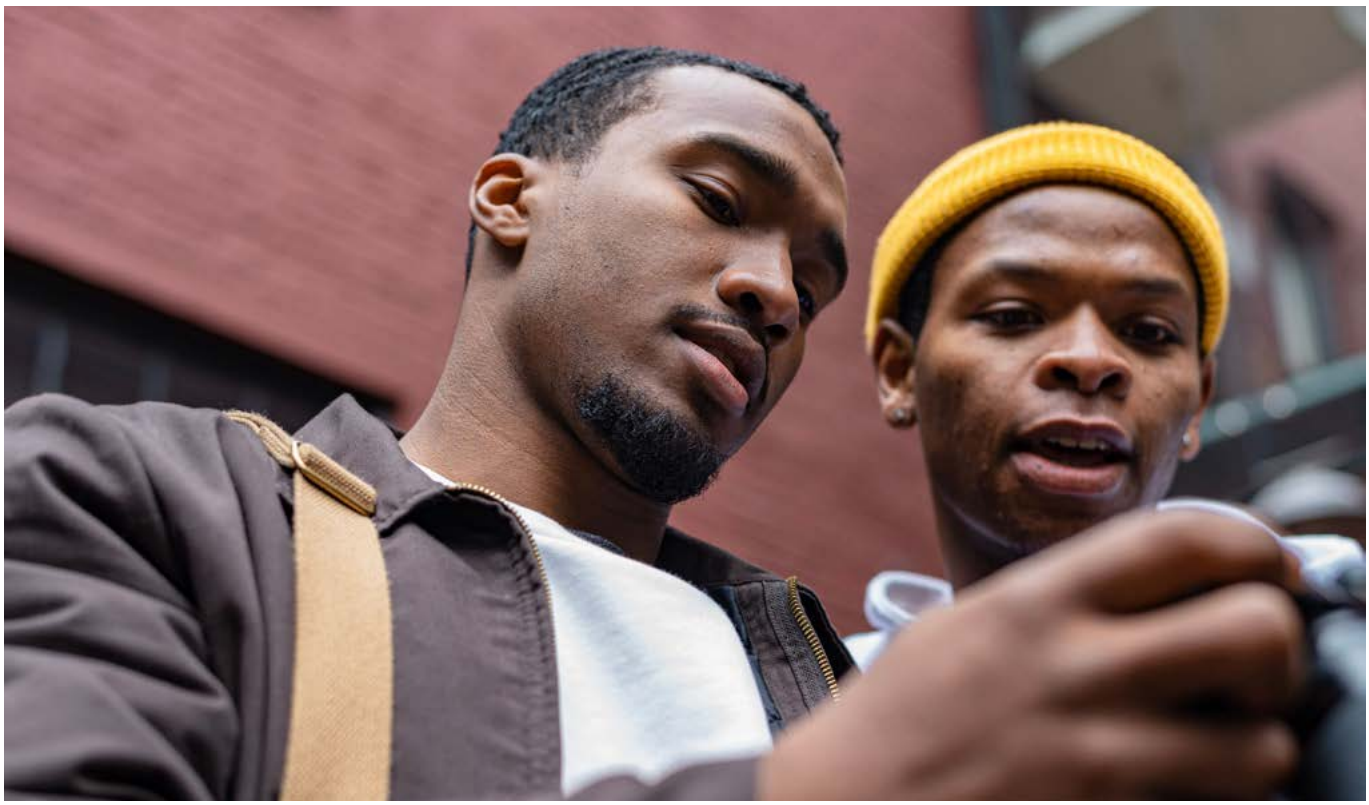
Recent research highlights concerning generational differences in attitudes towards gender equality. A 2026 Ipsos and King's College London survey across 29 countries found that 31 percent of Gen Z men agreed that a wife should always obey her husband, compared with 13 percent of Baby Boomer men. Similarly, 33 percent of Gen Z men believed that husbands should have the final say on important decisions, compared with 17 percent of Baby Boomer men.[361] These findings raise questions about the resurgence of unequal gender norms among younger generations and their implications for progress towards more equitable societies.

These dynamics are particularly concerning where misogyny intersects with racism, xenophobia, anti-LGBTQ+ hostility and anti-trans narratives, reinforcing broader hierarchies and divisions over identity, rights and belonging.[362] The normalisation of these narratives may contribute to an environment in which hostility, discrimination and exclusion become more socially acceptable, undermining shared expectations of equality, mutual respect and inclusion. An example of this is research showing how watching violent pornography has been associated with lower empathy, but also more acceptance of violence against women and girls. Another study found that posting misogynistic content on Twitter (now X), predicts offline domestic violence, while noting this is not a causal relationship.[363]

Research has also identified associations between attitudes supportive of violence against women and girls and the endorsement of extremist attitudes.[364] In some contexts, these overlapping grievances may contribute to the legitimisation of extremist violence. However, this does not suggest an inevitable progression from misogynistic attitudes to extremist violence. Nor should misogyny and gender-based violence be understood primarily through the lens of extremism, as doing so risks overlooking their prevalence in everyday social interactions and hostility, relationships, and wider society.

A preventative public health approach instead seeks to address these underlying conditions before harm manifests, including through education, community-based initiatives and positive engagement with boys and men. Crucially, this approach recognises boys and men not solely as potential perpetrators, but as individuals whose health, wellbeing and relationships can be negatively affected by harmful gender norms and technology. Targeted interventions and safeguarding remain relevant where specific risks emerge but should complement broader prevention efforts that promote healthier relationships, gender equality and collective safety.





3. Agency and trust in institutions

Economic insecurity, unemployment and changing social expectations have contributed to wider debates surrounding a perceived 'masculinity crisis', particularly where traditional expectations of masculine status, financial provision and independence become increasingly difficult to fulfil.[365] An example includes a US study which found how 57 percent of men who experience financial difficulties feel "less of a man", with therapists highlighting how financial struggles are not just a money problem for men, but an identity crisis.[366] Beyond their individual consequences, perceived losses of economic and social status can contribute to political alienation, resentment towards established institutions and declining confidence in their ability to represent people's interests.[367]

Online grievance-based communities can amplify these frustrations by framing men's perceived loss of status as evidence of systemic discrimination, often attributing responsibility to women, feminism or political institutions.[368] Such narratives may reinforce fatalistic worldviews and undermine perceived opportunities for meaningful social change. Research on some misogynistic communities for example, illustrates how gender-based grievances can legitimise withdrawal from romantic relationships with women, but also democratic institutions, effectively undermining democratic participation.[369]

At a societal level, the concern extends beyond individual disengagement to the potential erosion of institutional legitimacy, civic participation and collective agency. Where distrust and fatalism become normalised, they may weaken shared expectations of cooperation and the capacity of communities to address common challenges.[370] However, these outcomes are not inevitable, and evidence directly linking online misogynistic communities to declining institutional trust or civic participation remains limited. Digital communities can also foster solidarity, collective action and meaningful participation, highlighting their potential to strengthen rather than undermine social cohesion.[371]

Taken together, the interconnected nature of these harms highlights the need for coordinated institutional responses across consumer protection, financial regulation, online safety, safeguarding and law enforcement, rather than treating overlapping risks as separate regulatory concerns.

CASE STUDY

Age-related vulnerabilities and developmental consequences

Age and developmental stage are important factors in understanding how online harms affect boys and young men. Adolescence is a formative period for identity development, social relationships, sexual expectations and perceptions of masculinity, during which online environments may play an increasingly important role in shaping experiences and behaviours.[372] The taxonomy identifies several harms of particular concern for younger age groups, including financial sexual extortion, harmful sexual content, cyberbullying, appearance-related pressures and gambling-related harms. However, the nature and severity of these risks vary across adolescence, and younger boys should not be assumed to experience the same patterns of exposure or vulnerability as older teenagers.

Some harms raise concerns because exposure can begin considerably earlier in adolescence. Research by the Children's Commissioner for England found that the average age of first exposure to online pornography was 13, raising questions about how sexual content may inform developing expectations around intimacy, consent and relationships.[373] Similarly, appearance-focused online environments may reinforce muscularity ideals, social comparison and expectations around physical attractiveness during a period of significant physical and psychological development.[374] While these influences may contribute to body dissatisfaction and potentially harmful appearance-related behaviours, evidence of their specific causal effects and differences across adolescent age groups remains uneven.

Financial harms may also emerge through digital environments familiar to younger boys. Research by Common Sense Media found that 36 percent of boys in the US aged 11–17 had gambled in the preceding year, with video games providing an important context for exposure to gambling-like activities.[375] The UK Gambling Commission similarly identifies gaming, sports betting promotion and peer relationships as important influences on teenage boys' gambling experiences.[376] These findings raise concerns about the early normalisation of gambling-related behaviours and financial risk, although participation does not necessarily indicate harmful or problematic gambling. In addition, young men are more likely to be exposed to gambling ads[377], as well as more likely to be at risk of gambling addiction.[378]

Cyberbullying and other forms of online harassment are also particularly relevant to adolescent wellbeing. In Europe, 15 percent of adolescent boys have experienced cyberbullying, up from 12 percent in 2018, compared to 16 percent of girls (up from 13 percent in 2018).[379] It is important to note that research shows victimisation of cyberbullying is particularly high in LGBTQ+ communities.[380] At the community level, these experiences may affect peer relationships, participation in educational and social environments, and access to supportive networks. The implications may be particularly significant where online and offline peer relationships overlap, making it difficult for young people to disengage from harmful interactions.

From a public-health perspective, these findings highlight the importance of considering not only the immediate consequences of online harms, but also their potential implications during formative developmental periods. Exposure to harmful sexual expectations, financial exploitation, appearance pressures and online harassment may intersect with the development of relationships, coping strategies, financial behaviours and help-seeking practices. However, longitudinal research remains necessary to establish whether, and to what extent, these experiences contribute to longer-term health and wellbeing outcomes. Age-appropriate prevention, safeguarding and support are therefore important considerations, alongside efforts to address the digital environments and commercial practices that may expose younger users to harm.

Policy and regulatory mapping



GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO ONLINE HARMS IN CANADA, THE UK AND IRELAND

This chapter maps how governments in the UK, Canada and Ireland are responding to the online harms identified in the taxonomy. It covers over 200 laws, policy frameworks and strategies across criminal law, online safety, health products, gambling, finance, education and violence prevention, with comparative lessons from Australia and New Zealand. Each harm is assessed against five stages of the harm pathway, from societal and design prevention through to intervention, redress and recovery, to show where binding protections exist and where gaps remain.

APPROACH

The harms outlined in the taxonomy span across a broad range of existing and emerging laws, regulations and policies, requiring an in-depth mapping of which frameworks apply and where there are gaps.

01

Jurisdictions

This in-depth policy analysis constitutes a mapping of over two hundred relevant laws, policy frameworks and strategies, including 75 in the UK, 56 in Canada, 70 in Ireland (including EU frameworks that apply in Ireland as a Member State), and comparative frameworks from Australia and New Zealand.

02

Categories

The mapped frameworks are clustered by the three focus jurisdictions and separated according to the following categories:

1. Criminal law,
2. Online safety, platform and data frameworks,
3. Drugs, medicines and health products frameworks,
4. Gambling frameworks,
5. Finance frameworks,
6. Health and education frameworks,
7. Violence, abuse and social cohesion frameworks.[381]

03

Policy Coverage

Each entry was assessed against the harms outlined in the taxonomy. For each harm and jurisdiction, policy 'coverage' was assessed at five stages of the harm pathway, clustered according to 'primary' (1-2), 'secondary' (3-4) and 'tertiary' (5) stages of prevention:[382]

1. Societal prevention (incl. education, strategies and campaigns),
2. Design prevention (incl. safety by design, risk assessments and age assurance),
3. Exposure mitigation (incl. access-restriction, user tools and advertising rules),
4. Intervention and removal (incl. takedown, enforcement and criminal investigation),
5. Redress and recovery (incl. complaints, prosecution and support services).

04

Extent of Coverage

We then analysed the extent of coverage for each of these dimensions of harm mitigation above, which were summarised by the following ratings given to each harm area:

- Y — Binding law that directly covers a harm at a given stage
- PT — Partial coverage
- PO — Non-binding policy
- PE — Pending measure
- N — No identified framework

Coverage Overview

This section provides an overview of how the identified frameworks apply to the harms, with the full mapping provided as an annex. For each harm category, first, a heatmap is presented, which highlights the coverage of online harms to men and boys across the harm pathway, based on relevant frameworks in the UK, Canada and Ireland.

SEXUAL HARMS

HARM	UNITED KINGDOM						CANADA						IRELAND					
		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY
	OVERALL	Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery	OVERALL	Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery	OVERALL	Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery
Non-consensual intimate image abuse	Y	PT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	PE	PE	PE	Y	Y	Y	PT	Y	Y	Y	Y
Boundary erosion and sexual coercion	Y	PT	PT	PT	Y	PT	Y	PE	PE	PE	Y	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT
Unsafe sexual health misinformation and advice	PT	PO	N	PT	PT	N	PT	N	N	PT	PT	N	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	N
Problematic pornography use (PPU)	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	N	PE	N	PE	PE	N	N	PT	PT	PT	PT	N	N
Harmful sexual expectations	PT	PO	N	PT	PT	N	PO	PO	N	N	N	N	PO	PO	N	N	N	N

Non-consensual intimate image abuse is the most covered harm across all three jurisdictions and prevention levels. This reflects dedicated criminal offences in the UK, Canada and Ireland that criminalise the sharing or threatening to share intimate images without consent, including offences covering synthetic images. In the UK, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 applies alongside the new offences of creating a purported intimate image inserted by the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 (DUAA).[383] Additionally, the Crime and Policing Act 2026's offence of supplying nudification tools and its 48-hour takedown duty apply.[384] In Canada, the Criminal Code has prohibited non-consensual distribution of intimate images since 2015.[385] The Protecting Victims Act 2026 extended this offence to synthetic images and created a new offence of threatening to distribute intimate images.[386] These apply alongside provincial civil remedies. In Ireland, 'Coco's Law' - the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 applies.[387] This is due to be extended by June 2027 by EU Directive 2024/1385 on combating violence against women and domestic violence.[388] Online safety duties support these offences in the UK and Ireland, while proposed platform regulations under Canada's Bill C-34 are pending.[389] Additionally, where a person depicted is a minor, child sexual abuse material laws apply.

Boundary erosion and sexual coercion are covered in the UK and Canada, and partially covered in Ireland, through a combination of criminal laws, (proposed) online safety laws, and educational frameworks. In the UK and Canada, the harm coverage relies on child sexual offences, including grooming, luring and sexual communication with a child, and in Ireland under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017.[390] Consent provisions and blackmail or extortion offences also apply. However, coercive control offences are limited to intimate partners in Canada and Ireland, and Canada's offence, created by the Protecting Victims Act 2026, is not expected to come into force until June 2028. In the UK, there is no offence of sexually coercing an adult outside a relationship beyond causing sexual activity without consent. Both Ofcom's guidance on a safer life online for women and girls and the UK Government's Freedom from Violence and Abuse strategy have a limited focus on men and boys, where consent is treated as a core protection principle.[391] The Ofcom guidance applies to men and boys as potential victims and as children exposed to harmful content, while the Government's strategy treats them as victims and survivors, and the main group whose attitudes and behaviour prevention work must address. Below the age of consent, sexualised communication by an adult with a child is criminalised, and between adults, the criminal law applies where pressure amounts to harassment, threats, blackmail or sexual activity without consent.

Sexual health misinformation and advice is partially covered across jurisdictions, for example through drugs, medicines and health products frameworks, and related advertising duties. These include bans on advertising prescription-only medicines to the public in the UK and Ireland.[392] Some erectile dysfunction treatments, such as Viagra, have been reclassified as non-prescription pharmacy products in both countries and can be advertised via TV, radio and other forms of media. In Canada, deceptive marketing provisions under the Competition Act apply, and the Food and Drugs Act and Food and Drug Regulation regulates advertising of prescription drugs to the public.[393] In the UK and Ireland, education partially addresses sexual health misinformation and advice. In Ireland, the EU Digital Services Act's (DSA) (2022) systemic risk provisions, as well as Coimisiún na Meán's (CnaM) media literacy remit may address sexual health misinformation.[394] Inaccurate sexual health advice is otherwise not addressed in the identified frameworks. However, under the UK's Online Safety Act 2023 such advice may be in scope if it amounts to a knowingly false communication intended to cause harm.[395]

Problematic pornography use (PPU) is partially covered by the online safety regimes in both Ireland and the UK, in addition to educational frameworks in both jurisdictions. In the UK, this applies through children's duties and age assurance, including age assurance duties on pornography publishers under the OSA. The newly introduced offences under the Crime and Policing Act 2026 add the first binding measures on publishing pornography that shapes harmful sexual expectations, such as pornography depicting strangulation or incest.[396] In Ireland, while no such policy has been implemented at the time of writing, discussions are ongoing at government level regarding introducing similar age assurance systems on video-sharing platforms, likely under the Online Safety Code.[397] The proposed EU Kids Act may strengthen coverage by further restricting access for children to pornography websites.[398] Canada's Bill C-34 does not treat PPU as a priority harm, however, as currently drafted, it would require regulated services to age-restrict pornographic content.

Harmful sexual expectations are covered by policy frameworks only at the societal prevention level, such as education guidance and curricula, campaigns and gender-based harm frameworks. These include the cross-government Freedom from violence and abuse strategy to build a safer society for women and girls in the UK, Canada's National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and Ireland's No Excuses campaign.[399] The exception to this is the UK's new pornography offences[400], which prohibit depicting strangulation, suffocation, sexual activity between relatives or adults roleplaying as under-16-year-olds, all which can set harmful sexual expectations.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH HARMS

HARM	UNITED KINGDOM						CANADA						IRELAND					
		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY
	OVERALL	Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery	OVERALL	Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery	OVERALL	Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery
Harmful dieting and eating-related behaviours	PT	PT	PT	PT	N	PT	PT	PO	N	PT	N	PO	Y	PT	PT	Y	PT	PT
Suicidal ideation and self-harm	Y	PT	Y	Y	Y	Y	PT	PT	PE	PE	PT	PO	Y	PT	Y	Y	Y	PT
Unsafe supplement and performance-enhancing substance use	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PO	PT	PO	PT	PT	PT	PO	PT	PO	PT	PT	Y	PO
Unsafe cosmetic and bodily modification practices	PT	N	N	PT	PT	N	PT	N	PT	PT	PT	N	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	N
Dangerous risk-taking behaviours	PT	PT	PT	PT	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	PT	PT	PT	N	PT	N
Masculinity competitiveness and self-optimisation	PO	PO	N	N	N	N	PO	PO	N	N	N	N	PO	PO	N	N	N	N

Harmful dieting and eating-related behaviours: In the UK, partial measures apply under the OSA, where eating disorder content is considered primary priority content to children, and Category 1 services must offer user empowerment tools for adults to reduce exposure to such content. Ofcom's recommendation to also add body stigma and depression content to priority content that is harmful to children is pending approval by the Secretary of State.[401] Under Ireland's Online Safety Code, regulated video-sharing platforms must restrict content promoting or encouraging eating disorders for all users, not only children. This makes Ireland the only jurisdiction rated as fully covering this harm in this mapping. The prescription-only advertising bans in the UK and Ireland is also relevant to influencer promotion of weight-loss injections. Pro-eating disorder content is not criminalised in the identified frameworks. However, the UK and Ireland regulate exposure to it, whilst medicine frameworks additionally restrict the supply of prescription-only weight-loss medicines. In Canada, the Canadian Eating Disorder Strategy 2019-2029, provides a non-governmental policy framework.[402] Additionally, restrictions on advertising prescription drugs apply to prescription-only weight-loss medicines through the Food and Drug Regulations.

Suicidal ideation and self-harm are the most covered physical and mental health harms. Criminal laws make it an offence to assist or encourage suicide, as well as strategies and frameworks that have identified suicide as a significant harm, including in England via the Suicide Prevention Strategy for England: 2023 to 2028 and Men's health: A strategic vision for England, Canada's National Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2024-2027 and Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention Act and Ireland's Connecting for Life 2026-2035 strategy.[403] In Canada, the 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline supports recovery.[404] All three (in Canada's case, proposed) online safety regimes provide some levers against self-harm content, although Canada's Bill C-34 would apply to children only. Coverage is therefore listed for the UK and Ireland, with 'partial' in Canada, where counselling or aiding suicide is a Criminal Code offence, but platform duties are not yet in force. Encouraging serious self-harm is an offence only in the UK.

Unsafe supplement and performance-enhancing substance use is partially covered across the three jurisdictions. Whilst drugs, medicines and health products frameworks are the key frameworks related to this harm category, drug control laws on anabolic steroid supply and related health claims frameworks also apply. Ireland's rating reflects the Health Products Regulatory Authority's active online enforcement against unlawful online listings and social media pages advertising anabolic steroids. Canada has no platform-specific duties in this regard, but existing product and drug law applies, including strong pre-market licensing of natural health products and controls on anabolic steroids under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.[405]

Unsafe cosmetic and bodily modification practices are primarily covered through product regulation as part of the relevant drugs, medicines and health products frameworks across all three jurisdictions, such as Canada's requirement for authorisation before products such as fillers can be sold. In Ireland, the DSA systemic risk provisions and CnaM's media literacy remit may apply. Cosmetic practices promoted online largely fall outside specific regulation where no regulated product is involved.

Dangerous risk-taking behaviours (such as dangerous driving) are generally not singled out in policy frameworks, although the underlying behaviours are likely addressed by criminal law (such as driving offences). However, online displays or encouragement of such behaviours would partially fall under the online safety regimes in the UK through the OSA and Ireland through the DSA. These are not explicitly considered in Canada's proposed Bill C-34.

No identified framework yet engaged specifically with **masculinity competitiveness and self-optimisation**, with only adjacent consumer protection and product claim rules potentially applying.

Coverage of relational and psychosocial harms varies widely across jurisdictions. No identified framework addresses **masculinity competitiveness and self-optimisation** or **isolation and emotional suppression** beyond the policy level, and Canada's main framework for masculinity competitiveness and self-optimisation is still forthcoming, although Health Canada's What We Heard report (2026) already identifies masculinity and online influences as a key theme.[406] These harms are addressed in England through Men's health: A strategic vision for England, Youth Matters and the Social Connection Framework (2025).[407] In Canada, they are addressed through the National Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2024-2027, the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, and the forthcoming Men and Boys' Health and Well-being Strategy, which is expected in early 2027.[408] In Ireland they are addressed through Sharing the Vision 2020-2030, Young Ireland 2023-2028, Connecting for Life 2026-2035, the Junior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) specifications and the Online Health Taskforce's 2025 report.[409] Content fuelling these harms generally would fall outside the criminal law unless it amounts to hate, harassment, threats or fraud.

RELATIONAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL HARMS

HARM	UNITED KINGDOM						CANADA						IRELAND					
		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY
	OVERALL	Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery	OVERALL	Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery	OVERALL	Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery
Bullying and harassment	Y	PT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	PE	PE	PE	Y	PT	Y	PT	Y	Y	Y	Y
Gender antagonism	PO	PO	N	N	N	N	PO	PO	N	N	PO	N	PT	PT	PT	N	PE	N
Online misogyny	PT	PO	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PE	PE	PE	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT
Isolation and emotional suppression	PO	PO	N	N	N	N	PO	PO	N	N	N	N	PO	PO	N	N	N	N
Despair and hopelessness reinforcement	PT	PT	PT	PT	N	N	PE	PE	PE	PE	N	N	PT	PT	PT	N	N	N
Emotional dependency on AI companions	PT	PT	PT	PE	PE	N	PE	PE	PE	PE	N	N	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	N

Bullying and harassment is the most covered harm in this category as all three jurisdictions criminalise harassment. The UK and Ireland do so through dedicated harassment legislation, which is complemented by online safety duties. In the UK, this includes the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and the Malicious Communications Act 1988.[410] In Ireland, this includes the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020, which specifically targets online communications and the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Persons Act 1997.[411] In Canada, criminal harassment is an existing Criminal Code offence, which the Protecting Victims Act 2026 strengthened. Nova Scotia, also offer civil remedies for cyberbullying. Additionally, regulated service provider duties covering child bullying are pending under Bill C-34.[412] Bullying as such is not a criminal offence in the mapped jurisdictions. Instead, the criminal law may apply where it amounts to harassment, threats or threatening communications.

Gender antagonism is largely addressed through gender-based violence strategies. In the UK and Canada these sit mainly at the policy and non-binding level only. Although Ofcom's guidance on women and girls' online safety is produced under a statutory requirement under the OSA, a comparable framework for men and boys is not required under the OSA.[413] In Canada, the Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence funds research and voluntary intervention programmes on radicalisation to violence, including incel-related violence.[414] In Ireland, the DSA systemic risk provisions consider gender-based violence, alongside the Zero Tolerance strategy 2022–2026 and the No Excuses campaign.[415] The EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence will add binding criminal offences once transposed by June 2027.[416] The criminal law does not outline gender antagonism as such. However, threats, harassment, incitement to violence, or in Canada, the wilful promotion of hatred may apply.

Online misogyny is only partially covered in all three jurisdictions, with the most coverage in Ireland. Much of that coverage comes from general offences such as harassment, threats and intimate image abuse rather than from hate laws. Where hate laws do include sex or gender, they are limited in scope. The UK's offences exclude sex entirely. In Canada, the civil remedy for online hate under section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act was repealed in 2013 and hate-related platform duties are pending under Bill C-34.[417] However, the Criminal Code's hate propaganda offences cover sex as a protected ground. In Ireland, the Hate Offences Act 2024 creates aggravated offences, including on the grounds of gender, while the 1989 incitement to hatred legislation does not cover sex.[418] The Online Safety Code requires video-sharing platforms to prohibit content inciting violence or hatred on grounds including sex, for all users.[419] Additionally, the DSA systemic risk obligations extend to gender-based violence. The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2025-2030 complement these measures.[420] The EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence requires Ireland to create a gender-based cyber-incitement offence. The online safety regimes largely build on this underlying illegality. In the UK, misogynistic content therefore relates to criminal law only where it amounts to harassment, threats or abusive communications, whereas Canada's hate propaganda offences can extend to the wilful promotion of hatred on the grounds of sex. Beyond the criminal law, the UK's cross-government strategy on violence against women and girls takes a preventive approach that includes a specific focus on engaging men and boys, such as teaching in schools about misogynistic influencers and 'incel' culture.

Despair and hopelessness reinforcement is partially covered through provisions on algorithmic risk under the DSA and OSA. The OSA's recommender system duties apply to children only and may address despair indirectly by filtering out suicide, self-harm and eating disorder content, which Ofcom's pending recommendation on depression content would strengthen. Canada's Bill C-34 does not explicitly regulate recommender systems, but it does propose obligations on specific exposure and design risks that likely cover algorithmic systems that could expose users to harmful content, as defined in the bill. Despair content itself is not criminalised, and the criminal law would likely only be engaged where content encourages or assists suicide, or in the UK, serious self-harm.

Emotional dependency on AI companions is less covered as an emerging harm. Digital regulation through the OSA, DSA, the EU AI Act and pending Bill C-34 cover chatbots to different extents.[421] Bill C-34 proposes provisions for AI service providers to mitigate manipulative harmful chatbot behaviour, including manipulative engagement techniques, which could affect emotional dependency directly. In Ireland, CnaM enforces the AI Act's bans on manipulative AI and on AI that exploits age-related vulnerabilities.[422] The AI Act's transparency rules on chatbots are also applicable. In the UK, the Crime and Policing Act 2026 offence around providing chatbots that generate prohibited content is not yet in force. However, the Information Commissioner's Office's Children's Code on age-appropriate design should apply to companion apps likely to be accessed by children.[423] The proposed EU Kids Act, which would apply in Ireland, sets out some children-focussed duties. Additionally, whilst not explicitly covered, literacy efforts through Ofcom and CnaM in the UK and Ireland, as well as Canada's AI for All strategy may tackle this harm indirectly.

FINANCIAL HARMS

HARM	UNITED KINGDOM						CANADA						IRELAND					
		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY
	OVERALL	Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery	OVERALL	Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery	OVERALL	Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery
Gambling-related harms	Y	PT	Y	Y	Y	Y	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	Y	PT	Y	Y	Y	PT
Financial scams and fraud	Y	PT	Y	Y	Y	Y	PT	N	N	PT	PT	N	Y	PT	PT	Y	Y	Y
Financial sexual extortion	Y	PT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	PE	PE	PE	Y	Y	Y	PT	Y	Y	Y	Y
High-risk speculative trading	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	PT
Exploitative coaching and wealth schemes	PT	N	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	N	N	PT	PT	N	PT	N	PE	PT	PT	PT

As the financial sector is generally well-regulated across jurisdictions, financial harms are the most comprehensively covered category. These largely fall within criminal, financial services and consumer protection law. The coverage is the strongest in the UK and Ireland, while Canada's coverage in this mapping is more often partial. This reflects the absence of a national, platform-specific regime and variation between provinces rather than an absence of binding law, as gambling, securities and consumer protection are largely provincial and territorial responsibilities.

Gambling-related harms are covered by dedicated regimes in the UK and Ireland, whereas in Canada gambling is regulated by the provinces under the authority granted by the Criminal Code, supported by responsible gambling programmes, but with no national prevention framework. In the UK, the 2025 Gambling Act amendments introduced stake limits on online slots and a statutory levy that funds research, prevention and treatment.[424] In Ireland, the Gambling Regulation Act 2024 established the Gambling Regulatory Authority of Ireland and an exclusion register.[425] Its Social Impact Fund, in force since 30 June 2026, may fund related public education and awareness-raising.[426]

The frameworks permit adult gambling through licensed operators. Across all three jurisdictions, loot boxes are not currently regulated, though the EU Digital Fairness Act proposes regulating them alongside other variable reward systems.

Through fraud offences, financial regulation and online safety duties, **financial scams and fraud** are well covered in the UK and Ireland. In the UK, fraud offences are priority offences under the OSA. Additionally, duties on paid-for fraudulent advertising for the largest services are expected from 2027, which would be the only advertising-specific platform duty in all three jurisdictions. In Ireland, the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act 2001 covers online scams, and the Central Bank acts as a trusted flagger under the DSA, which should enhance takedown processes.[427] Canada relies on Criminal Code fraud offences, its Competition Act and anti-money laundering legislation, while a Financial Crimes Agency has been proposed under Bill C-29.[428] Money laundering frameworks mean that young men recruited online as 'money mules' can face criminal liability as well as being victims. In Ireland, the anti-money laundering framework is relevant to their recruitment on social media platforms.

Financial sexual extortion is covered in all three jurisdictions through blackmail, extortion and threat-to-share offences, such as blackmail under the UK's Theft Act 1968 and extortion under Canada's Criminal Code.[429] Canada explicitly addresses this through the Protecting Victims Act 2026, which makes sexual extortion an aggravating factor in extortion and extends the child luring offence to sexual extortion, with Cybertip.ca as the national reporting route. In the UK and Ireland, threat-to-share offences are covered by the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and Coco's Law. All three jurisdictions criminalise demanding money under threat of sharing images, and where the victim is under 18, child sexual abuse material laws apply to the images themselves.

High-risk speculative trading is regulated in the UK through the Financial Conduct Authority's financial promotions regime, which also includes guidance on 'finfluencers'.[430] The UK's crypto-asset authorisation regime will apply from 25 October 2027.[431] Ireland covers this harm through the EU's Markets in Crypto-Assets Regulation (MiCA) and the Consumer Protection Code 2025.[432] Canada's coverage is partial. It has no national securities regulator, and binding rules are set and enforced by provincial and territorial regulators coordinated by the Canadian Securities Administrators, so the gap is one of consistency rather than coverage.[433] Investor education is a provincial matter. The frameworks focus on product restrictions and promotion rather than on retail trading itself. Retail binary options are banned in all three jurisdictions and the UK criminalises unauthorised financial promotion.

Exploitative coaching and wealth schemes are only partially covered across all three jurisdictions through general consumer protection and deceptive marketing provisions, such as the UK's Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024, which also bans pyramid schemes, Canada's Competition Act and provincial consumer protection legislation, and Ireland's Consumer Protection Act 2007 and the joint Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland's (ASAI) and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) influencer marketing guidance.[434] Exploitative online commercial practices could also be captured by the proposed EU Digital Fairness Act, including consumer protections around influencer marketing.[435] Financial regulation only applies when regulated investments are involved. Coaching appears to fall outside specific regulation, with consumer law engaged where schemes make misleading income or results claims.

Jurisdictional snapshots

In the UK, Canada and Ireland, criminal law sets the foundation for addressing illegal online harms. Beyond that, their approaches differ. The UK and Ireland have online safety regimes in force that address platform design, while Canada currently relies on federal criminal and sector-specific law, with much of the relevant regulation – as well as health and education frameworks – operating at provincial and territorial level. The snapshots below summarise each jurisdiction's profile, with full analysis of key instruments provided in the annex.

United Kingdom

KEY INSTRUMENT OR AUTHORITY	TYPE	COVERAGE					HARMS				NOTEWORTHY ASPECTS
		PRIMARY		SEC.		TER.					
		Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery	Sexual health	Physical and mental health	Relational and psychosocial	Financial	
Criminal Law											
Sexual Offences Act 2003 (sections 66B and 66E)	Legislation				Y	Y	●			●	Criminalises sharing, threatening and creating intimate images, incl. deepfakes (creation offence inserted by the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025); targets the perpetrator, while removal sits with platforms and Ofcom.
Theft Act 1968	Legislation				Y	Y	●			●	Blackmail: the main offence for financial sexual extortion, which disproportionately targets young men and boys (England and Wales; Scotland relies on common law).
Online Safety Act 2023 (Part 10)	Legislation				Y	Y	●	●	●		Online offences: false and threatening communications, cyberflashing and encouraging or assisting serious self-harm (s.184, in force since January 2024; to be replaced by the Crime and Policing Act 2026 offence).
Crime and Policing Act 2026 (sections 99–101 and 103)	Legislation		PT		Y		●			●	In force 29 June 2026: offence of supplying 'nudification' tools; 48-hour duty to remove non-consensual intimate images; register of intimate image content.
Crime and Policing Act 2026 (sections 104, 106 and 107)	Legislation			PT	Y		●		●		In force 6 November 2026: the first binding measures on pornography depicting strangulation or suffocation, sex between relatives or sexual activity where a person is, or is pretending to be, under 16 (adults roleplaying as children).
Crime and Policing Act 2026 (section 135)	Legislation (not yet in force)				PE	PE		●			Not yet in force: broader offence of encouraging or assisting serious self-harm, replacing the Online Safety Act s.184 offence.
Crime and Policing Act 2026 (AI provisions)	Legislation (not yet in force)			PE	PE		●		●		Not yet commenced: AI child sexual abuse image-generator and AI chatbot offences; power to regulate illegal AI-generated content.
Online safety, platform and data frameworks											
Online Safety Act 2023 (Parts 3 and 5)	Legislation		Y	Y	Y	Y	●	●	●	●	Core platform regime: risk assessment, illegal content and children's safety duties (in force July 2025), age assurance; the only UK online safety framework spanning design prevention to redress, with its strongest protections for children.
Office of Communications (Ofcom)	Regulator	PT	Y	Y	Y	Y	●	●	●	●	Enforces the Online Safety Act (codes, information powers, fines, business disruption); holds the only binding UK-wide media literacy duty; has recommended adding body stigma and depression content to priority content harmful to children (pending).
Data (Use and Access) Act 2025	Legislation		PT		Y	Y	●	●	●		Inserts the offence of creating a purported intimate image (synthetic NCII) into the Sexual Offences Act 2003; also amends UK data protection law.
Proposed restrictions on social media use by under-16s	Proposal		PE	PE			●	●	●		Pending: restrictions on social media use by under-16s; secondary legislation by end 2026, implementation expected spring 2027.
Health and education frameworks											
Men's Health: A Strategic Vision for England (November 2025)	Strategy	PO				PO		●	●	●	England's first men's health strategy: suicide prevention for middle-aged men (£3.6m), community men's health programmes (£3m); non-binding, no online component.
Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy (December 2025)	Strategy	PO						●	●		National youth strategy: trusted adults, places to go, Young Futures Hubs; policy only.
Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance	Statutory guidance	PO					●	●	●		Statutory guidance for schools (from September 2026): misogyny, online harms, deepfakes, consent and suicide prevention; reaches all boys through school.
Violence, abuse and social cohesion frameworks											
Freedom from Violence and Abuse: a cross-government strategy to build a safer society for women and girls	Strategy	PO					●		●		Women-focused strategy (December 2025): treats misogyny as a driver of violence; engages men and boys through prevention; non-binding.
Gambling frameworks											
Gambling Act 2005	Legislation		Y	Y	Y	PT				●	Licensing framework for gambling, incl. online operators; protects children and vulnerable people; 2025 amendments added stake limits on online slots and a statutory levy. Loot boxes fall outside it.
Gambling Commission	Regulator		Y	Y	Y	Y				●	Licenses and sanctions operators; enforces safer-gambling and age-verification conditions; young men are a core at-risk group.
Finance frameworks											
Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)	Regulator		Y	Y	Y	PT				●	Enforces the financial promotion rules in s.21 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (only authorised firms may communicate or approve promotions, incl. by finfluencers and on cryptoassets): finfluencer guidance, CFD restrictions, binary options ban; the only regulator acting on speculative trading content.
Crypto Roadmap (Financial Conduct Authority)	Proposal		PE	PE						●	Pending: FCA authorisation regime for cryptoasset firms, from 25 October 2027.
Online Safety Act 2023 (sections 38–39)	Pending duty			PE	PE					●	Pending: paid-for fraudulent advertising duties for the largest services (expected 2027 at the earliest).

United Kingdom

Most binding policy frameworks in the UK (specifically England and Wales) are rooted in long-standing criminal law and the Online Safety Act 2023 (OSA). Relevant criminal law has been substantially extended in 2025 and 2026. For example, the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 (DUAA) and the Crime and Policing Act 2026 add offences on creating synthetic NCII and supplying nudification tools, along with a 48-hour duty to remove non-consensual intimate imagery. From November 2026, they also introduce the first binding measures on pornography that depicts strangulation, suffocation, sexual activity between relatives or adults roleplaying as under 16-years-olds.

The OSA is the only UK online safety framework spanning different levels of prevention from design through to redress, although its strongest protections apply to children. Gambling and finance are regulated through the Gambling Commission and the Financial Conduct Authority. Coverage is therefore concentrated at the secondary and tertiary stages of the harm pathway.

Societal-level prevention efforts largely rest on a range of strategies published since 2025, including England's first Men's Health Strategy, Youth Matters strategy, the Violence Against Women and Girls strategy and Revised Relationships, Sex and Health Education guidance[436] for schools. None of these have binding provisions specific to men and boys' health.

Several measures are yet to take effect; the Crime and Policing Act 2026's AI chatbot and serious self-harm offences, the OSA's fraudulent advertising duties, the crypto asset authorisation regime (October 2027) and restrictions on under-16-year-olds social media use (expected in Spring 2027).

Canada

KEY INSTRUMENT OR AUTHORITY	TYPE	COVERAGE					HARMS				NOTEWORTHY ASPECTS
		PRIMARY		SEC.		TER.					
		Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery	Sexual health	Physical and mental health	Relational and psychosocial	Financial	
Criminal Law											
Criminal Code, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-46 (sexual offences and hate propaganda)	Legislation				Y	Y	●		●	●	Sexual offences, child sexual exploitation material, luring, extortion, harassment and trafficking: the main binding route against men's and boys' online harms; hate propaganda offences, incl. wilful promotion of hatred online.
Protecting Victims Act, S.C. 2026, c. 19	Legislation				Y	Y	●		●	●	Royal Assent 18 June 2026; most provisions in force 18 July 2026. New offences of threatening to distribute intimate images (incl. synthetic intimate images) or child sexual abuse and exploitation material; intimate image offence extended to synthetic images; child luring offence applied to sexual extortion; sexual extortion an aggravating factor in extortion; criminal harassment strengthened. Coercive control offence (intimate partners only) not expected to come into force until June 2028.
Mandatory Reporting Act, S.C. 2011, c. 4	Legislation				Y		●				Binding reporting and 12-month data preservation duty on all internet services for child sexual abuse material; operationalises Criminal Code protections.
Online safety, platform and data frameworks											
Bill C-34, Safe Social Media Act	Bill		PE	PE	PE	PE	●	●	●	●	Pending (June 2026): first binding platform duties on design and harmful content (seven types), incl. AI chatbots and age-restriction of pornographic content; focuses on children.
Digital Safety Commission of Canada (proposed)	Regulator (proposed)	PE	PE	PE	PE	PE	●	●	●	●	Pending regulator under Bill C-34 to oversee and enforce the new duties.
Bill C-36, Protecting Privacy and Consumer Data Act	Bill		PE		PE	PE	●	●	●		Pending (15 June 2026): new privacy protections incl. children's data; partly operationalises AI for All.
Cybertip.ca (Canadian Centre for Child Protection)	Reporting service	PO			PO	PO	●			●	National tipline and designated reporting organisation for child sexual exploitation and sexual extortion; operationalises Criminal Code protections in practice.
Health and education frameworks											
Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention Act, S.C. 2012, c. 30	Legislation	PT						●			Statutory footing: requires the federal government to establish, coordinate and report on a suicide prevention framework.
National Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2024–2027	Strategy	PO				PO		●			Action plan under the 2012 Act, giving suicide prevention a statutory footing; policy only.
9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline (November 2023)	Service					PO		●			National suicide crisis helpline: redress and recovery.
Men and Boys' Health and Well-being Strategy (expected early 2027)	Strategy (in development)	PE				PE		●	●		Pending: would be Canada's first men-specific health framework.
Youth Mental Health Fund (2024)	Funding programme	PO				PO		●			Youth mental health funding for ages 12–25; community-based services; policy only.
Violence, abuse and social cohesion frameworks											
National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence (November 2022)	Strategy	PO				PO	●		●		Women-focused plan naming men and boys as a prevention priority; policy only.
Drugs, medicines and health products frameworks											
Food and Drugs Act, R.S.C. 1985, c. F-27, and Food and Drug Regulations, C.R.C., c. 870	Legislation		PT	Y	Y		●	●			Pre-market authorisation for drugs and products such as fillers; restricts advertising prescription drugs to the public (incl. weight-loss medicines); products only, no platform duties.
Natural Health Products Regulations, SOR/2003-196	Legislation		PT	Y	Y			●			Product licence needed for supplements, with evidence of safety and efficacy; products only.
Competition Act, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-34	Legislation			PT	PT			●		●	Deceptive marketing rules: false or unsupported claims and misleading warranties, incl. online and influencer marketing.
Gambling frameworks											
Provincial and territorial gaming corporations and regulators	Regulator		PT	PT	PT	PT				●	Gambling regulated provincially: licensing, advertising, age verification, self-exclusion; single-event sports betting legal.
Finance frameworks											
Canadian Securities Administrators (CSA)	Regulator		Y	Y						●	Umbrella of provincial securities regulators: bans binary options for retail investors (2017); registration and investor limits for crypto trading platforms, with no margin or leverage; CFD rules vary by province.
Bill C-29, Financial Crimes Agency	Bill				PE					●	Pending (1 May 2026): would create a Financial Crimes Agency; scams and finfluencers otherwise rely on fragmented federal and provincial rules.

Canada

Canada's approach currently combines federal criminal law, sector-specific product rules and a broad layer of policy, alongside relevant regulation sits at the provincial and territorial level, particularly related to gambling, securities, consumer protection and education. Canada's decentralised regulation results from its federalised structure, under which these areas are largely provincial and territorial responsibilities, and reflects the constitutional division of powers, rather than a policy gap in these areas. However, consistency, effective coordination and enforceability across Canada's federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions are essential in addressing men's and boys' online harms.

The Criminal Code provides the main binding route against men's and boys' online harms at the federal level. The Protecting Victims Act 2026 strengthens it with a mix of new offences and amendments to existing ones. It creates new offences of threatening to distribute intimate images or child sexual abuse material, and of coercive control in intimate relationships. However, the coercive control offence is not expected to come into force until June 2028. It also amends existing offences, extending the Criminal Code's intimate image offence to synthetic images, applying the child luring offence to sexual extortion and making sexual extortion an aggravating factor in extortion cases. Cybertip.ca[437] and the Mandatory Reporting Act[438], which places binding reporting duties on internet service providers, operationalise some of these protections in practice.

Canada has no comprehensive platform-specific online safety regime in force, although platforms are subject to binding obligations under various criminal, privacy, consumer protection and sector-specific laws, as well as provincial frameworks. Bill C-34 (the Safe Social Media Act) would introduce an overarching online safety regime, although at the time of writing, its final scope and timing remain uncertain as it progresses through Parliament. The proposed legislation places greater emphasis on protecting children and does not include fraud and scam-related harms in scope. Advertising and cannabis and tobacco frameworks, health products law, and the Competition Act provide some binding measures in relation to exposure.

Policy frameworks sit at both ends of the harm pathway, with gender-based violence and youth mental health frameworks addressing societal prevention. Health Canada's What We Heard report (2026) from the national conversation on men and boys' health identifies 'masculinity, online influences and health' as one of five key themes, indicating that online harms are already on the federal men's health agenda. At the redress level, the 9-8-8 helpline and the National Suicide Prevention Action Plan, which has a statutory footing, apply.

Financial harms are substantively regulated in Canada, but largely through provincial securities, gambling and consumer protection regimes, which vary between provinces and are not designed around online platforms. Scams, finfluencers and speculative trading are covered by fragmented federal and provincial frameworks, and a Financial Crimes Agency is still pending under Bill C-29. Several initiatives could improve consistency in addressing these harms, including through Bill C-34 and Bill C-36, and the Men and Boys' Health and Well-being Strategy, expected in early 2027. Their enactment, final scope and timing remain uncertain. If enacted broadly as proposed, the bills would bring Canada closer to the UK and Ireland on platform-specific duties, but given the provincial role in gambling, securities, consumer protection, education and health, effective coverage is likely dependent as much on federal-provincial-territorial collaboration as on new federal structures.

Ireland

KEY INSTRUMENT OR AUTHORITY	TYPE	COVERAGE					HARMS				NOTEWORTHY ASPECTS
		PRIMARY		SEC.		TER.					
		Societal prevention	Design prevention	Exposure mitigation	Intervention and removal	Redress and recovery	Sexual health	Physical and mental health	Relational and psychosocial	Financial	
Criminal Law											
Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 (Coco's Law)	Legislation				Y	Y	●		●	●	Coco's Law: intimate image abuse (incl. threats) and harmful communications offences.
Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act 2024	Legislation				PT	PT			●		Hate offences, mainly aggravated forms of existing offences, incl. on grounds of gender.
Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 (as amended in 2019)	Legislation				Y	Y	●				Sexual offences, incl. online grooming of children.
Directive (EU) 2024/1385 (combating violence against women and domestic violence)	EU instrument	PE			PE	PE	●		●		Pending (transposition due 14 June 2027): cyber-violence offences, e.g. non-consensual image sharing and cyberstalking, protecting any victim.
Online safety, platform and data frameworks											
Coimisiún na Meán (Media Commission)	Regulator	PT	Y	Y	Y	PT	●	●	●	●	Online safety regulator (established under the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022) and Ireland's Digital Services Coordinator; enforces the Online Safety Code and the DSA; enforces AI Act bans on manipulative AI; media literacy remit.
Online Safety Code (Coimisiún na Meán, October 2024)	Statutory code		Y	Y	Y		●	●	●		Binding code for video-sharing platforms: restricts content promoting eating disorders, self-harm and suicide and content inciting violence or hatred (incl. on grounds of sex), for all users, not only children; age assurance for pornography under discussion.
Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 (Digital Services Act)	EU instrument		PT	PT	Y	Y	●	●	●	●	EU platform regulation: notice-and-action duties, and systemic risk duties for very large platforms, incl. illegal content, fundamental rights, civic discourse, gender-based violence, public health, minors and physical and mental well-being; risks from recommender systems must be assessed.
Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 (Artificial Intelligence Act)	EU instrument		PT	PT	PT		●		●		The only system-level AI rules in the mapped jurisdictions: bans manipulative AI practices; transparency for chatbots and deepfakes.
Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation)	EU instrument		PT			PT	●	●	●		EU data protection law: lawful processing, profiling limits and extra protection for children's data; regulates data, not content.
Proposed EU Kids Act	Proposal		PE	PE			●	●	●		Pending: proposed EU safety by design rules for children, incl. delayed social media access and AI chatbots.
Proposed EU Digital Fairness Act	Proposal		PE	PE		PE		●		●	Pending: proposed EU consumer law regulation on dark patterns, addictive design, unfair personalisation, influencer marketing and spending-maximising features (e.g. virtual currencies); focus on the protection of children.
Health and education frameworks											
National Men's Health Action Plan: Healthy Ireland – Men (HI-M) 2024–2028	Strategy	PO						●	●		The only long-standing dedicated men's health framework mapped; policy only.
Connecting for Life 2026–2035	Strategy	PO				PO		●			National suicide and self-harm reduction strategy; policy only.
Children First Act 2015	Legislation	PT			PT		●		●		Child safeguarding statements and risk assessments for organisations; gender-neutral.
Junior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) specification	Curriculum	PO					●	●	●		Junior Cycle curriculum: consent, pornography, image-sharing, extortion and help-seeking; reaches all boys through school.
Violence, abuse and social cohesion frameworks											
Zero Tolerance: Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence 2022–2026	Strategy	PO				PO	●		●		National strategy (2022–2026) on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence; prevention and awareness work engaging men and boys; policy only.
No Excuses campaign (Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration)	Campaign	PO					●		●		Women-focused awareness campaign on sexual harassment and violence, with young men as a key audience; policy only.
Gambling frameworks											
Gambling Regulation Act 2024	Legislation	PT	Y	Y	Y	PT				●	Major reform: age protection, credit ban, advertising limits, exclusion register and Social Impact Fund.
Gambling Regulatory Authority of Ireland (2025)	Regulator	PT	Y	Y	Y	PT				●	New gambling regulator; restricted prediction markets, unless licensed, from 1 July 2026.
Finance frameworks											
Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010	Legislation				Y					●	Anti-money laundering framework: young men recruited on social media as 'money mules' can face criminal liability as well as being victims.
Central Bank of Ireland	Regulator		Y	Y	Y	PT				●	Financial regulator; enforces the Consumer Protection Code and MiCA; trusted flagger under the DSA, supporting removal of scam content.
Regulation (EU) 2023/1114 (Markets in Crypto-Assets Regulation)	EU instrument		Y	Y	PT					●	EU crypto-asset rules: authorisation of providers and rules on marketing communications; applies directly in Ireland.
Consumer Protection Act 2007	Legislation			PT	PT					●	Bans misleading and aggressive commercial practices and pyramid schemes; engaged where coaching or wealth schemes make misleading income or results claims; non-binding ASAI/ CCPC guidance on disclosing influencer marketing.

Ireland

Ireland has the strongest potential coverage of the three jurisdictions. It combines national criminal law with national and EU online safety, data and AI regulation. Additionally, Ireland has a track record of men's health-focused policy.

'Coco's law', the Hate Offences Act 2024 and the sexual offences legislation provide the criminal foundation in relation to men and boys' online harms. The Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act 2024[439] increases penalties for offences motivated by hatred, including on grounds of gender. Coimisiún na Meán (CnaM) oversees both the Online Safety Code and the EU Digital Services Act (DSA) (as Ireland's Digital Service Coordinator). The Online Safety Code requires video-sharing platforms to restrict content promoting eating disorders, self-harm and suicide, as well as content inciting hatred. The DSA's systemic risk duties are relevant to most mapped harms as they extend to the protection of minors, gender-based violence, mental and physical well-being, civic discourse and recommender systems.

Additionally, the EU AI Act makes Ireland the only mapped jurisdiction with system-level rules on AI systems, including bans on manipulative AI (although AI chatbots and companions are covered to an extent by the UK OSA and are proposed to be covered to an extent under Canada's Bill C-34). The Irish Gambling Regulatory Authority has sought to keep pace with developments in gambling, such as through restrictions of prediction markets in July 2026.

Ireland is the only mapped jurisdiction with a long-standing dedicated men's health framework rooted in its first policy in 2008, and through its second HSE National Men's Health Action Plan (2024-2028)[440], which covers men's health and suicide prevention. Prevention is further supported by safeguarding and curriculum frameworks including Children First[441], Junior Cycle SPHE[442] and Connecting for Life 2026-2035. These are complemented by campaigns such as No Excuses, which target young men.

However, gaps also remain in Ireland, including in legislation and policy frameworks. In legislation, the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989[443], the principal statute governing hate speech, protects groups defined by race, religion, nationality or sexual orientation, but not gender (the 1989 Act has resulted in roughly 50 prosecution in more than 30 years and is considered to be an insufficient legislative deterrent). In health policy, the National Men's Health Plan, one of the country's main instruments for men's health, has no statutory basis and therefore carries no enforcement powers or legally binding duties. Additionally, several key measures depend on EU timelines, for example, transposing the Directive on violence against women and domestic violence[444] by June 2027, an implementation of the proposed EU Kids Act and the proposed Digital Fairness Act.

Comparative insights: lessons from Australia and New Zealand

The above analysis of the UK, Canada and Ireland shows growing but uneven recognition of online harms affecting men and boys. But a comparison with Australia and New Zealand's online regimes, which are at different stages of maturity, highlights distinctive gaps and opportunities for other jurisdictions in addressing online safety for men and boys. Particularly, it highlights the importance of regulatory capacity and the treatment of legal-but-harmful content, as well as the gender-disaggregated evidence needed to make these harms visible.

Criminal offences in Australia and New Zealand are broadly comparable to the UK, Ireland and Canada. Additionally, Australia's Men's Health Strategy 2020-2030 specifically sets out actions to improve men's and boys' mental health and wellbeing and risk-taking behaviour, among other physical health risks.[445] However, both New Zealand and Australia differ in their approaches to strengthening online safety.

New Zealand does not yet have an overarching online safety regime comparable to the UK, Ireland or Australia. Instead, it addresses harmful and illegal online content by classifying it as 'objectionable' in New Zealand. Objectionable content includes 'torture, sexual violence, sexual activity involving children or young people, the promotion of crime acts of terrorism, degrading and dehumanising conduct, extreme violence including executions, mass shootings, suicide or extreme cruelty towards animals'.[446]

Objectionable content is 'illegal to view, share or create', and is rooted in the Films, Videos and Publications Classification Act 1993.[447] Te Mana Whakaatu, the Classification Office, oversees the classification of content. It also engages in prevention work to support communities to make informed choices around online content. Enforcement lies with the New Zealand Police, the New Zealand Customs Service and the Department of Internal Affairs.

In addition, the Government's Online Safety (Minimum Age and Child Safety Risk Assessment) Bill, introduced in August 2026, would establish a standing regulator and a risk assessment regime for covered online platforms, including social-media-style services and social AI companions, based on design features, business models, algorithms, governance and use of technology, as well as risks from illegal and harmful content and conduct, AI-generated or manipulated content and advertising.[448] It would also impose a minimum age of 16 for holding an account on an age-restricted platform. However, the Bill had not had its first reading before Parliament dissolved on 1 October 2026 and would therefore need to be reinstated by the next Parliament.

Meanwhile, **Australia** is widely seen as the first country to establish a dedicated government online safety regulator and pass a dedicated online safety statute, rooted in child-focused legislation under the Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015.[449] Australia later passed the Online Safety Act 2021 (AUS OSA), which applies broader safety duties relevant to users of all ages.[450]

The AUS OSA establishes the primary online safety framework in Australia tackling online harms. The eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) is tasked to implement and enforce the regime. eSafety have worked closely with industry to establish codes of practice that aim to protect Australians from unlawful content categorised as 'Class 1A' and 'Class 1B'.[451]

Class 1A content constitutes content that 'is seriously harmful, including child sexual abuse material, pro-terror material, and extreme crime and violence'. Class 1B content is crime and violence content, as well as drug-related content.

Age-restricted content is categorised as 'Class 2' and includes online pornography (the exact classification depends on the type of pornography depicted) and other content considered as 'high-impact', including nudity, violence and drug use, as well as 'themes' such as suicide, death, serious illness, racism and family breakdown.[452]

These classifications apply to social media services, 'relevant electronic services' such as instant messaging services, dating services or online multi-player gaming services, 'designated internet services' such as file storage services, generative AI services and other website and apps.[453] Search engines, app stores, hosting services, internet service providers, and equipment services (relevant software and hardware to access the classified content). Depending on the type of service, risk assessment requirements may apply. The commencement dates for these obligations began on 16 December 2023, with the latest commencement on 9 March 2026.

Alongside these systemic measures, the Australian OSA establishes an individual complaints regime, allowing Australians to report cyberbullying, adult cyber abuse, image-based abuse and illegal or restricted content directly to eSafety. Beyond offering redress (takedown), these schemes have also been used to establish a gender-disaggregated evidence base on online harms, independent of platform data access. Financial sexual extortion is an example: eSafety found that 86 percent of sexual extortion reports made came from male victims, and nearly half came from men aged between 18-24.[454] eSafety has used this data to scrutinise platforms' responses, finding that services are not consistently deploying available detection tools.

eSafety's Basic Online Safety Expectations (BOSE) provide a benchmark for the requirements for regulated service providers to mitigate online harms.[455] These sit alongside safety by design principles.[456] Additionally, the BOSE Guidance was updated in December 2025 to align them with the new obligations for age-restricted services, as introduced by the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024 (SMMA).[457] This framework made Australia the first country to introduce social media restrictions for children under 16 years old, and requires designated services – so far these are nine social media and user-streaming services – to implement age assurance and prevent media use by under-16-year-olds from creating accounts.[458]

Since the December 2025 deadline to implement these restrictions, preliminary evidence has shown mixed results on the effectiveness of the restrictions. For example, a research study from June 2026 found that three months after the SMMA came into force, more than 85 percent of survey participants under 16 years old were still able to use designated services.[459]

However, Australia's online safety regime continues to adapt and evolve. On 15 October 2026, the Online Safety Amendment (Digital Duty of Care) Bill 2026 was introduced.[460] It aims to impose a statutory duty of care on online services to provide a 'safe online environment' and protect users from serious harmful material and conduct, especially children. Such serious harm includes violent extremist material, sadistic online exploitation, and fake nude material. For children specifically, services would be required to protect children from exposure to pornography, content that glorifies 'crime [or] encourages dangerous stunts or seriously harmful practices' in addition to content encouraging eating disorders, abuse, harassment or bullying and material promoting hostility toward women or gender equality. The duty would apply to services such as games, social media platforms and AI chatbots. This would be complemented by strengthened takedown notices and related powers, particularly around 'fake nude material'. As part of the continued adaptation of Australia's online safety regime, the Bill would repeal the existing industry codes, standards and BOSE framework, which would be superseded by the new Duty following a 12-month transition period after Royal Assent.

Overall, both New Zealand and Australia provide relevant comparative insights when considering policy responses to online harms affecting men and boys in the UK, Canada and Ireland. For example, Canada might consider the approaches of Australia's eSafety when developing the proposed Digital Safety Commission under Bill C-34, including what capacities, resources and expertise it will need to exercise its investigative and enforcement powers effectively. New Zealand's proposed Online Safety Bill, which would establish a new online safety regulator, may also offer timely lessons. Additionally, lessons can be learned from both jurisdictions on how illegal and legal-but-harmful online content can be addressed. From Australia specifically, the UK, Canada and Ireland can benefit from a close consideration of eSafety's approach to restricting social media access for children, including its benefits and limitations. Gender-disaggregated data, produced via Australia's complaints regime, provides an evidence base on harms where men and boys are primary victims, insights which might otherwise go unrecognised. Australia's relatively long-standing approach also provides a reminder that digital safety regulation takes time and requires continuous adaptation, especially as technologies and online harms evolve.

Implications for policy responses to online harms affecting boys and men

1. Existing laws should protect men and boys

To ensure a public-health, preventative approach, governments should ensure existing offences are proportionately applied to harms affecting men and boys online, close remaining legal gaps, and widen access to redress and support beyond criminal justice. Many of the online harms men and boys face, from harassment and threats to fraud and sexual extortion, are covered by general offences rather than harm-specific ones. Because these offences are largely technology and gender-neutral, they can capture new and changing harms without new legislation. However, they can only operate once the harm has occurred. Their effectiveness also depends on men and boys reporting these harms, and on police, prosecutors and courts recognising them when men and boys are affected. Gaps also remain in how hate crime law covers sex or gender and in how coercion outside intimate relationships is addressed. Outside the criminal and financial routes, redress and support have little statutory backing.

- General offences only work if those applying them recognise the harm, regardless of whether this takes place online or offline. Justice and home affairs ministries should work with police, prosecution services and judicial training bodies to develop training guidance on how harms present when men and boys are victim survivors. This includes the harms they may be less likely to identify, such as sexual extortion, coercion and harassment.
- Where the law leaves gaps, justice ministries and legislatures should review and close them. This includes how hate law covers sex or gender, how coercion outside intimate relationships is addressed, and the timely implementation of pending EU requirements (such as the gender-based cyber-incitement offence in the EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence).
- Justice ministries, victim survivors' commissioners (or equivalents) and online safety regulators should also strengthen routes to redress outside the criminal justice systems. Civil remedies, complaints mechanisms and victim support services need clearer statutory footing, so that men and boys can seek redress without depending on a prosecution.
- These measures depend on men and boys coming forward. Health and education departments, working with civil society and men's health organisations, should foster help-seeking. The aim is for men and boys to recognise these harms and know where to turn for justice and support.

2. Online safety regulation should address the gendered harms men and boys face

Online safety regulation should be gender sensitive and systematic, meaning it embeds gendered harms to men and boys in risk assessment and safety by design obligations, where relevant extend meaningful protections to adults, and capture the full range of technologies shaping men's and boys' health. Online safety laws are a key opportunity to tackle men's and boys' online harms. In the UK, the OSA is the only identified framework that acts across design prevention, exposure mitigation, intervention and redress. The systemic risk models of the OSA and the DSA are especially promising because they address design features and recommender systems as well as individual content. Yet many protections focus on children. No binding framework covers harms such as masculinity competitiveness and self-optimisation, isolation and emotional suppression, particularly for adults. None of the three jurisdictions requires regulators to address men's and boys' online harms specifically, as the UK does for women and girls (though the EU does call attention to gender-based harms more generally). Coverage of AI companions is uneven, and the effects of planned age restrictions on boys remain unclear.

- Online safety regulators, including the EC which oversees the largest platforms under the DSA, should make these harms explicit in their risk assessment guidance, codes of practice and safety by design expectations. This means naming risks such as body dissatisfaction, steroid and supplement use, isolation and dependency, and examining how recommender systems and design features drive exposure to them.

- Governments and legislatures should consider giving this work a statutory basis, similar to the existing requirement for guidance on women and girls' online safety under the UK's OSA. This approach would complement the violence against women and girls (VAWG) agenda. Many of the same drivers, such as misogynistic content and gender antagonism, harm men and boys as well as women and girls.

- Protections should also extend beyond childhood. Legislators and regulators should require services to give adult users meaningful control over their feeds and over design features linked to harm and should apply this beyond the largest platforms.

- When reviewing their frameworks, governments should define scope by what a service does, such as hosting or generating content, interacting with users or recommending material, rather than by platform type. They should prioritise obligations by risk as well, rather than solely by size, and give regulators a clear, accountable process for bringing new services and harms into scope. This matters most for AI companions and smaller high-risk services.

- Governments and regulators should also evaluate how age restrictions affect boys, including whether they displace boys to less regulated services and what risks young men face once the restrictions no longer apply.

3. Harmful monetisation should be tackled across regulatory remits

Governments and regulators should extend advertising and influencer marketing rules beyond financial services, address the monetisation incentives that reward harmful content, and formalise referral pathways between regulators. Many of the harms men and boys face online are driven by commercial interests, from high-risk trading and coaching schemes to supplements and performance-enhancing substances. These harms cut across online safety, financial regulation, consumer protection, advertising and health products, so responsibility for them is fragmented. Financial services offer the most developed model, with influencer guidance and regulators acting directly within platform enforcement processes. Comparable rules and partnerships are limited elsewhere, however. The business models that reward creators for harmful content remain largely unaddressed, and cooperation between regulators often relies on informal arrangements.

- Consumer protection authorities, advertising standards bodies, and medicines and health product regulators should develop influencer marketing guidance for products and services that affect men's and boys' health, such as supplements, cosmetic procedures and coaching schemes. This should build on existing financial promotions guidance. Where online platforms are the main sales channel, these regulators should have clear routes into platform enforcement, for example through trusted flagger status.

- Online safety regulators should treat monetisation as a risk factor in their risk assessment guidance. This includes examining how creator payment programmes, affiliate schemes and paid promotion reward content that harms men's and boys' health. When reviewing their frameworks, governments should consider extending advertising-specific platform duties beyond fraud.

- Finally, governments should formalise referral pathways between online safety, financial, consumer, advertising and health products regulators. Memoranda of understanding, joint forums and information-sharing agreements would allow regulators to act on harms that fall across their remits, rather than relying on informal cooperation.

4. Online harms should be recognised as a men's health issue

Governments should integrate online harms into men's health, education and well-being policy, back these frameworks with funding, implementation and evaluation, and adopt a public health prevention framework to address the intersection of online harms and men's and boys' health. Strategies, guidance and action plans are often the only frameworks addressing some of the harms men and boys face online, including masculinity competitiveness and self-optimisation, isolation and emotional suppression, and harmful sexual expectations. Men-focused health strategies and gender-based violence frameworks that engage men and boys as partners in prevention are promising developments. However, online harms are not consistently built into these frameworks, and their implementation and evaluation remain limited. Where strategies have a statutory footing and reporting duties, as with Canada's suicide prevention framework, they can go further than conventional policy.

- Health departments should lead on integrating online harms into men's health and well-being strategies, treating exposure to harmful online environments as a determinant of health. Education departments should build these harms into relationships, sex and health education, and digital literacy curricula. Digital departments and online safety regulators should contribute to both, so that health, education and online safety policy reinforce one another.

- A public health approach should be used to inform and organise this work across all three levels of prevention: building resilience and positive engagement with men and boys, targeting those at greater risk, and supporting those already affected. Governments should fund each level and consider giving key strategies a statutory footing with public reporting duties, so that progress can be tracked.

- Governments should also build evaluation and dedicated funding into these frameworks from the outset, with impact assessments informing each new iteration. Governments should direct their public research councils and health research funders to support longitudinal research on what works to address digital harms to men and boys, including data broken down by gender, age and background.

- Finally, much of the delivery sits with local government, health services, devolved administrations, and provinces and territories. National governments should coordinate with them and recognise their efforts, so that national strategies translate into services that men and boys can access in practice.

State of the evidence

TOWARDS A FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

In this chapter, 'report cards' assess the current state of evidence across the four overarching harm areas identified in the taxonomy. They categorise the research base connecting specific online harms to health outcomes, with findings organised into three categories:

- ● **Established**
  Supported by a substantial and reasonably consistent body of empirical evidence.

- ◐ **Emerging**
  Supported by empirical evidence, but with important limitations concerning its scope, consistency, methodological strength or applicability to boys and young men.

- ○ **Hypothesised**
  Plausible relationships or mechanisms identified through theory, preliminary observations or indirect evidence, but not yet supported by sufficient direct empirical research.

The research gaps identified are intended to inform future research priorities, rather than suggest that no relevant evidence currently exists. As the review focused on English-language research, with a particular focus on the UK, Canada and Ireland, relevant studies published in other languages or focused on other geographical contexts may not have been reflected.

SEXUAL HEALTH HARMS RESEARCH

OVERALL EVIDENCE ASSESSMENT

The evidence base is comparatively well developed for several forms of online sexual victimisation, including image-based abuse and sexual harassment, and for certain adverse outcomes associated with problematic pornography use. However, research specifically focused on boys and young men remains under-developed, particularly concerning sexual development, relationship expectations and the longer-term consequences of harmful online experiences. The rapid development of AI-generated sexual content and AI-mediated intimacy presents additional challenges, with emerging technologies outpacing empirical research into their consequences.

WHERE THE EVIDENCE STANDS

●

Established

- Online sexual victimisation, including image-based abuse and sexual harassment, can have significant psychological and social consequences.
- Men are more likely to report more PPU than women, and sexual minority men and women are at an even greater risk of PPU than heterosexual men and women.[461]
- Financially motivated sexual exploitation, including sexual extortion, disproportionally affects boys and young men and can be associated with substantial psychological distress.

◐

Emerging

- Research identifies associations between pornography engagement, sexual expectations, body image, sexual performance concerns and relationship wellbeing, with some emerging literature on younger men and boys' engagement with pornography.[462]
- Evidence is developing on how masculine norms influence boys' and young men's experiences of online sexual victimisation, willingness to disclose abuse and access to support (with more research on offline compared to online sexual victimisation).
- Online sexual health misinformation and harmful advice may contribute to unsafe sexual practices, such as inconsistent condom use where there is a risk of STIs, or sexual activity without adequate consideration of consent and sexual health risks, but evidence directly linking particular forms of exposure to subsequent behaviour remains limited.

○

Hypothesised

- Personalised and AI-generated sexual content may reinforce unrealistic and harmful sexual expectations or create new forms of PPU, but longer-term consequences remain insufficiently established, including health impacts for men and boys.
- While emerging literature has explored potential links between online pornography and coercive, violent or consent-undermining behaviours in intimate relationships, further research is needed to understand the mechanisms through which these effects may occur, why some men and boys may be more susceptible than others, and which factors may mitigate these risks.[463]

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH HARMS RESEARCH

OVERALL EVIDENCE ASSESSMENT

A substantial body of research documents the physical and psychological consequences of disordered eating, unsafe substance use, self-harm and related health behaviours. However, the evidence concerning how digital environments contribute to the development, escalation or persistence of these harms is less conclusive. Research is particularly limited regarding the interaction between online appearance ideals, commercialised self-optimisation cultures and existing psychological vulnerabilities. Further systematic research is needed to understand the relationship between suicide and specific online environments, moving beyond individual case studies to examine how platform features, online communities and patterns of engagement may contribute to suicidal ideation and behaviour.

WHERE THE EVIDENCE STANDS

●

Established

- Disordered eating, unsafe performance-enhancing substance use, self-harm and certain forms of dangerous risk-taking can result in significant physical and psychological harm.
- Appearance-focused social media content and pornography can reinforce unrealistic body standards, including ideals surrounding muscularity, genital appearance and sexual performance, contributing to body dissatisfaction, social comparison and adverse mental-health outcomes among boys and young men.
- Evidence suggests that online fitness, appearance and self-improvement ecosystems can expose boys and young men to potentially unsafe health advice, products and practices.

◐

Emerging

- While online fitness and self-improvement ecosystems promote testosterone use, anabolic steroids and other performance-enhancing substances, evidence remains limited on whether and how exposure to this content translates into actual substance use among boys and young men.
- Studies increasingly examine the relationship between digital engagement and mental health difficulties, but findings are often correlational and do not speak to how men and boys may experience barriers to help-seeking, for example due to masculine ideals of stoicism and emotional suppression.
- There is a growing focus on how online content leads to disordered eating among men and boys, but limited research on prevalence, causality, and underlying vulnerability factors.

○

Hypothesised

- Repeated exposure to appearance, productivity and self-optimisation narratives may create cumulative pressures affecting self-worth, anxiety and health-related behaviour, but these pathways require additional research.
- Recommendation systems and online communities may contribute to the escalation of harmful health behaviours and reinforce existing vulnerabilities, although how this happens is less well-evidenced.
- AI-mediated mental health interactions may influence whether boys and young men seek professional or interpersonal support, but longer-term consequences and gender-specific effects remain insufficiently established.

RELATIONAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL HARMS RESEARCH

OVERALL EVIDENCE ASSESSMENT

Research has established that online harassment and cyberbullying can have significant psychological and social consequences, while a growing body of evidence examines the relationship between digital engagement, loneliness, dating, identity formation and interpersonal wellbeing. However, important uncertainties remain concerning the longer-term effects of participation in particular online communities, including those organised around gender grievance, social status and relationship dissatisfaction. AI companionship and other forms of digitally mediated intimacy introduce further questions about emotional dependency and social development, for which longitudinal evidence remains particularly limited given the rapid development of new technologies.

WHERE THE EVIDENCE STANDS

●

Established

- Cyberbullying, online harassment and humiliation can have adverse consequences for psychological wellbeing, social participation and feelings of belonging, particularly for sexual minority men.
- Online environments can provide opportunities for connection, community and support, while also exposing men and boys to hostile or degrading interactions.
- Loneliness, social isolation and difficulties in interpersonal relationships are associated with men and boys' poorer psychosocial wellbeing.

◐

Emerging

- Research suggests that engagement with online communities organised around masculine identity, grievance or gender antagonism can intersect with men and boys' relationship expectations, social identity and psychological distress.
- Men and boys increasingly use AI companions and conversational systems for emotional support and companionship, with preliminary evidence suggesting both potential benefits and risks.

○

Hypothesised

- Sustained engagement with gender-antagonistic narratives may reinforce interpersonal distrust, hostile relationship expectations or social withdrawal, but how remains insufficiently established.
- Emotional dependency on AI companions may alter men and boys' patterns of human interaction, intimacy or help-seeking, although robust longitudinal evidence is lacking.
- Negative experiences on dating platforms may contribute to the development or reinforcement of grievances among some men and boys, potentially fostering misogynistic attitudes and resentment towards women, while also encouraging withdrawal from dating and intimate relationships. Further research is needed to understand the mechanisms underlying these pathways, why some men may be more susceptible than others, and how this contributes to undermining healthy relationships.

FINANCIAL HARMS RESEARCH

OVERALL EVIDENCE ASSESSMENT

The evidence base establishes the occurrence and consequences of several forms of financial harm, including gambling-related problems, online fraud and financially motivated sexual exploitation. However, research specifically examining the online vulnerabilities to financial harms among boys and young men remains comparatively limited, particularly where exploitation intersects with masculine aspirations concerning wealth, status and financial independence. Newer digital commercial ecosystems, including speculative trading, prediction markets and exploitative coaching schemes, present additional research challenges.

WHERE THE EVIDENCE STANDS

●

Established

- Online gambling-related problems can have significant financial, psychological and relational consequences and men are more likely to experience problematic gambling, or gambling disorders.
- Online fraud and financially motivated exploitation can result in material financial losses and psychological distress.
- Financial sexual extortion disproportionally affects boys and young men and can involve substantial distress and barriers to disclosure rooted in feelings of shame and masculine ideals.

◐

Emerging

- Research increasingly examines how digital gambling environments, influencer promotion and commercial incentives shape financial risk-taking and potentially harmful engagement by men and boys.
- Gendered expectations surrounding wealth, status and financial success may influence engagement with risky financial opportunities and susceptibility to certain forms of exploitation.
- Digital ecosystems that combine aspirational masculinity narratives, social comparison and commercial promotion may contribute to escalating financial risk-taking or exploitative purchasing behaviour, but this body of literature is still early in its development.

○

Hypothesised

- Financial harms may produce cumulative effects across mental health, interpersonal relationships and social participation, particularly where victimisation is accompanied by shame or secrecy, but these wider pathways remain under-examined.
- Gambling harms can place additional demands on public health services. However, further research is needed to quantify these impacts through a gender-sensitive lens, particularly to understand the specific healthcare needs of boys and men around online gambling-related harms.
- Further research is needed to understand the potential gendered impacts of prediction markets, including whether boys and young men face disproportionate exposure, participation or financial harms, and how platform design, gamification and marketing may shape these risks.

TOWARDS A RESEARCH AGENDA ON ONLINE HARMS AFFECTING BOYS AND MEN

The taxonomy identifies important gaps in understanding how online harms affect men and boys. While research is expanding considerably, questions remain about the gendered nature of these harms, the mechanisms through which they emerge, their cumulative consequences and the effectiveness of potential responses.

The following six interconnected priorities consolidate the research gaps and provide a foundation for future research, policy and prevention.

1. Understanding the gendered nature of online harms

Research must move beyond treating gender primarily as a demographic variable to understand how gender, gendered norms, expectations and experiences shape exposure, vulnerability and responses to online harms.

- **Gendered pathways and impacts:** Investigate how expectations surrounding appearance, sexual performance, financial success, independence and emotional self-reliance shape experiences of harm and their physical, psychological, sexual, financial and relational consequences.
- **Recognition and perceptions of harm:** Engage men and boys directly to assess whether evidenced online harms reflect their lived experiences, how they understand exploitation, abuse, manipulation and coercion, and where their perceptions differ from existing research and policy definitions.
- **Disclosure, help-seeking and recovery:** Examine how masculine norms influence the recognition and reporting of victimisation, willingness to seek support and pathways to recovery.

2. Identifying which men and boys are most affected, and why

Research should examine how exposure, vulnerability and outcomes differ across populations, rather than treating men and boys as a homogeneous group.

- **Age and life-course differences:** Investigate how harms vary across childhood, adolescence, early adulthood and later life, particularly in relation to sexual development, identity formation, relationships, financial decision-making and health.
- **Intersectional and geographical differences:** Examine how ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, socioeconomic circumstances and geographical context shape experiences of harm and access to support.
- **Differential outcomes and protective factors:** Establish why similar experiences affect individuals differently, including the influence of pre-existing vulnerabilities, offline relationships, community connectedness and opportunities for positive engagement.

3. Investigating emerging technologies and AI-mediated harms

Research should examine the gendered experiences and impacts of emerging technologies, particularly AI chatbots and companions. Greater attention is needed to how boys and men engage with these technologies, how their experiences differ from those of women and girls, and LGBTQ+ gender identities, and whether and how these interactions affect emotional wellbeing, intimacy, relationships and sexual expectations.

AI companionship and relationships: Examine how sustained interactions with AI companions influence emotional dependency, loneliness, social development, intimacy and interpersonal relationships, including potentially supportive uses.

- **AI-mediated mental-health support:** Investigate how men and boys use AI systems to discuss psychological distress, self-harm and suicidality, including safeguard effectiveness and whether these interactions complement or displace other forms of support.
- **AI-generated sexual content:** Assess the implications of synthetic sexual imagery, AI-generated pornography and AI-mediated intimacy for consent, sexual expectations, autonomy and relationship development, particularly during adolescence.
- **Emerging financial technologies:** Examine risks associated with cryptocurrency, prediction markets and increasingly personalised or automated commercial practices, including financial exploitation and gambling-like behaviours.

4. Understanding harms across platforms, ecosystems and commercial models

Greater attention is needed to how harms emerge, interact and escalate across interconnected digital environments, and the role of platform design and commercial incentives in shaping these pathways, as recommended by the Lancet.[464]

- **Cross-platform pathways, features and affordances:** Investigate how users move between social media, messaging services, gaming, pornography, financial and other digital environments, and how recommendation systems, social feedback, private messaging, engagement incentives and frictionless transactions contribute to the development or amplification of harms.
- **Commercialisation of vulnerabilities:** Examine how influencer marketing, affiliate programmes, paid communities and other monetisation strategies capitalise on insecurities surrounding masculinity, appearance, wealth, dating and self-improvement, distinguishing legitimate commercial activities from exploitation.

5. Establishing causal pathways, cumulative impacts and longer-term consequences

Much of the existing evidence identifies associations between online harms and adverse outcomes. Longitudinal and mixed-methods research is needed to establish when, how and for whom online environments contribute to harm, analyse how this is compounded by pre-existing vulnerabilities, and identify protective factors and longer-term consequences. Priority areas for investigation include:

- **Sexual development and relationships:** How pornography, sexual-health misinformation, harmful sexual expectations and hostile relationship narratives may affect consent, intimacy, relationship functioning, misogynistic attitudes and withdrawal from dating.
- **Victimisation and recovery:** The longer-term psychological, sexual, relational and financial consequences of cyberbullying, image-based abuse, sexual coercion and sexual extortion, including effects on trust, disclosure, help-seeking, and recovery among men and boys.
- **Loneliness, belonging and social participation:** When online communities provide meaningful support and connection, and when engagement may reinforce isolation, distress, emotional dependency or withdrawal from offline relationships.
- **Self-harm and suicidality:** How specific digital experiences interact with existing vulnerabilities, including whether online environments contribute to risk, offer protection or have different effects across populations.
- **Cumulative and overlapping harms:** Whether and how exposure to multiple harms across digital environments compounds adverse outcomes across physical, mental, sexual, financial and relational wellbeing.

6. Measuring wider public-health, community and societal impacts

Building on the Lancet series, research should extend beyond individual consequences to examine how online harms accumulate and interact with wider social, economic and institutional conditions.[465]

- **Public-health and healthcare implications:** Quantify cumulative health consequences, healthcare demand and economic costs, including gendered patterns in service utilisation.
- **Community wellbeing and inequalities:** Investigate how harassment, exclusion and harmful norms affect belonging, interpersonal trust, social participation and existing inequalities.
- Gender relations and social cohesion: Examine how gender-antagonistic narratives and harmful masculine ideals may contribute to misogyny, polarisation or extremist attitudes, without assuming deterministic pathways.
- Economic and intergenerational consequences: Assess the wider costs of exploitation, gambling and unsafe health practices, alongside the potential transmission of harmful gender norms and inequalities across generations.
- Prevention and intervention effectiveness: Evaluate which platform safeguards, regulatory responses, educational interventions and community-based approaches reduce harm, for whom they work and under what circumstances, incorporating men's and boys' perspectives into their design and evaluation.

Stakeholder takeaways

The taxonomy can serve as a practical tool for informing responses to online harms affecting men and boys across a broad range of sectors. This section outlines potential applications of the taxonomy for a range of important sectors, including policymakers and regulatory bodies; public health and health service responses; education, practitioners and families; research, civil society and advocacy; and platform policy, enforcement and safety by design. Across all stakeholders, these considerations span from upstream action on design and commercial practices to early intervention and support for those affected.



GOVERNMENT, REGULATION AND LEGAL

Actors across government, regulation and legal sectors shape the policy, regulatory and legal conditions in which online harms arise and are addressed. From a public health perspective, this sector is well placed to act upstream, on the platform design choices, commercial practices and product standards that shape exposure to harms. It is important that responses are grounded in fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, privacy and children's rights. Stakeholders in this sector can use the taxonomy to develop consistent, gender-responsive approaches and decision-making across policy, regulation and enforcement, particularly where harms cut across health, consumer, digital and criminal frameworks.

Policymakers

Online harms in this taxonomy cut across many government departments, including health, education, digital, gender equality and men's health. Many of these harms, such as unsafe supplement use and speculative trading, are often not seen as online safety issues, and can therefore fall between department remits. Treating digital environments as determinants of health means building them into health and wellbeing strategies, and not only in online safety policy.

POLICYMAKERS CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Recognise digital environments, including platform design and commercial incentives, as determinants of health within health and wellbeing strategies.
- Embed gender-responsive approaches across policy portfolios, setting out how online harms manifest differently across genders.
- Identify gaps where harms fall between regulatory regimes, and where existing legal frameworks not specific to online safety could be applied alongside online safety regulation. These include laws on controlled drugs and medicines, consumer protection, gambling, financial promotions and advertising standards.
- Consider product safety approaches to digital design, including safety assessments. Recent proposals in the UK, for example, set out how digital products, platforms and AI systems could be brought within a dedicated product safety framework modelled on the regime for physical goods.466
- Clarify roles and responsibilities across government portfolios by mapping each harm to the departments responsible for it. Relevant portfolios include health and public health; education; digital and online safety; culture, media and sport; equalities; children and families; justice and policing; business and consumer protection; and financial services.
- Ensure regulators are resourced with the expertise needed to address the gendered dimensions of harm, particularly where they are newly established, such as in Canada.
- Commission research that addresses evidence gaps, including on gendered exposure, platform design and emerging challenges (such as Generative AI).
- Meaningfully engage men and boys, alongside frontline practitioners, civil society and the health sector, in policy development and consultation, using the taxonomy as a shared framework to structure discussions and test whether harms reflect lived experience.

Online safety regulators

Regulatory remits vary across jurisdictions. Some authorities only oversee large social media platforms, while others cover a wider range of services, including smaller platforms, pornography sites, dating apps, gaming platforms, and decentralised or emerging services. The following takeaways are intended to be applicable across these different regulatory models. The taxonomy can help regulators look at how design features, recommender systems and commercial models contribute to risk, and how that risk differs across genders.

REGULATORS CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Develop gender-responsive guidance and risk assessment expectations that

account for how harms affect different groups, including men and boys.

- Use the taxonomy as a benchmark when reviewing platforms' risk assessments, checking whether they cover the relevant harms, the platform features linked to each harm, and the populations most affected.
- Use the taxonomy to inform staff training, guidance development and risk assessment expectations from the outset.
- Treat platform infrastructure, design and commercial practices – including recommender systems, engagement features and monetisation models – as determinants of health that shape exposure to the harms in the taxonomy.
- Shape safety by design expectations for platform features, including AI companions and chatbots.
- Support protected researcher access to platform data so that exposure, design effects and gendered differences can be measured independently.
- Inform transparency reporting categories so that harms affecting men and boys can be tracked more accurately.
- Identify where harms fall outside current regulatory scope and work with policymakers to address those gaps.

Consumer, financial, gambling and health-product regulators

Several harms in the taxonomy are commercially driven and fall under regulators outside traditional online safety remits. These include influencer marketing of supplements, enhancement products and get-rich-quick schemes, gambling-like features, and speculative trading, crypto and prediction-market products marketed to young men.

THESE REGULATORS CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Coordinate with online safety regulators where commercial harms are amplified by platform design and recommender systems.
- Address products that fall between online safety and product safety rules, such as supplements, performance-enhancing substances, peptides, and unverified cosmetic or sexual-enhancement products promoted on social media, pornography platforms, and online marketplaces.
- Use the taxonomy's analysis of health misinformation to identify health claims used to sell products, such as unverified sexual-enhancement products or "testosterone boosters" promoted by influencers or advertised on pornography platforms.
- Recognise gambling-like and speculative products that may reach users outside existing protections, such as memecoins, trading apps and prediction markets.

Law enforcement

Law enforcement has a role where harms are illegal, particularly sexual extortion and fraud or scams targeting young men. Men and boys are a significant target group for financially motivated sexual extortion, and stigma around help-seeking can discourage reporting.

LAW ENFORCEMENT CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Recognise sexual extortion, coercion and fraud specifically affecting men and boys, including where victims may be reluctant to report due to shame or gendered expectations.
- Ensure investigations are linked to appropriate support services, including mental health and suicide prevention services, given the risks associated with harms such as sexual extortion.
- Understand how different harms are interconnected to inform prevention, such as scams leading to sexual extortion.
- Understand how harms and offences operate across services and how AI tools are used, such as for generating non-consensual intimate imagery.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND HEALTH SERVICES

A public health approach is crucial for treating aspects of digital environments, including platform design, commercial incentives and information ecosystem, as determinants of health in a similar way as housing, income or employment. However, many of the harms in the taxonomy also first appear in health settings. They may show up as body dissatisfaction, harmful dieting, use of unregulated supplements or performance-enhancing substances, sexual performance concerns, gambling-related harm, loneliness, or suicidal ideation and self-harm.

Public health stakeholders can use the taxonomy to recognise the specific linkages between online harms and adverse health outcomes, consider the specific implications for primary, secondary and tertiary prevention approaches,[467] as well as apply a gender-responsive lens to how those harms manifest, are recognised and are responded to.

Public health bodies and health systems

Public health agencies set population-level strategy, run monitoring and commission prevention. Treating digital environments treated as determinants of health is still a relatively new approach, and there is a need for consideration around how online harms manifest across genders, including among men and boys.

PUBLIC HEALTH BODIES AND HEALTH SYSTEMS CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Recognise digital environments – including recommender systems, monetisation models and commercial marketing – as determinants of health within population health and men's health strategies. Develop monitoring that captures exposure to specific harms and design features.
- Consider the public health case for upstream, structural measures alongside individual-level interventions, for example around feed design, regulation of influencer marketing, and wellness products such as supplements and peptides that make health claims without being regulated as medicines.
- Carry out gender-responsive analysis of how online harms are distributed and experienced, including differences within groups of men and boys by age, sexual orientation and other factors.
- Inform professional guidance and training so that practitioners recognise when online environments, including influencer promotion and products bought through e-commerce sites and online marketplaces, may play a role in presenting concerns such as steroid, testosterone or peptide use.
- Inform public health messaging on body image and enhancement that reflects how masculine norms around strength and appearance shape both vulnerability and reluctance to seek help. Public health campaigns should be designed and evaluated with men and boys, drawing on lived experience to shape messaging.

Mental health and suicide prevention services

The taxonomy includes suicidal ideation and self-harm, despair and hopelessness reinforcement, isolation and emotional suppression, and emotional dependency on AI companions. Norms of self-reliance and emotional suppression can discourage men and boys from seeking help.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION SERVICES CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Recognise online environments as part of the context of distress, including content, communities, and technological features within AI that reinforce hopelessness, isolation or harmful beliefs about masculinity.
- Inform guidance on the risks and potential benefits of AI systems for people in distress and work with AI developers on safeguarding and signposting.
- Develop gender-responsive services and outreach, including through specific services, peer support and helplines, that reach men and boys online as well as offline.

Sexual health services

The taxonomy's sexual health harms category covers harmful sexual expectations, boundary erosion and sexual coercion and unsafe sexual-health misinformation and advice.

SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Inform sexual health education and guidance that addresses how online content, including pornography, may shape sexual expectations, including normalisation of practices such as strangulation.
- Develop online campaigns and outreach that meet men and boys where they encounter sexual-health misinformation, targeting specific harms such as, unsafe enhancement products.
- Ensure services are prepared to support men and boys affected by intimate image abuse and sexual coercion. The taxonomy's evidence shows gay, bisexual, trans and queer men are particularly affected on dating platforms.

Addiction and gambling services

The taxonomy covers harms involving compulsive or high-risk engagement. These include gambling-related harms, high-risk speculative trading, and problematic pornography use. In each case, platform features are designed to sustain engagement.

ADDICTION AND HARM-REDUCTION SERVICES CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Recognise commercial and design features such as randomised rewards and influencer endorsement as potential upstream drivers of harm.
- Identify emerging forms of gambling-like activity that young men may not see as gambling.
- Use the taxonomy's framing of problematic pornography use to recognise it as an area of need. It is not classified as an addiction in the UK, but compulsive sexual behaviour is recognised as a clinical condition. Include evidence-based organisations specialising in problematic pornography use within referral networks and the wider support ecosystem.
- Develop harm-reduction approaches that respond to how masculine norms around risk-taking, status and financial success shape engagement.

EDUCATION, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Schools, youth services, sports clubs, families and safeguarding organisations are important settings for prevention and early intervention particularly as adolescence and early adulthood are formative periods for identity, relationships and beliefs about masculinity, sexuality, status and success. Responses in this sector should be gender-responsive: addressing how harms manifest differently across genders, including engaging men and boys directly.

Stakeholders in this sector can use the taxonomy to recognise how online harms arise and how they may show up in young people's behaviour and wellbeing. It also helps them talk to young people about online experiences with nuance, focusing on content and context, and refer concerns to health and, safeguarding services, or report them to platforms and relevant authorities where needed.

Schools and school-based professionals

Schools reach many young people during formative years through relationships, sex and health education, digital and media literacy, and safeguarding roles, with this work involving not only teachers but also school counsellors, safeguarding leads, and external specialists. This places schools at the heart of all levels of prevention: building understanding and healthy norms across the whole school population, identifying pupils showing early signs of harm, and supporting those already affected. School staff often see the effects of online harms first, through changes in pupils' behaviour, wellbeing or attitudes towards peers. However, they may lack a shared language for recognising how these harms arise online, how they connect to one another and how they may differ across genders. Responsibility for addressing these harms should not rest with teachers alone. It should be shared across specialist roles within and beyond school, and supported by action from platforms, government and health services. Clearer definitions can help schools identify harms earlier, decide which type of response is needed and refer pupils to appropriate professional or service.

TEACHERS, SCHOOL COUNSELLORS AND SPECIALIST EDUCATORS CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Inform digital literacy efforts, including understanding how platform features and commercial models shape what they see. This includes recommendation algorithms, paid promotion, influencer endorsement and affiliate marketing, to ensure critical thinking not only for what content says but how it reaches them.
- Deliver gender-responsive sexual and health education that addresses harmful sexual expectations, boundary erosion and sexual coercion, consent and how pornography may shape expectations of sex.
- Address the concerns that can draw boys towards harmful content, including masculinity competitiveness and self-optimisation, isolation and loneliness, and pressure around appearance and financial success.
- Recognise and respond to gender antagonism and misogyny in classrooms, including reference to how engagement-driven design and creator monetisation can reward content that sets genders against each other, creating an "us versus them" divide.
- Recognise signs of harm in students, including bullying and harassment, harmful dieting and eating-related behaviours, isolation, and refer to safeguarding or health services.

Youth workers, sports clubs and coaches

Youth workers, sports clubs and coaches can be trusted adults in settings where boys may be more willing to talk. Sport, gym and fitness settings are also where some harms in the taxonomy circulate offline as well as online. These include hyper-muscular body ideals, unsafe supplement and performance-enhancing substance use, harmful dieting, and competitive comparison around status and appearance.

YOUTH WORKERS, SPORTS CLUBS AND COACHES CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Recognise how online fitness, appearance and "self-improvement" content may shape boys' training, diet and use of supplements or performance-enhancing substances, and challenge unsafe practices.
- Create spaces where boys can talk about online experiences, relationships and mental health.
- Promote healthy and realistic models of strength, body image and success, recognising coaches' influence as role models.
- Recognise early signs of related harms, including dangerous risk-taking behaviours, harmful dieting, and other behaviour.
- Refer young people to health, mental health, addiction or safeguarding services where needed.
- Draw on the taxonomy's definitions to support consistent training and safeguarding policies across clubs and youth organisations.

Parents and caregivers

Parents and caregivers are often the first to notice changes in a young person's behaviour, mood, or beliefs, but may not recognise their connection to online environments. Conversations about the content, communities and contexts young people engage with are important factors to consider beyond screen-time, as it can contribute to an understanding of whether time is supportive or harmful.

PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Understand the kinds of content and communities which young people may encounter, including appearance-focused and fitness content, wealth and coaching content, gambling features, AI companions, and content that frames relationships between men and women as adversarial.
- Understand how platform features shape what young people see and do. For example, the roles of recommendation algorithms, autoplay and endless scrolling, influencer promotion and affiliate links, and loot boxes and rewards.
- Use this understanding to talk with young people about why they are seeing certain content and how platforms are designed to keep them engaged. Recognise potential signs of harm, such as changes in mood, withdrawal, extreme dieting or shift towards hostile views about women or relationships.
- Understand where to find support, including schools, health services and helplines.

Child protection and safeguarding organisations

Child protection and safeguarding organisations respond where online harms involve exploitation, abuse or serious risk to children. In the taxonomy this includes for example, financial sexual extortion, non-consensual intimate image abuse, sexual coercion, and exposure to suicide and self-harm content.

CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING ORGANISATIONS CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Recognise the specific way boys are victims of online sexual exploitation and abuse, including financial sexual extortion, and ensure responses are gender-responsive.
- Understand how boys can be both victims and perpetrators of harm, sometimes at the same time. For example, they may be coerced into extorting or exploiting others, share intimate images of peers while being harmed themselves, or take up harmful attitudes towards girls after repeated exposure to misogynistic content.
- Understand how offending moves across services, for example contact made on social media, gaming or dating platforms before moving to private messaging, and how AI tools can be used to create intimate imagery.
- Assess emerging risks from AI companions and chatbots, including emotional dependency and harmful responses to children disclosing distress or suicidal ideation.
- Develop guidance and training for schools, youth organisations and parents using consistent harm definitions.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RESEARCH

Across the civil society and research sectors, the taxonomy offers a common framework for analysing and documenting gendered online harms. For researchers, the taxonomy supports study design and data collection that addresses research gaps; for civil society, it can help align documentation, reporting, and advocacy. Across both groups, the taxonomy can improve coordination with policymakers, regulators, and platforms by offering a common language for understanding and responding to gendered online harms.

A public health approach to prevention means engaging men and boys early and constructively, not just as potential perpetrators but as partners in preventing harms to all. It requires recognising how trauma, abuse and health vulnerabilities intersect with online harms. It also means supporting crucial victim-centred work to tackle violence against women and girls, and also recognising the disproportionate harms faced by Black and minoritised communities and those affected by systemic inequalities across race, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexual orientation.

Researchers and academia

Researchers in public health, media effects, online safety and related fields study how online environments shape health and wellbeing. A shared set of harm definitions and mechanisms can help researchers measure what people actually encounter online and build comparable evidence across studies, platforms and jurisdictions.

RESEARCHERS AND ACADEMIA CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Measure and classify harms consistently, using the taxonomy's categories and definitions to measure exposure to specific harms, design features and communities, and to develop coding frameworks for qualitative, quantitative and computational studies.
- Address evidence gaps the taxonomy identifies, such as AI companions and general-purpose AI, prediction markets, and male-specific outcome data. This includes strengthening causal evidence through longitudinal, experimental designs that distinguish established outcomes from observed associations and hypothesised pathways.
- Examine how harms interact and how gender shapes them, studying how harms co-occur and reinforce one another across categories, and how masculine norms shape exposure, vulnerability, help-seeking and outcomes.
- Compare harms across jurisdictions, platforms and populations, using standardised terminology to build a comparable evidence base.

Civil society organisations, including men's health and organisations engaging specifically with men

Civil society plays a critical intermediary role between affected communities, platforms, regulators and policymakers. They require support to document, escalate, advocate and coordinate, recognising that responsibility for addressing these harms should never rest with civil society alone. Men's health and male engagement organisations and community-based programmes, work directly with men and boys on health, wellbeing, relationships and gender norms. They are often well placed to reach men who are less likely to seek help through formal services. Online harms affecting men and boys are rarely set out in a consistent way, which makes it harder to design programmes, measure their impact and make the case for policy change. A shared framework may help these organisations articulate the specific harms they encounter and connect their work to wider public health, regulatory and platform responses.

MEN'S HEALTH AND MALE ENGAGEMENT ORGANISATIONS CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Design and evaluate programmes that address specific evidenced harms, such as isolation and emotional suppression, masculinity competitiveness and self-optimisation, or harmful beliefs and self-optimisation.
- Advocate for upstream action on platform design and commercial practices, alongside individual and community-level support.
- Take a gender-responsive approach that recognises men's and boys' experiences of harm while working alongside women's, LGBTQ+ and gender based violence organisations.
- Share insights from frontline work with researchers, policymakers and platforms to help fill evidence gaps.

Women's, LGBTQ+ and gender-based violence organisations

Organisations working with women, LGBTQ+ people and survivors of gender-based violence have long led responses to misogyny and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). Several harms in the taxonomy overlap with this work and reinforce hostility and harmful expectations toward women, girls and LGBTQ+ people, as well as affecting boys' and men's own wellbeing.

WOMEN'S, LGBTQ+ AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ORGANISATIONS CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Identify online drivers that may contribute to attitudes underpinning violence against women and girls, such as gender antagonism and harmful sexual expectations, to inform primary prevention.
- Cross-reference harms with ISD's TFGBV taxonomy and other existing frameworks where they overlap, such as intimate image abuse and sexual extortion, recognising that these harms take different forms across genders.468
- Build partnerships with men's health and male engagement organisations based on a shared, gender-responsive prevention agenda.

Men and boys

Men and boys bring direct experience of the online environments, communities and pressures set out in the taxonomy. That lived experience is essential to ensuring the taxonomy's broad categories reflect the wide range of ways harms are encountered and experienced, across ages, backgrounds, sexual orientations, identities and circumstances. Involving men and boys in research, policy and programme design is established public health practice, and it helps ensure responses reflect how harms are experienced. Efforts to engage them need to go beyond one-off consultation, reach a diverse range of men and boys, and treat them as partners. The taxonomy offers a shared reference point for structuring that engagement.

MEN AND BOYS CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Test and refine the taxonomy's categories and definitions so they reflect how harms are experienced across different ages, backgrounds and identities, and identify where harms are missing or vary from lived experience.
- Understand the spectrum of harms they can encounter online and how platform design contributes to them.
- Contribute to the design and evaluation of research, programmes and policy through youth panels, advisory groups and lived-experience input.
- Shape public messaging and campaigns so that they resonate with men and boys.
- Inform platform and regulatory responses through consultation on safety by design and user experience.

PLATFORMS AND INDUSTRY

Social media platforms and other digital services design, operate and monetise the online environments in which many harms in the taxonomy arise, from social, gaming and dating platforms to pornography, AI, commerce and gambling services. Industry actors play different roles in relation to these harms, from the teams that design, moderate and safeguard platforms and AI systems to the operators, advertisers and creators who monetise them.

Many of these harms are not illegal and arise through cumulative exposure, commercial incentives or design. A clear, shared language for identifying and distinguishing them can guide policy, moderation and product design. It can also show how engagement can move from everyday topics, such as fitness or self-improvement, towards harmful beliefs, products and behaviours. That clarity supports earlier, gender-responsive risk assessment and safety by design, as well as better coordination with regulators, researchers, health services and civil society partners.

As this taxonomy maps how platform type and design shape harm, the takeaways below set out overarching uses for all tech platforms followed by considerations for specific platform types and commercial operators and promoters.

TECH PLATFORMS AND INDUSTRY CAN USE THE TAXONOMY TO:

- Map platform policies against the taxonomy's harm categories and sub-harms to identify and address gaps. Cover both illegal content, removed promptly in line with legal duties in each jurisdiction, and harms that are not illegal but may be harmful, developing policies and enforcement guidelines for these using the taxonomy's definitions. Use the links between harms to set moderation thresholds for case triage and escalation, and coordinate enforcement across teams that usually work separately.
- Strengthen enforcement of policy violative content by translating harm definitions into detection signals, classifier training data, annotation guidelines and risk-modelling inputs. This includes community-specific terms, such as the ranking vocabulary used in status-anxiety content.
- Apply product-safety principles to new products and features before they reach users: carry out gender-responsive risk assessments that draw on the platform features linked to each harm and the populations most affected.
- Improve user-facing protections: map taxonomy categories to user reporting flows so users can report harms that current options might not cover. Provide signposting to support at points of risk.
- Increase transparency and coordination: classify harms consistently in transparency reporting so they can be compared across services and over time. Develop shared standards and use shared definitions for cross-platform signal-sharing through multistakeholder industry coalitions, particularly for harms that move across services.

Platform-specific considerations

- Dating Platforms: treat dating platforms as a first point of contact for financial sexual extortion. Add friction and warnings when users are pushed off-platform, detect known extortion scripts and reused images, and offer a dedicated sexual-extortion reporting route.
- Gaming: treat randomised rewards such as loot boxes and skin trading as gambling-like. Switch them off or age-gate them by default for under-18s, disclose odds, and block third-party skin-gambling integrations.
- Forums and anonymous platforms: proactively detect and remove content encouraging suicide, self-harm or sexual coercion, signpost to support, and cooperate with regulators on persistently high-risk spaces.
- Social media and video-sharing: test recommender systems for escalation from everyday fitness or self-improvement content towards gender antagonism, despair or influencer-promoted products. Publish the results and give all users (not only children) feed controls, including a non-profiled option.
- Commerce platforms: delist supplements, performance-enhancing substances and enhancement products that make unauthorised health claims, including under coded or wellness terms, and close the search and recommendation routes to them.
- Pornography platforms: Understand how recommendation pathways and advertising may contribute to harmful sexual expectations, problematic use and demand for unsafe enhancement products, particularly among adolescent boys.
- AI services: Turn AI-related sub-harms, such as emotional dependency and responses to suicidal ideation, into pre-release evaluation of features such as sycophancy and constant availability.

Commercial operators and promoters

- Gambling, betting, trading and crypto operators can assess their products and promotional practices against the design features the taxonomy links to gambling-related harms and high-risk speculative trading. This includes products that fall outside traditional definitions of gambling, such as skin gambling, memecoins and prediction markets.
- Advertisers, agencies and creators can screen products, partnerships and ad placements against the taxonomy's harm definitions, recognising how sponsorships, affiliate links and testimonials can lend unsafe products and schemes false credibility.

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