The Relationship Between Marital Status, Gender Role Conflict, Perceived Social Support and Men’s Intentions to Seek Help From a Variety of Helpers

Caroline Findlay and Gordon A. Walker

Monash University

Background

- Men seek help less than women
- Increased suicide and depression
- Beyond Blue and Men’s Line
- Gender
- Masculinity and gender role conflict
Issue 1: Gender Role Conflict

- Definition
- Incongruent with help seeking
- Multiple masculinities

Issue 2. Help seeking

- Help seeking- contextually situated
- Context – marital status.
  - Experience of divorce for men can be psychologically and emotionally profound
  - Separated men - high risk group
- Help seeking scales- should evaluate context and a range of potential helpers
**Issue 3: Social Support**

- Men do not act in isolation—they come into contact with family, friends and the community.
- ABS reports that family and friends are first point of call for emotional support.
- Research reports that an individual’s social support affects their attitudes to seeking help—
  - Size of network may impact help seeking
  - Unanimous attitudes of groups may impact help seeking
- Social lives are gendered and may change depending on changes in life and support.

---

**Social Constructionist Theory**

```
Masculinities

Social Environment

Attitude towards help seeking
```

Changes depending on context.
Aim of study

- Evaluate whether past experiences such as divorce alters how gender role conflict and social support influence men’s help seeking patterns.

- Why some men seek help in some situations but not in others.
Hypotheses

1. Gender role conflict will differ as a function of marital group.

2. Patterns of help seeking in relation to each potential helper will differ depending on marital group.

3. Perceived social support will differ depending on marital group.

4. Men who have higher perceived social support will have lower scores for help seeking.

5. There will be a strong negative relationship between gender role conflict and likelihood of seeking help from potential helpers.

Method

• After exclusions there were 113 male participants

• 3 groups:
  – Married and never divorced $n = 56$
  – Divorced and remarried $n = 37$
  – Divorced and not remarried $n = 20$

• Criteria for eligibility
Materials

- Gender Role Conflict Scale
- Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support
- Patterns of Help Seeking Scale
- Demographic questionnaire
- Explanatory statement
- Pre-paid envelopes

Procedure

- Ethics
- Recruitment
- Data Collection
- Returned questionnaires
Results

Hypothesis 1
Gender Role Conflict

- Most gender role conflict factors showed significant differences between the groups.

- Divorced and not remarried men reported the highest total gender role conflict.

- Divorced and remarried men reported the lowest gender role conflict.
Results
Hypothesis 2
Patterns of Help Seeking

- Significant differences were found between marital groups for most types of potential helpers including:
  - Friend/significant other
  - Parent
  - Relative (not parent)
  - Religious leader
  - Doctor
  - Psychotherapist
  - Support group

- Overall, married and divorced and not remarried groups – highest help seeking for each potential helper

Results
Hypothesis 3
Perceived Social Support

- No significant differences among marital groups for perceived social support from family, friends or significant others

- Although the Significant Others subscale- was approaching significance
Results
Hypothesis 4
Perceived Social Support and Patterns of Help Seeking

Married men – perceived social support from a friend positive correlation with help seeking from a parent

Divorced and not remarried- perceived social support from family and from friends- positive relationship with help seeking from friends/significant other

When groups combined- global perceived social support- positive relationship with help seeking from a relative

Results
Hypothesis 5
Total Gender Role Conflict and Patterns of Help Seeking

Correlations for Total Gender Role Conflict and potential helpers:

Divorced and not remarried group - Total gender role conflict – strong negative relationship with most potential helpers.

Divorced and remarried group - No significant relationships for total gender role conflict and any potential helpers were found.

Married Group - positive relationship between total gender role conflict and help seeking from a psychiatrist.
Results- Hypothesis 5
Gender Role Conflict Subscales and Patterns of Help Seeking

Correlations for Gender Role Conflict subscales and potential helpers:

**Married men**
- Restrictive Emotionality /parent and relative
- Success, Power and Competition/ friend
- Restrictive Affectionate Behaviour Between Men/parent, relative, psych

**Divorced and remarried**
- Restrictive Affectionate Behaviour Between Men/ parent
- Success Power and Competition / parent
- Restrictive Emotionality / relative (not parent)

**Divorced and not remarried**
- Restrictive Affectionate Behaviour between Men / friend, parent, nurse, psychotherapist
- Conflict Between Work and Family/ psychiatrist and nurse
- Restrictive Emotionality / friend and psychiatrist

**Discussion**

**Importance of marital status for Gender Role Conflict**

- The experience of divorce may be associated with the way men see their masculinity
- Masculinity is at least partially contextually situated- not a stable construct
- Masculinity may change depending on the social context in which a man lives
- People may not all experience divorce in the same way
**Discussion**

**Importance of Context and Helper**

- Patterns of help seeking differed depending on marital status for:
  - Friend/significant other
  - Parent
  - Relative
  - Religious leader
  - Doctor
  - Psychotherapist
  - Support group
- **No significant difference found for:**
  - Nurse
  - Teacher
  - Psychiatrist
- **Explanations for this**

**Discussion**

**Importance of Context and Perceived Social Support**

- No significant difference found for perceived social support for each of the groups

- **Explanation for this:**
  - Greater acceptance of divorce in society?
  - Increase in divorce rates may have resulted in a normalising of marriage breakdown
  - Stigma may be an issue- area of future research
**Discussion**

**Does Perceived Social Support matter to Help Seeking?**

- Global social support did not have a strong relationship with patterns of help seeking

  **Explanations:**
  
  - Way in which social support was measured
  - Higher socio economic status of sample
  - Level of education of sample

**Discussion**

**Does Gender Role Conflict Relate to Potential Help Seeking?**

- Different patterns emerged depending on marital status for gender role conflict and willingness to seek help.

  - This suggests:
    
    - Marital status is related to gender role conflict and correlated with help seeking
    
    - Type of helper, type of problem and context all may contribute to whether help is sought.
Implications

- Contextually sensitive approach in future research
- Counsellors and men’s help groups- masculinity sensitive advertising
- Type of potential helper important- type of services and nature of advertising offered

Limitations

- Difference in sample sizes of each group limited possible analysis
- Participants- High socio economic group
Conclusion

- Past experiences such as divorce were associated with the way in which men see themselves and their patterns of help seeking

- Findings go some way to explain why men seek help in some situations and not others

- Future research - should continue to be contextually sensitive