



The Adolescent Man Box

Findings from a survey with Australian
adolescents aged 14–18 years



Executive Summary



Jesuit
Social Services
Building a Just Society

the
men's
project

A Jesuit Social Services initiative

Acknowledgements

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To learn more

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Executive summary

Australian Government policy is clear: every child and young person in Australia deserves to grow up in a safe, supported, and connected environment that nurtures their ability to thrive (DSS, 2021). Yet, we are falling dramatically short. Many continue to face violence and harm, and some are involved in causing harm to others.

Adolescent boys are often in the media spotlight – ranging from concerns about poor mental health and loneliness, to the creation of image-based abuse material such as sexually explicit ‘deep fakes’ of their peers, consumption of violent pornography, and the use of sexual violence. There has also been a growing public conversation about how these experiences and behaviours are related to restrictive forms of masculinity. Of course, not all boys engage in these behaviours, and media coverage often highlights extreme or concerning

cases without reflecting the full diversity of boys’ experiences, values and development.

Nevertheless, the problems reported in the media are serious, and many individuals, groups and organisations are working hard to address them. We believe that understanding the perspectives of young people, and how their ideas and behaviours are shaped, is critical to implementing positive social change and achieving better outcomes for children, young people and the broader community. This study asks young people themselves about their beliefs and experiences, ensuring their voices are central to conversations about preventing and addressing violence and harm.

This aligns with Australia’s obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirms every child’s right to be safe from violence, to express their views in matters affecting them, and to grow up with their best interests, dignity and development fully supported.

The Adolescent Man Box study

The Adolescent Man Box study examines the extent to which Australian male, female and non-binary adolescents perceive and endorse stereotypical masculine norms, as well as the relationship between boys’ endorsement of these norms and their behaviours and experiences. It is the first study of its kind in Australia to provide a far-reaching picture of both social and health related measures and their associations with restrictive masculinity amongst adolescent boys aged 14 to 18 years. In doing so, beyond our focus on masculinities, we have also sought to understand the prevalence of a range of behaviours and life outcomes.

The Adolescent Man Box survey was implemented anonymously online with 1401 adolescent respondents aged 14-18 years old, including 655 boys, 736 girls and 10 non-binary respondents, over a five-week period in March and April 2025. The survey used a non-probability, opt-in online panel method. Our sample was weighted to be representative of the Australian population by age and gender, and broadly representative of state/territory and metropolitan and regional areas.

The research builds on earlier Man Box studies which examined similar issues in relation to men aged 18 to 30 and (later) 30 to 45 (The Men’s Project & Flood, 2024, 2018). Unlike the adult iterations, however, the Adolescent Man Box study also considers the perspectives of girls and non-binary adolescents. This recognises that societal pressures and attitudes about masculinity are shaped by all in the community, and provides valuable insights into perspectives across genders.

The Adolescent Man Box refers to a collection of beliefs that place pressure on boys to behave in certain ways. Using a validated scale - the Meanings of Adolescent Masculinity scale (Oransky & Fisher, 2009) - it contains 27 ‘rules’ that are grouped into four thematic pillars (**Constant effort to be manly**, **Emotional restriction**, **Heterosexism** and **Social teasing**). The Adolescent Man Box reflects rigid masculine norms such as “A teenage boy must always appear confident even if he isn’t” and “When a teenage boy has a fear, he should keep it to himself”.

Figure 1: The four pillars of the Adolescent Man Box



Constant effort

Belief that to be masculine, one must constantly, and without interruption, maintain one's tough, confident and strong public persona



Emotional restriction

Assumption that to be masculine, boys must be emotionally stoic and refrain from sharing their feelings with others



Heterosexism

Norm that masculinity is defined in opposition to homosexuality and femininity, and that one must distance oneself from behaviours and attitudes traditionally thought as "girly" or "gay"



Social teasing

Assumption that to be masculine, one must be able to both dole out and stand up to teasing and taunting in the peer context

**Using the Meanings of Adolescent Masculinity Scale (Oransky & Fisher, 2009)*

We examined how much adolescents (of all genders) endorse these rules, how much they perceive pressure in relation to these rules, and the association between boys' endorsing such beliefs and the use of behaviours such as bullying, aggression, risk-taking, and seeking help.

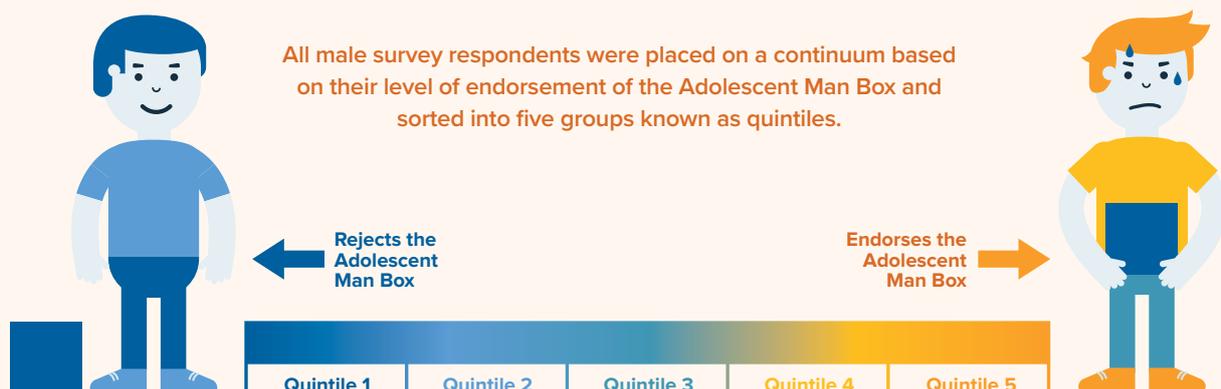
Based on their level of endorsement of each of the 27 rules, we gave each respondent an Adolescent Man Box score. Using these scores, we could then divide adolescent boys into five 'quintiles', with the lowest-scoring 20% in quintile 1 (those with weakest endorsement of the Adolescent Man Box) and the highest-scoring 20% in quintile 5 (those with strongest Adolescent Man Box endorsement), to allow us to investigate associations between endorsement of stereotypical masculine norms and different behaviours and outcomes.

We also examined adolescents' endorsement of other attitudes not covered by the Adolescent Man Box scale, including attitudes about aggression and control, rigid gender norms, and gender equality. We considered these separately so as not to undermine the validity of

the Adolescent Man Box scale. The study also asked questions to explore where adolescents' ideas about masculinity come from.

Responses were diverse, reflecting the diversity of adolescents themselves. Many adolescent boys no longer feel shaped or bound by traditional masculine norms, while a substantial minority clearly do. Understanding the context in which views are formed and the relationships between attitudes and behaviours is important for anyone working with young people today.

As with previous Australian Man Box studies (The Men's Project & Flood, 2024, 2018), this study was conducted by The Men's Project, an initiative established in 2017 by Jesuit Social Services. The Men's Project works with young people and community leaders to prevent violence and strengthens the national evidence base to include perspectives of boys and men on what is required to prevent harm to themselves and those around them. The adult Man Box studies have contributed to this evidence, and now the Adolescent Man Box expands this evidence to include a younger cohort.



What is life like for boys who reject traditional masculine norms compared to boys who endorse them?

Every adolescent is unique, and their views about masculinity are diverse. But when we consider those who least endorse rigid masculine norms (quintile 1) with those who most endorse the Adolescent Man Box (quintile 5), we start to see some commonalities between each group (for example, poor mental health symptoms across all quintiles), as well as some significant differences (for example, differences in relation to the use and experience of aggression).

Adolescent boys who reject traditional norms (quintile 1) show healthy attitudes towards gender equality and overwhelmingly reject violence towards women. They are almost universally bothered when witnessing abuse and sexual harassment, and are more likely to want to intervene. They are themselves less likely to be involved in any form of bullying or harassment or physical fights. These boys recognise the value of emotional connection and empathy, and are comfortable listening to one another's problems and comforting friends. They are also comfortable maintaining friendships with transgender and gender diverse people.

Boys who least strongly endorse the Adolescent Man Box say their family has a strong influence on their attitudes about masculinity. They are also more likely than boys in other quintiles to nominate female friends as having a big influence. They tend not to spend money on gambling, and while the level of poor mental health for these boys is a significant concern, they are more likely than other boys to seek help on these and other aspects of their life.

For boys who most strongly endorse the Adolescent Man Box (quintile 5), on the other hand, life appears to be more lonely. Many of these boys have been victimised, appear to have less supportive relationships with family, and are more likely than other boys to

look online rather than around them for positive social connection. Almost half of these boys agree that no one really knows them well and almost half agree that their online social life is more engaging and rewarding than their offline social life. Relative to other boys in the survey, their parents, particularly their mothers, are less likely to influence their attitudes about what it means to be an adolescent boy, while the influence of the online world is higher.

Boys with the highest endorsement of the Adolescent Man Box are more likely than other boys to have been physically hurt on purpose, insulted or threatened, or sexually harassed. More than a quarter of boys in this group had experienced being physically hurt on purpose in the past month, more than double the proportion of boys in quintile 1.

While boys in the Adolescent Man Box are more likely to be victimised than other boys, they are also much more likely to perpetuate harm to others. Boys who most strongly endorsed the Adolescent Man Box rules were significantly more likely to report that in the past month they had bullied or physically hurt someone they knew on purpose, and they reported that they usually retaliate if rejected at more than three times the rate of boys in quintile 1. Most adolescents who had used aggression in the past month reported that they had been victimised in the same time period.

The boys who most strongly endorse the Adolescent Man Box are also much more likely to endorse statements related to aggression and control. For example, more than a third of boys in this group agreed that if a teenage boy has sex with a teenage girl, he should decide what happens and what she does during sex, while almost no boys in quintile 1 felt this way. For these boys, there is a need to promote support and accountability.

Key findings

Attitudes, influences and pressures related to being a teenage boy

Finding 1:

While many boys do not feel bound by traditional masculine norms, a significant proportion do.

Many adolescents rejected individual rules of the Adolescent Man Box. When we looked at each of the 27 Adolescent Man Box rules separately, we found that in most cases there were more adolescents who did not personally endorse that rule compared with the number who did (See Figure 2). This was especially so for girls.

Although the majority of adolescents did not endorse most individual rules when considered separately, **many adolescents nonetheless agreed with a substantial number of rules overall**. Specifically, 71% of boys and 35% of girls reported agreement with at least half of the 27 rules in the Adolescent Man Box.

Most boys appear to recognise the value of emotional connection and empathy, rejecting rules related to the

Adolescent Man Box pillar of **emotional restriction**. Only 7% of boys believed that it is **not** important to listen to each other's problems, and 13% said it's **not** their role to comfort a friend who is upset.

There were higher levels of endorsement in relation to the other aspects of restrictive masculinity. In the **Heterosexism** pillar, almost half of boys (48%) believed that being thought of as gay makes them seem like less of a man and 47% agreed they should never act like a girl.

Teasing one another appears to be a way of life for the majority of boys, with 62% agreeing it's normal for boys to make fun of their friends.

And a significant proportion of boys endorsed the need to project confidence, strength and toughness (**Constant effort to be manly**) – 44% believed they should always appear confident even if they're not and 43% believed they must appear strong no matter what.

Figure 2: Proportion of adolescents who personally endorsed Adolescent Man Box rules, by gender (n=1401)

Percentage of respondents aged 14-18 who agreed or strongly agreed that 'In my opinion...

Adolescent Man Box rules	Boys	Girls	Total*
Pillar 1: Constant effort to be manly			
A teenage boy should always seem as manly as other boys that he knows	37%	11%	25%
A teenage boy should never back down from a challenge in public	25%	10%	18%
Acting manly should be the most important goal for teenage boys	26%	8%	17%
A teenage boy must always appear confident even if he isn't	44%	15%	30%
No matter what happens, a teenage boy should seem strong to others	43%	13%	29%
Getting made fun of helps teenage boys become tough	32%	15%	24%
Teenage boys should try to appear manly in almost all situations	38%	14%	27%
Pillar 2: Emotional restriction			
It's weird for a teenage boy to talk about his feelings with other teenage boys	34%	14%	24%
When a teenage boy has a fear, he should keep it to himself	22%	5%	14%
It's hard to respect a teenage boy who shows his feelings	14%	5%	10%
If a teenage boy has hurt feelings he should hold it in	23%	5%	15%
It is not a teenage boy's job to comfort a friend who is upset	13%	6%	10%
It's not important for teenage boys to listen to each other's problems	7%	2%	4%
Teenage boys should not talk about their worries with each other	12%	2%	7%
Pillar 3: Heterosexism			
A teenage boy who wears nail polish is hard to take seriously	53%	24%	40%
It's embarrassing to have a lot of gay friends	33%	12%	23%
Being thought of as gay makes a teenage boy seem like less of a man	48%	26%	38%
It would be embarrassing for a teenage boy to say that he is interested in being a hairdresser	25%	12%	19%
A good way to seem manly is to not act gay	47%	30%	39%
A teenage boy should be embarrassed if someone says he "runs like a girl"	40%	16%	29%
There is something wrong if a teenage boy wants to do activities usually done by girls	27%	12%	20%
Teenage boys should never act like a girl	47%	24%	36%
Pillar 4: Social teasing			
A teenage boy should be able to take teasing from his friends, even if it's mean or degrading	33%	10%	22%
There's nothing wrong with a teenage boy who picks on his friends, even if they get upset	15%	6%	11%
It's normal for teenage boys to make fun of their friends	62%	54%	58%
In order to fit in, teenage boys must be able to tease other teenage boys	24%	13%	19%
Teenage boys do not pick on each other to be mean	54%	35%	45%

*includes boys, girls and non-binary respondents

When we look at younger adolescent boys (14-15 years old) compared with older adolescent boys (16-18) we see that endorsement of the Adolescent Man Box rules was notably lower for the older group. Endorsement of the rule that a teenage boy should always seem as manly as other boys he knows fell from 46% (younger group) to 31% (older group), and the rule that a teenage boy should never back down from a challenge in public dropped from 29% to 23%. In the emotional restriction pillar, endorsement of the rule that teenage boys should keep their fears to themselves fell from 27% (younger group) to

18% (older group), while in the heterosexism pillar older boys appeared more comfortable having gay friends or being seen to “act like a girl” than the younger group. This may suggest that some views soften with maturity and social experience – and may highlight a window of critical vulnerability in the early teenage years when identity pressures peak. The only rule more strongly endorsed by older adolescents related to social teasing. However, it is not possible to interpret these results with any certainty, and it is possible that these differences may also reflect emerging generational differences.

Finding 2:

Societal pressures on teenage boys to be ‘a real man’ were equally observed by both boys and girls. The pressure to be manly remains strong in our society, even in adolescence.

Alongside personal endorsement we asked adolescents about what ‘most Australians believe’ as an indication of the level of social pressure to conform to these restrictive masculine norms. These questions were focused on the **Constant effort to be manly** pillar.

Between 60% and 63% of boys and girls believe that most people in Australia expect teenage boys to be

manly, confident, and strong at all times. Almost half of boys (46%) and a greater number of girls (50%) indicated there was a social pressure on teenage boys to never back down from a challenge in public. More than half of both boys (53%) and girls (56%) said most Australians believe that getting made fun of helps teenage boys to become tough.

Previous research, including the adult Man Box, has highlighted the social pressure that boys and men perceive around rigid masculine norms. The Adolescent Man Box demonstrates that this social pressure is also recognised by girls, and recognised by girls **at the same level** as their male peers.

Figure 3: Perceived social expectation for teenage boys to adhere to Adolescent Man Box rules related to ‘constant effort to be manly’ (n=1391).

Percentage of male and female respondents aged 14-18 who agreed or strongly agreed that ‘Most people in Australia believe...’

Adolescent Man Box pillar 1 - Constant effort to be manly	Boys	Girls
A teenage boy should always seem as manly as other boys that he knows	60%	62%
A teenage boy should never back down from a challenge in public	46%	50%
Acting manly should be the most important goal for teenage boys	52%	52%
A teenage boy must always appear confident even if he isn't	62%	61%
No matter what happens, a teenage boy should seem strong to others	63%	62%
Getting made fun of helps teenage boys become tough	53%	56%
Teenage boys should try to appear manly in almost all situations	62%	63%

Finding 3:

While the perception of what others expect of teenage boys is consistent for girls and boys, girls personally endorse restrictive forms of masculinity at much lower rates than boys.

As with the adult Man Box research, there is a marked difference between what respondents personally believe, and what broader society expects. For each of the seven rules in the **Constant effort** pillar of the Adolescent Man Box, the perceived social pressure was greater than the level of personal endorsement for respondents of all genders (See Figure 4 and 5).

Particularly noteworthy, however, was the much greater differential for girls than boys when we compared perception of social pressure with personal endorsement. As highlighted in Finding 1, there remains strong endorsement of some of the rules by boys. For girls, however, endorsement was rarely above 15%.

For example, while the same percentage of both boys and girls (52%) agreed there is social pressure for teenage boys to be manly, only 8% of girls personally endorsed this rule compared with 26% of boys. And while almost the same numbers of boys and girls perceived there is social pressure on boys to appear confident even when they aren't (62% of boys and 61% of girls perceived this), boys personally endorsed this rule at nearly 3 times the rate of girls (44% to 15%).

Figure 4: Proportion of boys who personally endorsed Adolescent Man Box rules compared with those who perceived social pressure (n=655)

Percentage of male respondents aged 14-18 who personally endorsed Adolescent Man Box rules ('In my opinion...') compared with the percentage of male respondents who perceived social pressure ('Most people in Australia believe')

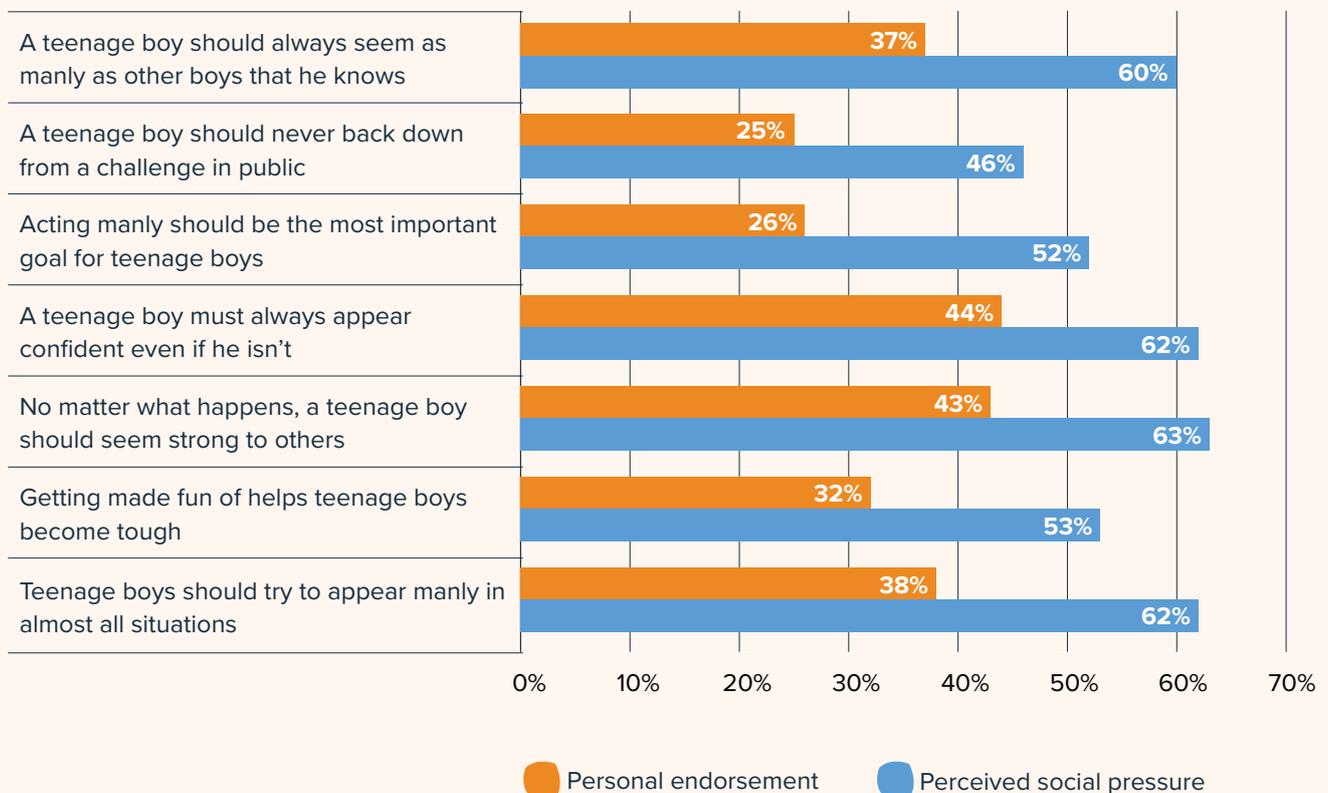
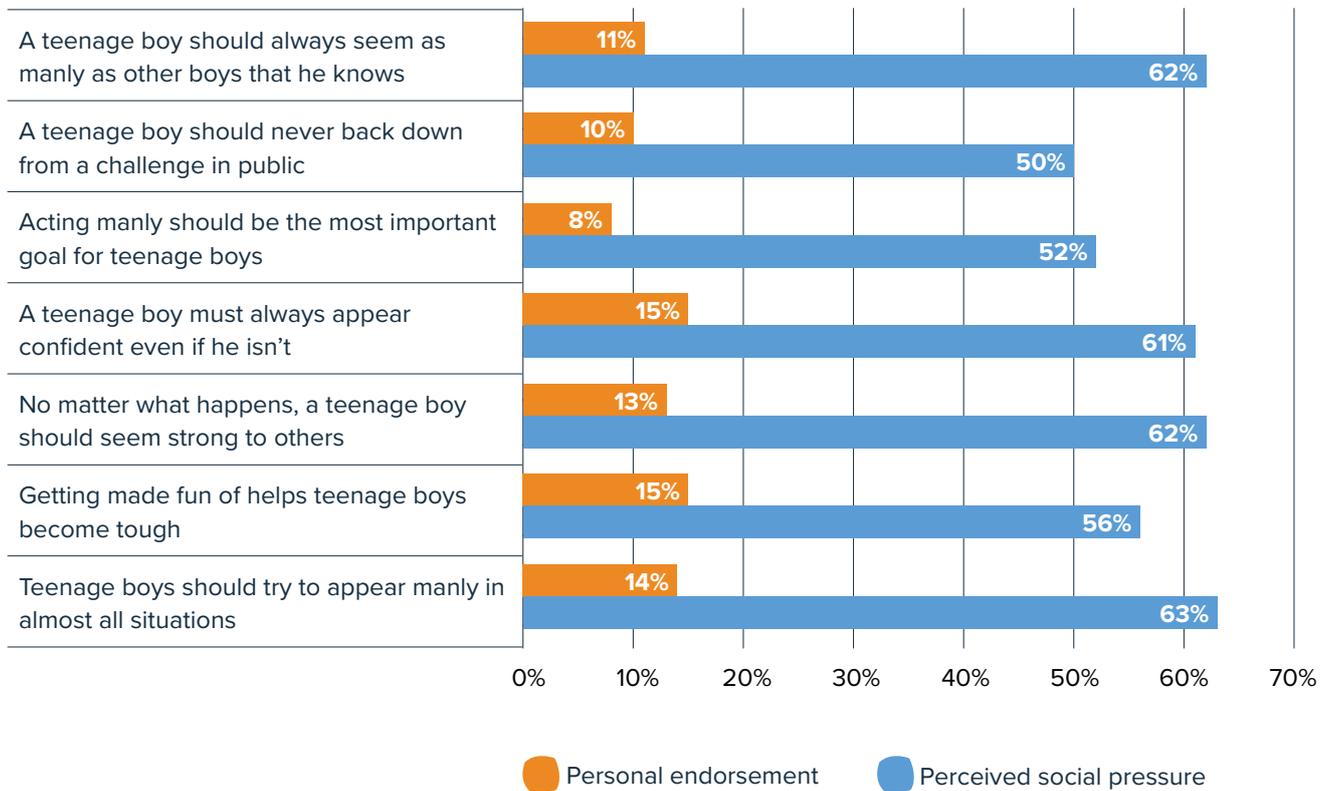


Figure 5: Proportion of girls who personally endorsed Adolescent Man Box rules compared with those who perceived social pressure (n=736)

Percentage of female respondents aged 14-18 who personally endorsed Adolescent Man Box rules ('In my opinion...') compared with the percentage of female respondents who perceived social pressure ('Most people in Australia believe...')



Finding 4:

Nearly all adolescents support gender equality in concept, but many boys believe they have it harder than girls.

The vast majority of boys (96%) believe it's important for teenage boys to treat girls as equals.

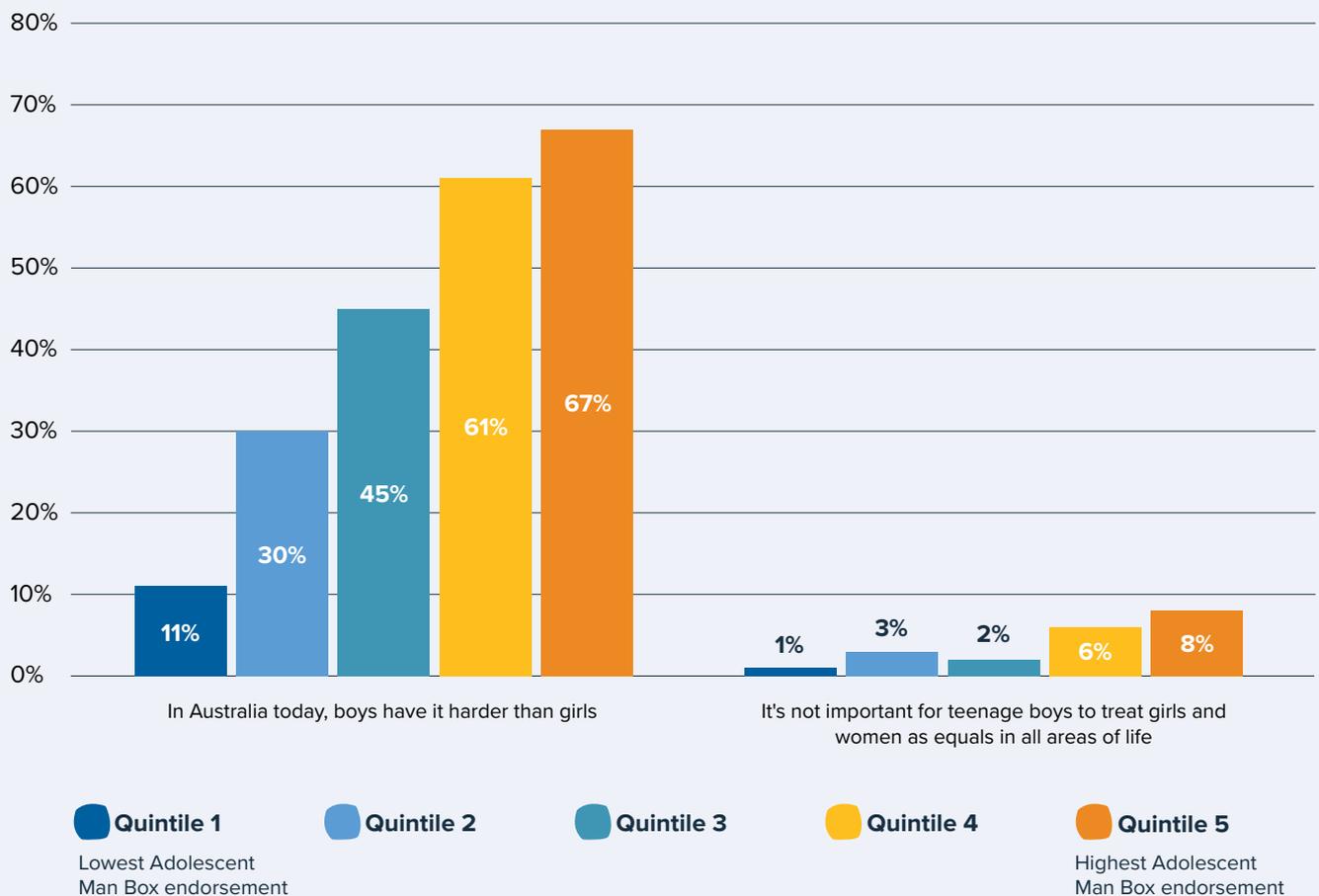
However, their views on equality in practice differ. A much higher proportion of boys than girls agreed that,

in Australia today, boys have it harder than girls (42% of boys agreed compared with 13% of girls).

Boys who most strongly endorse the Adolescent Man Box rules were significantly more likely to agree that boys have it harder than girls (67% of boys in quintile 5 compared with 11% of boys in quintile 1).

Figure 6: Proportion of boys who endorsed attitudes about gender equality, by quintile (n=655)

Percentage of male respondents aged 14-18 who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement



Finding 5:

Parental figures and male friends are perceived by adolescent boys to have a significant impact on their attitudes about masculinity.

While adolescent boys encounter a wide range of influences on their understanding of how teenage boys should behave, their responses to this survey reveal that they perceive real-life relationships as shaping their views more strongly than online media.

Respondents were provided with a list of people, groups and media and asked how much impact each item has on their ideas about how teenage boys should act. For each item on the list, they could select whether it had a 'big impact', 'some impact' or 'no impact' on their ideas. There was no limit to how many items respondents could rate as having each level of impact.

Parents and male friends were perceived by adolescent boys to have the greatest influence on their ideas about how teenage boys should behave: 59% of boys indicated that their father or male parental figure had a 'big impact' on their attitudes about adolescent masculinity (with the remainder of boys rating their father as having 'some impact' or 'no impact'), 48% rated their mother or female parental figure as having a big impact, and 42% ranked male friends as having a big impact. A lower proportion of adolescent boys rated online media as having a big impact on their ideas about how teenage boys should behave. For example, 22% of boys ranked social media and online influencers as having a big impact, and 14% ranked pornography as having a big impact.

Real-life relationships were perceived to shape adolescent boys' views of masculinity more strongly than online media, regardless of quintile. However, boys who most strongly endorse the Adolescent Man Box rules (quintile 5) were more likely than boys in other quintiles to report that online media has a big impact on their ideas: over half (52%) of those who most strongly endorse the Adolescent Man Box (quintile 5) believe that media has a big influence on their ideas about how to be a boy in the world (compared with 34-37% for other quintiles). On a related point, this group is also more likely than other boys to say that their online social life is more rewarding than their offline interactions (47% of quintile 5 compared with 32% for quintile 1). Meanwhile, boys in quintile 5 are significantly less likely than boys in other quintiles to report their mum or female parental figure as having a big impact (34% for quintile 5 compared with 42-66% for other quintiles).

While parents were perceived by all adolescents to be significant in shaping attitudes about how teenage boys should behave, we should not overlook the enormous breadth of influences in young people's lives. For example, when asked to name an online influencer or content creator that they follow, a staggering 438 unique online content creators were named, and the vast majority of these were mentioned by only one respondent (355 content creators were mentioned only once). This is a reminder that the online world is vast, the sources of influence are diverse, and each adolescent experiences this online landscape differently.

Figure 7: Proportion of adolescents who rated people, institutions and media as having a big impact on their ideas about masculinity

Percentage of respondents aged 14-18 who rated each item as having a 'big impact' (as opposed to 'no impact' or 'some impact') on their own ideas about how teenage boys should act

People, groups and media	Boys	Girls	Total*
Family			
Dad or male parental figure	59%	60%	60%
Mum or female parental figure	48%	45%	47%
Family members (other than parents)	29%	30%	29%
Any of the above	68%	70%	69%
Friends, peers and partners			
Male friends	42%	48%	45%
Romantic or sexual partners	23%	28%	25%
Female friends	19%	21%	20%
Gender diverse friends	9%	12%	11%
Peers who are not your main friends	6%	8%	7%
Any of the above	56%	62%	59%
Formal figures and institutions			
Sports clubs or sports people	21%	25%	23%
Teachers	20%	17%	19%
Coach or mentor	20%	20%	20%
Religion	18%	21%	19%
Any of the above	48%	50%	49%
Media			
Social media and online influencers	22%	32%	27%
Video games	15%	18%	17%
Movies and television	14%	26%	20%
Advertising	12%	17%	14%
Pornography	14%	22%	18%
Any of the above	39%	52%	45%

**includes boys, girls and non-binary respondents*

Attitudes and experiences of violence

Finding 6:

A significant proportion of boys and girls showed a tolerance for technology-facilitated surveillance, and a smaller but concerning proportion of boys agreed with other violence-supportive attitudes including those about image-based abuse.

The survey asked about a range of attitudes that are related to violence and control, including technology-facilitated surveillance and image-based abuse. For both boys and girls, 18% agreed that continually checking who their partner was communicating with on social media was normal in a relationship, and almost a quarter of both boys and girls agreed that it was okay to send multiple texts, phone calls, social media messages when their partner wasn't responding immediately, or when they were frustrated with them (24% of boys, 23% of girls). The embedding of tracking capabilities in social media apps including those used by parents may have influenced the behaviour and expectations among adolescent boys and girls – and adolescents may not perceive this as control or violence.

Only small numbers of adolescents of any gender thought activities such as changing a photo or video of someone into something sexual or sharing intimate photos after a break-up (both are forms of image-based abuse) were acceptable, but it is important that efforts are made to change the attitudes of this small group (which includes more boys than girls), given the potentially devastating consequences. Around 6% of boys said it was okay to change a photo or video of someone into something sexual (compared with 2% of girls) and 8% of boys said sharing intimate photos after a break-up was not a big deal (compared with 4% of girls).

A small, but concerning, proportion of boys agreed with other violence-supportive attitudes – at more than twice the rate of girls. For example, 10% of boys agreed that if a man is violent to his partner it's probably because his partner did something to provoke or deserve it, compared with 5% of girls. One in ten boys said a teenage boy should use violence to get respect if necessary compared with 4% of girls. While 13% of boys believe if a teenage boy has sex with a teenage girl he should decide what happens and what she does during sex, only 5% of girls agreed with this.

Figure 8: Proportion of adolescents who personally endorsed violence-supportive attitudes, by gender (n=1401)

Percentage of respondents aged 14-18 who agreed or strongly agreed that 'In my opinion...'

Attitudes about masculinity as aggressive and controlling	Boys	Girls	Total*
Attitudes about masculinity as aggressive and controlling			
If a teenage boy has a girlfriend, he should know where she is all the time	12%	7%	10%
A teenage boy should use violence to get respect if necessary	10%	4%	7%
If a man is violent to his partner, it's probably because his partner did something to provoke / deserve it	10%	5%	8%
If a teenage boy has sex with a teenage girl, he should decide what happens and what she does during sex	13%	5%	9%
Attitudes about intimate partner abuse and technology-facilitated abuse			
It's ok to send multiple texts, phone calls, social media messages when your partner isn't responding immediately, or when you are frustrated with them	23%	24%	24%
It's okay to call your partner mean names when they disagree with you or your beliefs	8%	5%	7%
Continually checking who my partner is communicating with on social media is normal in a relationship	18%	18%	18%
It's okay to use a photo or video of someone and change it into something sexual	6%	2%	4%
Sharing intimate photos of your partner after a breakup is not a big deal	8%	4%	6%

**total includes boys, girls and non-binary respondents*

Finding 7:

The more strongly adolescent boys hold rigid views about masculinity, the more likely they are to cause harm to others, and to hold violence-supportive attitudes.

When we divide the boys surveyed into five groups ('quintiles') along a continuum according to their level of agreement with the restrictive rules of the Adolescent Man Box, we see a particularly concerning picture for the group who most strongly agree with these rules.

The boys with the strongest endorsement of the Adolescent Man Box (quintile 5) are far more likely than their peers to have used a form of bullying, physical violence or sexual harassment in the past month, and are also more likely to hold violence-supportive attitudes.

Nearly two in five boys (39%) in quintile 5 reported that they had used bullying, physical violence or sexual harassment in the past month, compared with 7% of boys in quintile 1.

More than half of boys (52%) who most strongly endorse the Adolescent Man Box (quintile 5) believe it's okay to call or text their partner multiple times when they don't respond immediately and two in five (42%) believe that it's normal to continually check who their partner is communicating with. These figures are far higher than boys at the other end of the scale.

Respondents were also asked about their propensity to retaliate if rejected. Overall, 16% of boys agreed they usually try to get back at someone if they are rejected. Boys who most strongly endorsed the Adolescent Man Box were significantly more likely to say they would retaliate if rejected, with more than a third of boys in quintile 5 (35%) agreeing they would do so compared with 11%-15% across the other four quintiles.

Figure 9: Proportion of boys who endorsed attitudes about intimate partner abuse, by quintile (n=655)

Percentage of male respondents aged 14-18 who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement

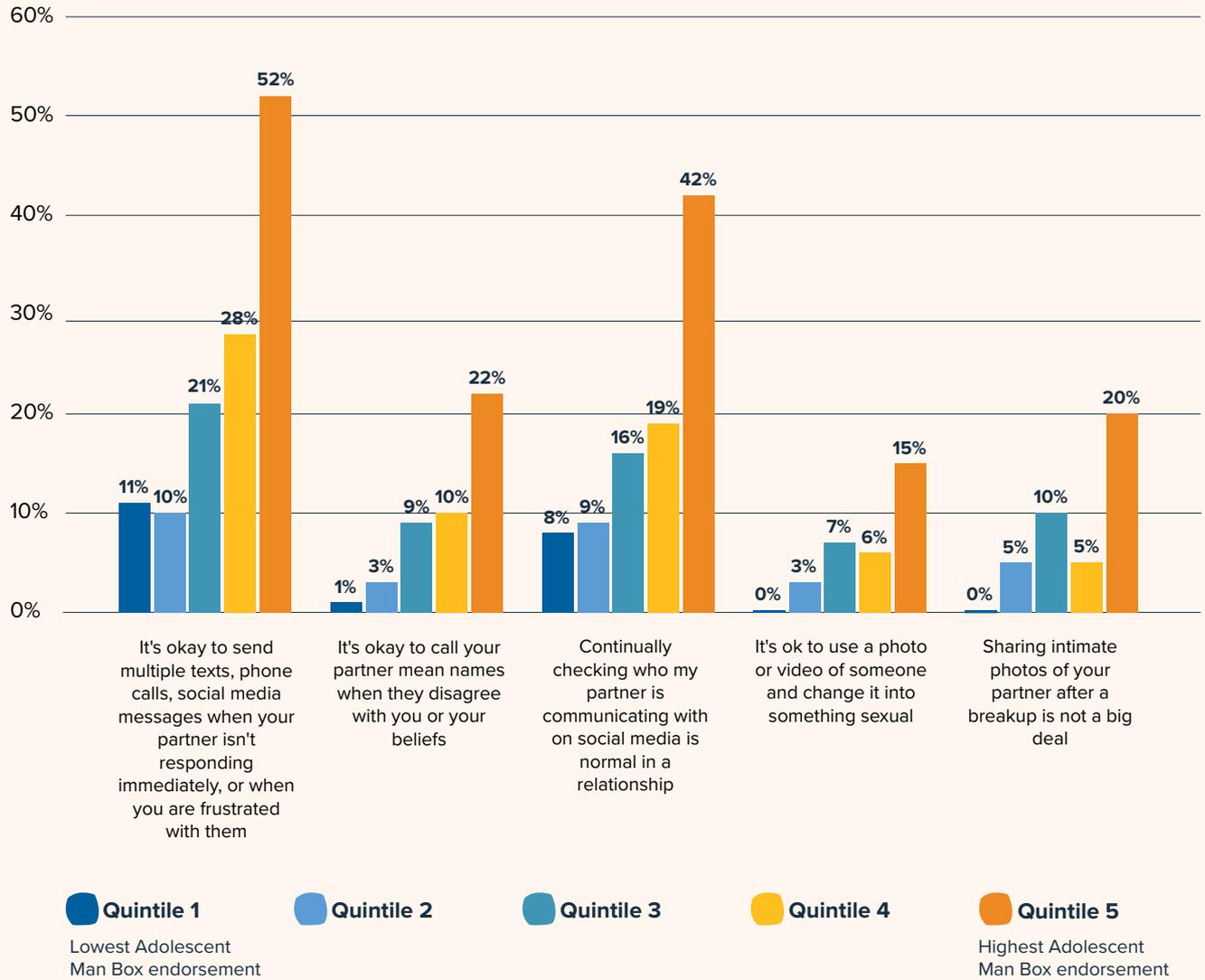


Figure 10: Proportion of boys who used physical violence, bullying or sexual harassment behaviours, by quintile (n=655)

Percentage of male respondents aged 14-18 who reported using each behaviour in the past month

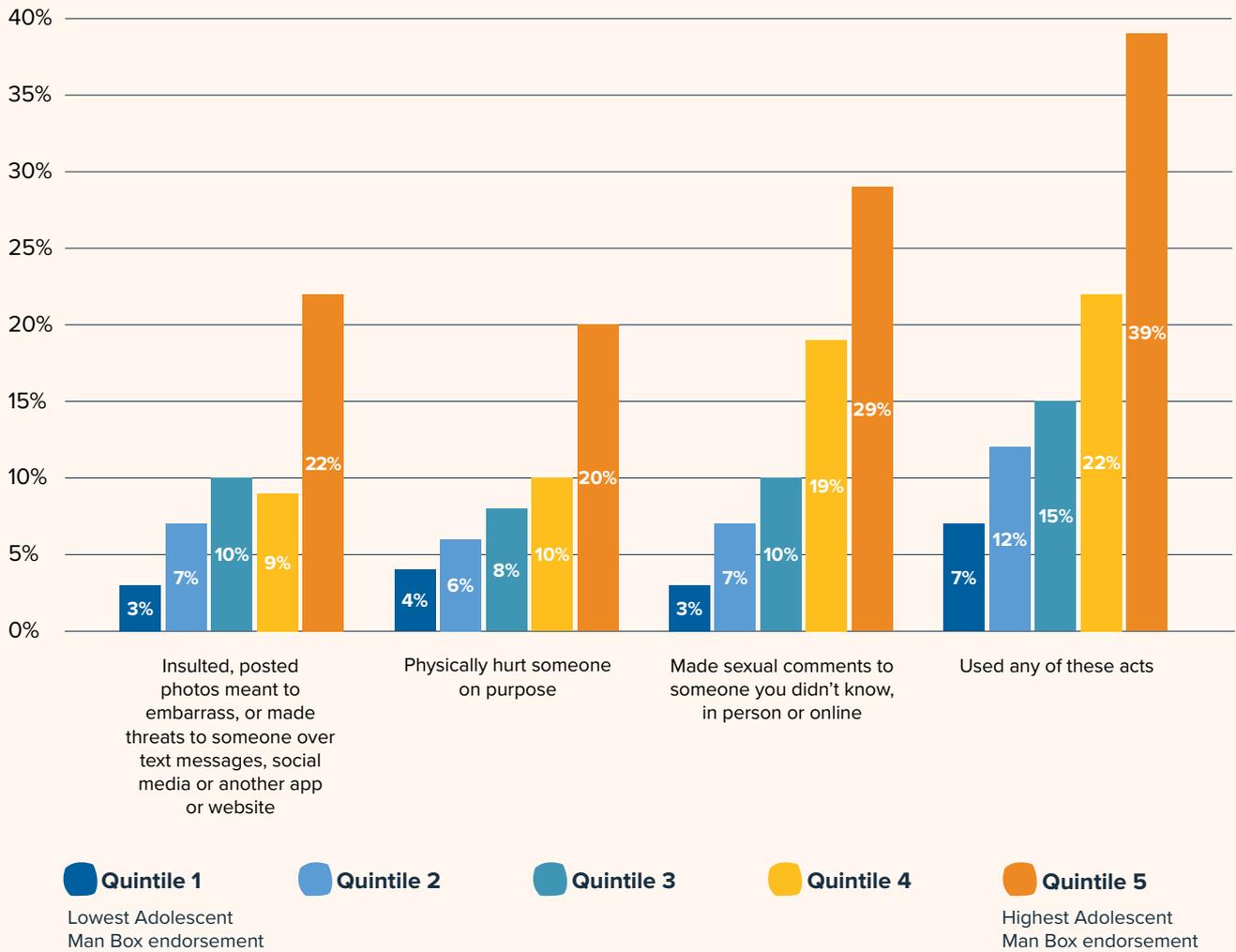
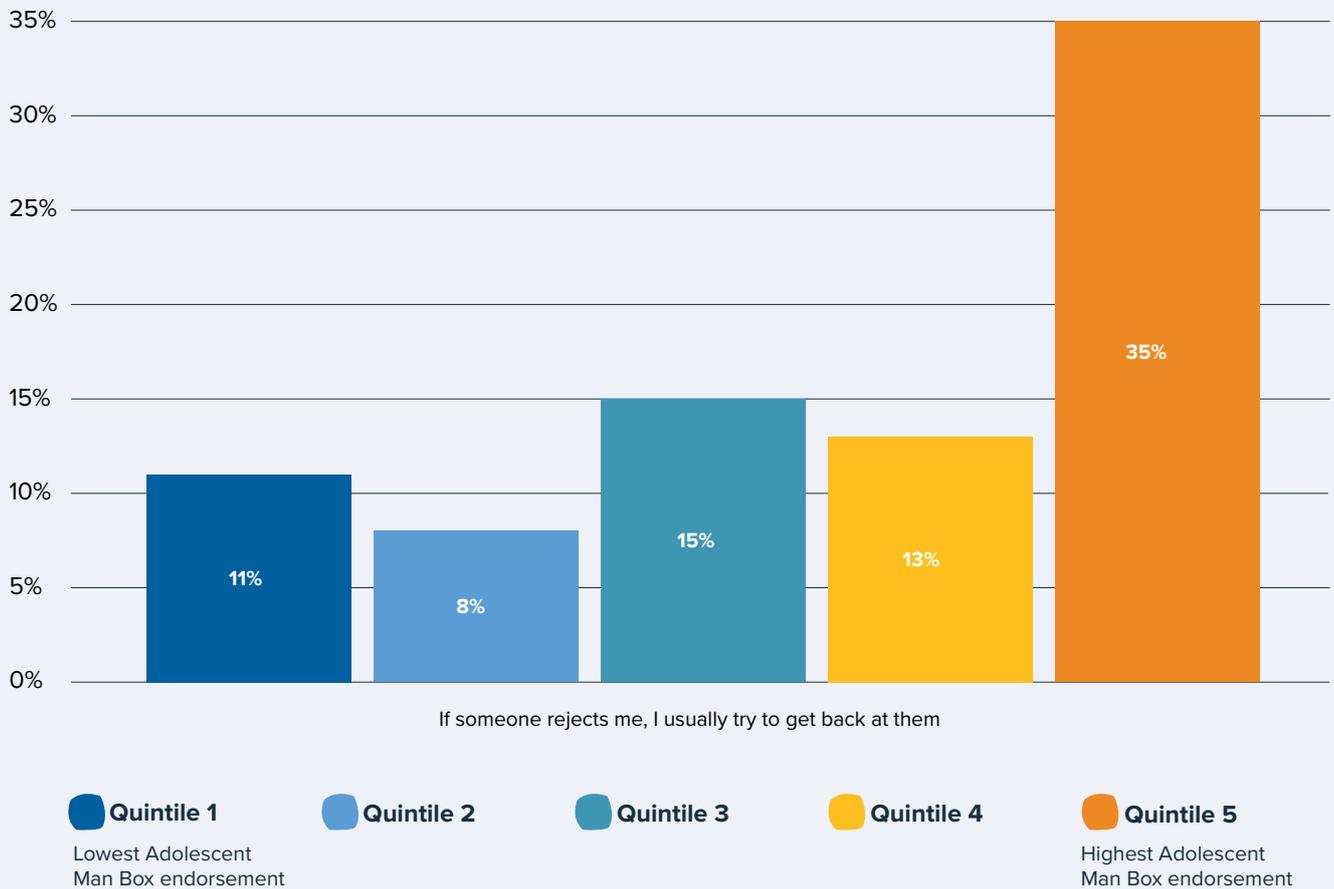


Figure 11: Proportion of boys who would probably retaliate if rejected, by quintile (n=640)

Percentage of male respondents aged 14-18 who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'If someone rejects me, I usually try to get back at them'



Finding 8:

Victimisation is a common experience in teenage life – but it’s even worse for those who strongly endorse the Adolescent Man Box. And those who use aggressive acts are also more likely to have been victims themselves.

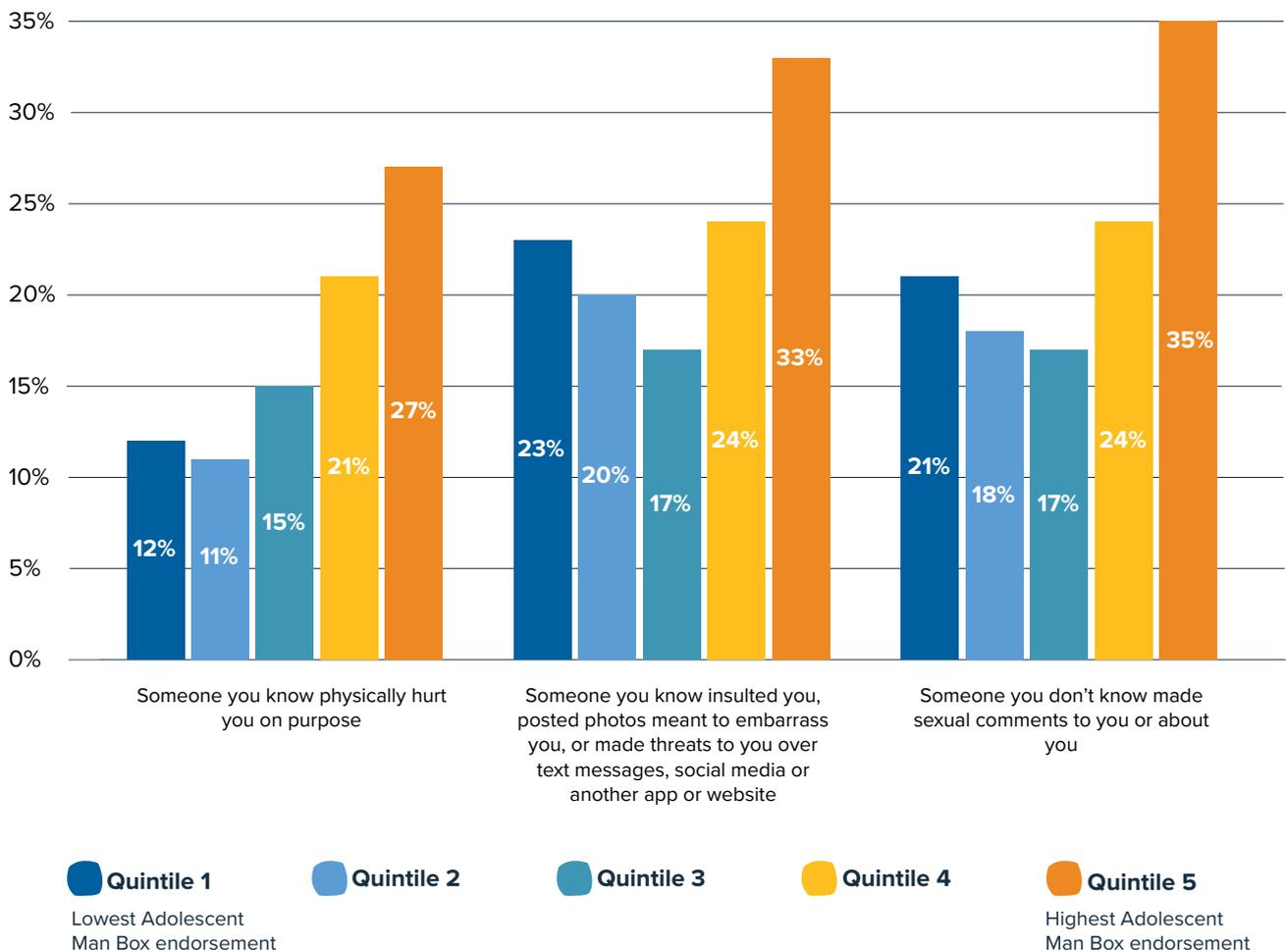
Two in five adolescents (41%) reported they had experienced victimisation (been physically hurt on purpose, insulted or threatened including online, or sexually harassed) in the past month, including 38% of boys and 45% of girls. The proportion of respondents of all genders who reported they had been *victimised* (41%) was higher than the proportion of respondents who reported they *had used* any of those aggressive acts (16%).

There was a clear relationship between the experience of victimisation and endorsement of the Adolescent Man Box, with boys who most strongly endorse rigid masculine norms also more likely to experience victimisation. For example, 27% of boys in quintile 5 had experienced being physically hurt on purpose in the past month compared with 12% of boys in quintile 1.

There was also a high degree of overlap between adolescents who use aggression and those who are victimised: of those respondents (of all genders) who reported they had used at least one of the forms of aggression in the past month, 83% reported they had been victimised in at least one of the specified ways in the past month. Of the adolescent boys who reported they had used aggression in the past month, 80% reported they had been victimised in the same period.

Figure 12: Proportion of boys who reported experiencing bullying, physical violence or sexual harassment behaviours, by quintile (n=655)

Percentage of male respondents aged 14-18 who reported experiencing each behaviour in the past month



Finding 9:

Most boys feel uncomfortable witnessing sexist comments or harassment, but the majority do not intervene. Nevertheless a significant minority do step up.

The vast majority of boys (95%) said they felt uncomfortable witnessing verbal or physical harassment of women and girls, and a third (33%) intervened. Around three quarters (78%) of boys were bothered when they witnessed harassment of a transgender person, and one in five (21%) intervened. Four in five boys (80%) who witnessed sexist comments towards women and girls indicated this left them feeling uncomfortable, and one in six (17%) intervened.

The research highlights an opportunity to help boys be active bystanders. It also highlights the need to

address transphobia, since boys were far more likely to say they were not bothered to witness harassment of a transgender person (22% not bothered) compared to witnessing harassment of a girl or woman (5% not bothered). Whereas, girls were more consistently bothered by each of the scenarios.

Boys who most strongly endorse restrictive masculinity norms are less likely to intervene in all scenarios than those who least endorse masculine norms, and are also less likely to be bothered by such behaviours (for example, when witnessing sexist comments or jokes, 34% of boys in quintile 5 reported it didn't bother them, compared with 8% of boys in quintile 1).

Figure 13: Proportion of boys who responded in different ways to witnessing sexism and harassment

Percentage of male respondents aged 14-18 who reported each bystander response the last time they were around teenage boys or men making sexist comments or jokes, or verbally or physically harassing others

	Not bothered	Bothered but did nothing	Bothered and did something
Sexist jokes or comments (n=419)	20%	61%	19%
Harassment of girl / woman (n=212)	5%	61%	34%
Harassment of transgender person (n=166)	22%	52%	26%

Figure 14: Proportion of girls who responded in different ways the last time they witnessed sexist jokes and harassment of others

Percentage of female respondents aged 14-18 who reported each bystander response the last time they were around teenage boys or men making sexist comments or jokes, or verbally or physically harassing others

	Not bothered	Bothered but did nothing	Bothered and did something
Sexist jokes or comments (n=559)	6%	65%	29%
Harassment of girl / woman (n=378)	1%	62%	38%
Harassment of transgender person (n=257)	5%	59%	36%

Pornography and image-based abuse

Finding 10:

A significant proportion of boys view pornography frequently, including aggressive and non-consensual acts – and this is even more likely for boys who most strongly endorse the Adolescent Man Box.

Nearly three in five (59%) adolescent boys have viewed pornography, and of these, around half view pornography once a month or more.

We also asked respondents who had viewed pornography if they had been exposed to a range of content which included someone being strangled (referred to commonly as being ‘choked’), being treated aggressively (pushed, shoved, kicked, punched, slapped or gagged), and being subjected to non-consensual acts.¹ Nearly two-thirds (63%) of those who had seen

pornography said they had viewed one or more of these acts. We view these acts as harmful because of the risks associated with normalising aggression, lack of consent, and strangulation (which has significant health risks).

Boys with the strongest endorsement of the Adolescent Man Box (quintile 5) were more likely to report viewing pornography frequently (70% who viewed pornography did so once per month or more). They were also more likely to have watched harmful acts in pornography. For example, 82% of boys in quintile 5 have watched any harmful act happening to a female, compared with 43% of boys in quintile 1, and 72% of boys in quintile 5 have seen something happening to someone without consent compared with 19% in quintile 1.

A note about sample size

In designing the survey, we made ethical decisions with participant wellbeing in mind to allow participants to opt-out of questions of a sensitive nature. This was important given respondents were as young as 14 years old. All respondents were asked an initial question – ‘Have you ever seen pornography’. Respondents who indicated they had never seen pornography, were unsure if they’d seen pornography, or preferred not to say, were not asked further questions on this topic. This means we are only able to present data about frequency of use and nature of content for a smaller sample size. Quintile analysis involved yet smaller samples as this was only done for boys’ data. For example, only 334 boys answered the question about pornography viewing frequency, and only 253 boys answered the question about viewing harmful acts in pornography. Therefore, it is best to focus on the relationship between the quintiles (ie the trend across the five quintiles) rather than focusing too heavily on any one quintile.

¹ The survey included this explanation: “Without consent” refers to something happening without the person’s permission or against their will. This may include actions such as verbal pressuring, intimidation, physical force, tricking someone, using hidden cameras or upskirting, or when a person is asleep’

Figure 15: Proportion of boys who had ever seen pornography and reported seeing specific harmful acts, by quintile (n=253)

Percentage of male respondents aged 14-18 who reported ever seeing pornography and reported seeing non-consensual acts, choking, or someone being pushed, shoved, kicked, punched, slapped or gagged in pornography

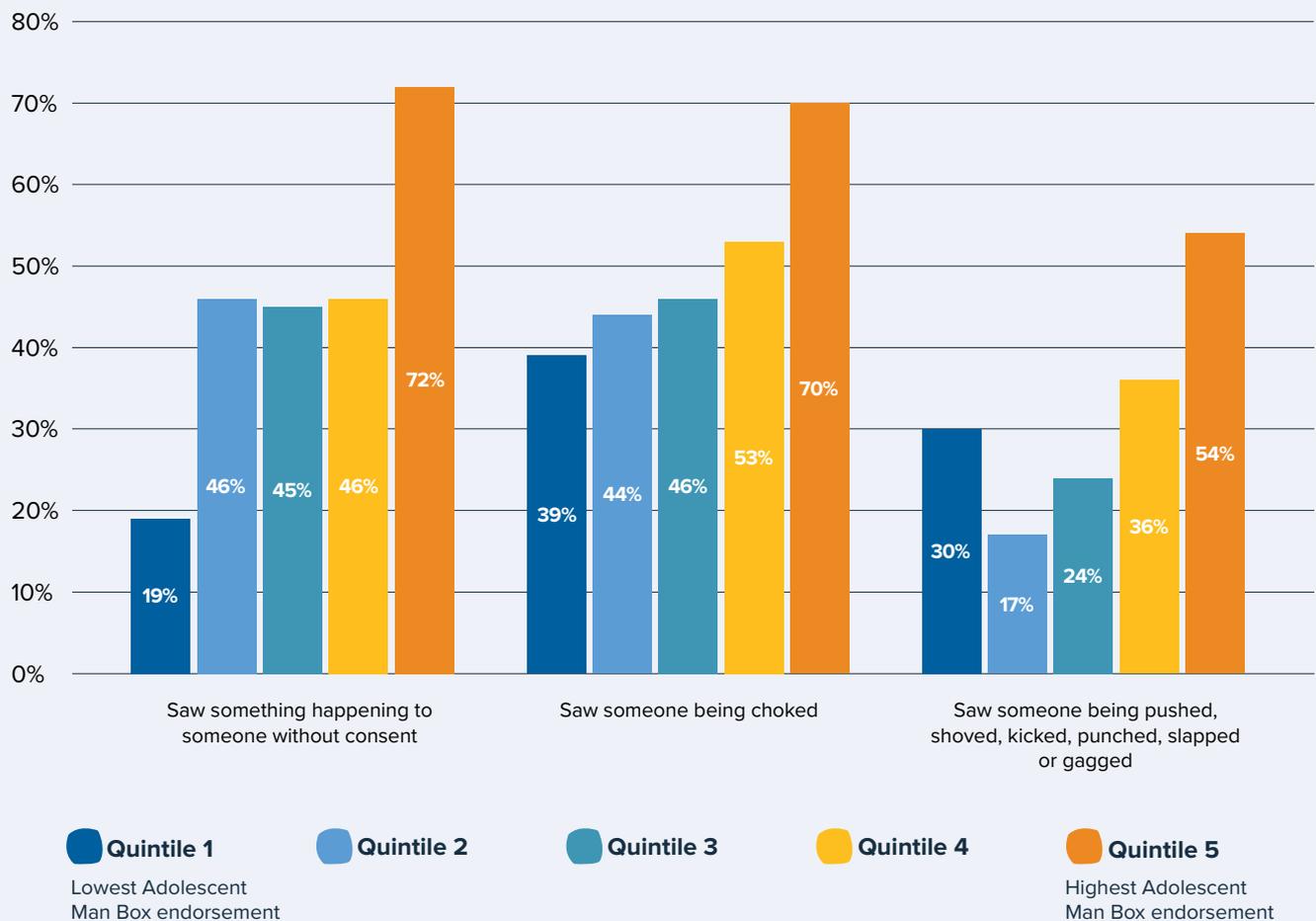
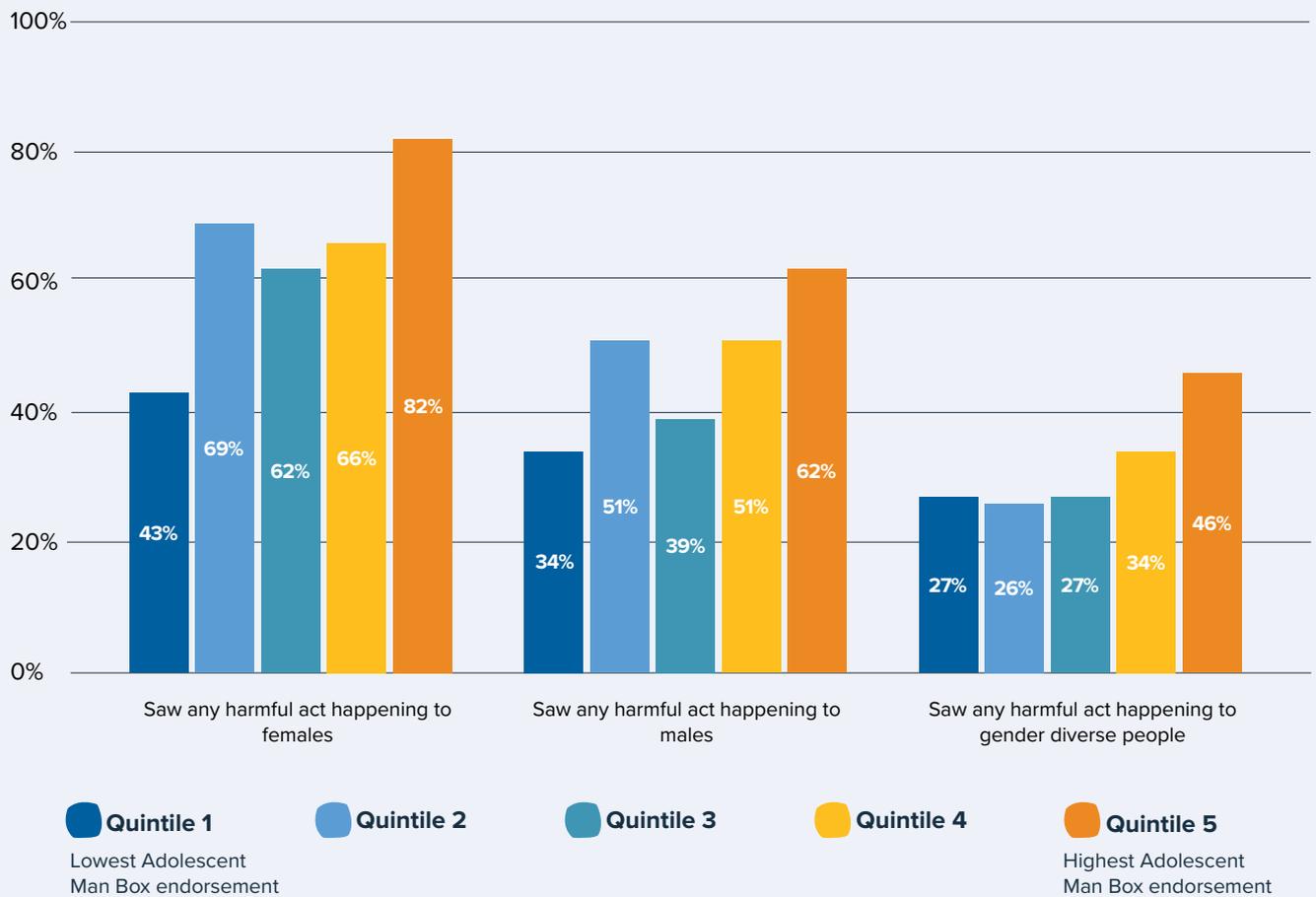


Figure 16: Proportion of boys who had ever seen pornography and reported seeing harmful acts happening to people of different genders, by quintile (n=253)

Percentage of male respondents aged 14-18 who reported ever seeing pornography and reported seeing non-consensual acts, choking, pushing, shoving, kicking, punching, slapping or gagging happening to each gender in pornography



Finding 11:

A tenth of adolescent boys have seen sexually explicit deepfakes of people they know and even more have friends who create this kind of image-based abuse material. Boys who most strongly endorse restrictive masculine norms are significantly more likely to have experience with this form of image-based abuse.

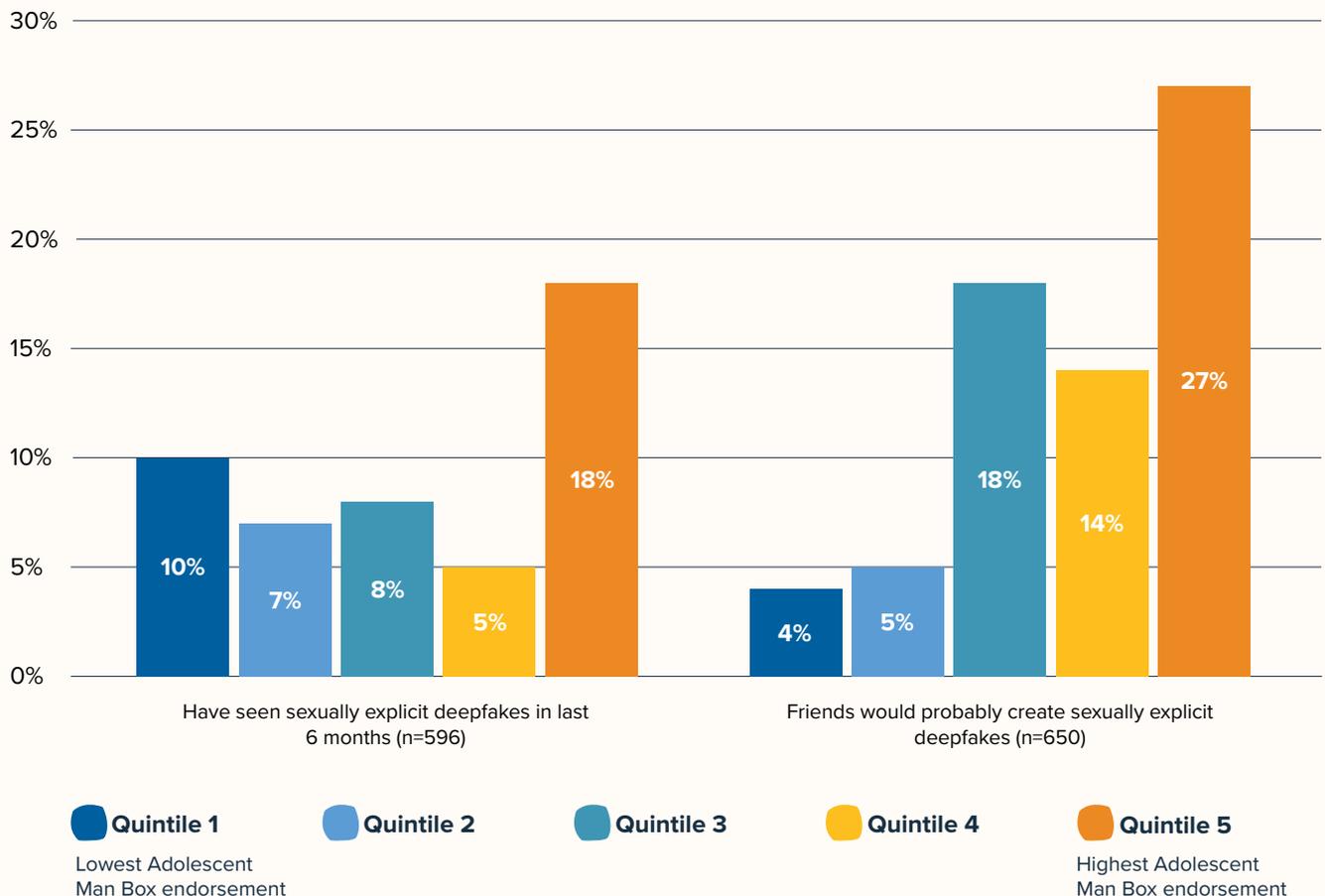
Exposure to image-based abuse is a real and growing aspect of adolescence in Australia. Almost 1 in 10 boys (9%) reported they had seen sexually explicit deepfakes of people they knew, and an even higher proportion of boys (13%) reported having friends who would create such material. We did not directly ask if boys had been involved themselves in creating sexually-explicit

deepfakes (given a likely reluctance to admit to criminal behaviour) but association with friends involved in such activity provides a rough proxy for this, or at least an indication as to whether image-based abuse is part of their experience as an adolescent.

Those who strongly endorse rigid masculine norms were more likely to have experience with this form of image-based abuse. Boys in quintile 5 were more likely to report that they have seen deepfakes (18% compared with between 5% and 10% for the other quintiles). Boys in quintile 5 were also far more likely to agree that their friend would probably create fake nude images of people they know (27% compared with 4% of boys in quintile 1).

Figure 17: Proportion of boys who have seen image-based abuse material, or have friends who would create such material, by quintile

Percentage of male respondents aged 14-18 who reported they have seen sexually explicit deepfake images of people they know in the last 6 months, and who agreed or strongly agreed that their friends would probably create sexually explicit deepfake images of people they know



Health and wellbeing

Finding 12:

Most adolescents appear to be experiencing mental health challenges – and boys seem particularly reluctant to seek help.

Adolescents in this study reported significant experience of poor mental health symptoms, consistent with a number of other studies focused on the mental health of young Australians. **Nearly four in five adolescents (78%) reported a poor mental health symptom over the past two weeks (73% of boys and 83% of girls).** The most common symptom was little interest or pleasure in doing things, with 72% of the total sample reporting feeling this symptom in the past two weeks. More than three in five adolescents (62%) reported feeling down, depressed or hopeless over the last two weeks, and nearly one in five (17%) reported having thoughts of self-harm in that time.

While there is widespread experience of poor mental health symptoms across genders, and in fact girls reported a higher level of mental ill health, boys are

significantly less likely than girls to seek help. More than one third of boys (36%) reported they had never sought help for an emotional or personal problem in the past six months, compared with 20% of girls.

Less than one third of boys (27%) reported seeking help more frequently than once per month compared with 50% of girls.

This gender difference in help-seeking may be partially explained by boys experiencing lower levels of poor mental health than girls, however it is worth noting that the question about help-seeking asks about a much longer period (6 months) than the question about mental health symptoms (2 weeks). It is also important to recognise that help-seeking is not limited to mental health problems. For example, it might include asking for advice about personal problems such as relationship issues, or questions about sex or pornography use.

Figure 18: Proportion of adolescents who sought support, by gender (n=1391)

Percentage of respondents aged 14-18 who reported different frequencies of help seeking for an emotional or personal problem over the last 6 months

Help seeking	Boys	Girls
More frequent (once per month or more)	27%	50%
Less frequent (less than once per month)	37%	29%
Never	36%	20%

Finding 13:

The more strongly adolescent boys hold rigid views about masculinity, the more likely they are to experience less positive outcomes themselves.

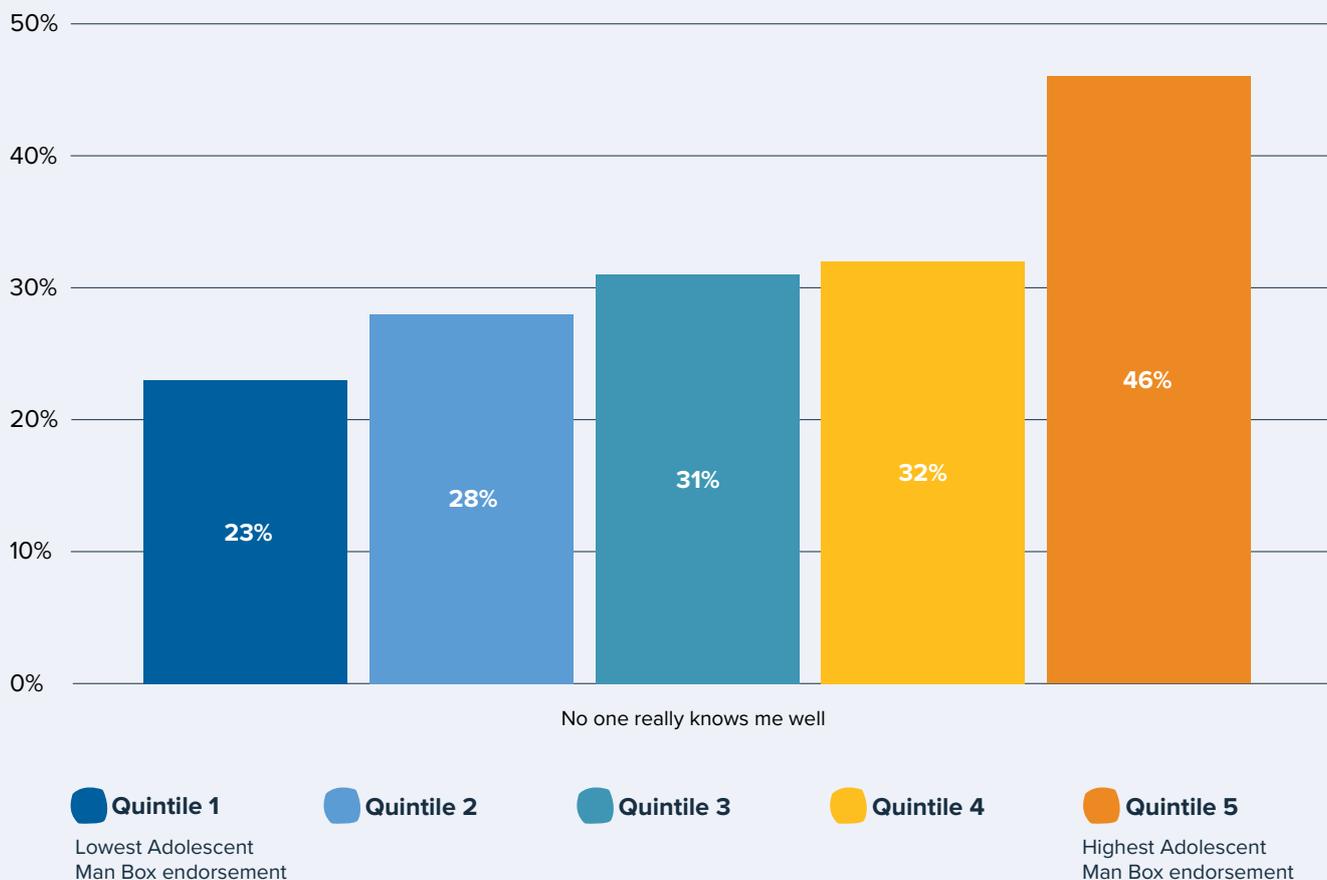
The more strongly boys endorsed the restrictive Adolescent Man Box rules, the more likely they were to have consumed alcohol in the previous 12 months (47% of boys in quintile 5 compared with 32% in quintile 1) and to have experienced gambling problems in the previous 12 months (31% of boys in quintile 5 have spent money on gambling compared with 8% of boys in quintile 1; and of these, 19% of boys in quintile 5 have experienced gambling problems in the last 12 months compared with 3% in quintile 1). Boys who most strongly endorse the Adolescent Man Box are also more likely to have been

in a serious physical fight (33% of quintile 5 compared to 21% of quintile 1).

Endorsement of rigid masculine norms appears to have an association with poor mental health. Boys with the highest endorsement of the Adolescent Man Box (quintile 5) were more likely than boys with the lowest endorsement to report any of the three poor mental health symptoms in the past two weeks (85% compared to 71%). They were also significantly less likely to agree they could be vulnerable with a friend (65% in quintile 5 compared to 89% in quintile 1), and twice as likely to agree that no one really knows them well (46% vs 23%). It is concerning that almost half the boys in quintile 5 agree that no one really knows them well.

Figure 19: Proportion of boys who feel no one really knows them well, by quintile (n=637)

Percentage of male respondents aged 14-18 who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'No one really knows me well'



Recommendations

Findings from this study highlight significant opportunities to improve the wellbeing of Australian adolescents and ensure they feel safe, connected, and hopeful about their future. Given the focus of The Men's Project at Jesuit Social Services, we place particular emphasis on preventing violence and promoting respectful behaviours among adolescent boys.

There are important opportunities to support adolescent boys to:

- recover and heal from experiences of violence and abuse;
- develop healthier responses to rejection and improve awareness of digital consent and surveillance;
- seek help for mental health concerns and troubling behaviours, such as harmful pornography use and gambling;
- reject all forms of violence and abuse, including image-based abuse, and feel confident intervening when witnessing sexist or abusive behaviour;
- normalise diverse, non-violent and inclusive expressions of masculinity; and
- build understanding of gender equality and respect for LGBTQIA+ peers.

To achieve these outcomes, we recommend the following actions:

- 1. Strengthen violence prevention efforts** across schools and communities by ensuring programs reflect young people's real and contemporary experiences. This includes equipping practitioners to work with young people to address topics such as harmful pornography use, image-based abuse, digital surveillance, and transphobia, as well as to build key skills like emotional regulation, conflict resolution, bystander action and help-seeking.
- 2. Scale up early intervention for boys at-risk of using harmful behaviours**, alongside investment in high-quality evaluation to inform the expansion of effective programs.
- 3. Invest in healing and recovery services for children and young people impacted by violence or abuse**, ensuring these services are age-appropriate, accessible, and responsive across both physical and digital settings.
- 4. Support parents and carers to talk with boys about sensitive and contemporary issues**. This includes creating practical tools, such as podcasts and conversation guides, on topics like rejection, consent, online behaviour, pornography, and masculinity.
- 5. Make digital environments safer and more developmentally appropriate for adolescents**, by strengthening online safety regulation and increasing accountability for tech platforms that expose adolescents to harm.

The findings of this study taken together with related research and practice experience also highlight the need for broader system reforms. We recommend:

- 1. Developing a five-year National Action Plan dedicated to children and young people who have experienced violence or abuse**, ensuring accountability to their voices and needs is central to the system's response.
- 2. Strengthening the national evidence base by funding a mechanism to generate, share and apply high-quality evidence** that improves the impact and coordination of efforts to prevent and respond to boys' use of violence.



For more information about The Adolescent Man Box, and to download the full report, visit www.adolescentmanbox.org.au



**Jesuit
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A Jesuit Social Services initiative