

**Publication Summary: Determining the Efficacy and Scope of Behavioral Health,
Gender-Specific Screening Tools for Males Benefiting Front Line Community Workers
Conference Report Summary**

Salvatore J. Giorgianni, Jr., PharmD* and Armin Brott, MBA**

Men's Health Network: P. O. Box 75972: Washington, D.C.20013
202-543-MHN-1 (6461) : Report@menshealthnetwork.org : www.MensHealthNetwork.org

About This Monograph

Men's Health Network (MHN) is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide health awareness advocacy to men, boys, and their families where they live, work, play, and pray. The Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) provides funding to support programs that help people make informed health care decisions by producing and promoting high-integrity, evidence-based research guided by patients, caregivers, and the broader health care community.

Program

This report is based on discussion by an expert panel convened by MHN on September 18, 2020, and partially funded by PCORI. Participants in this e-conference came from the public and private sectors and included federal, local, and community policymakers; men's health activists; academic researchers; grassroots entities; and providers who work with boys and men in a clinical setting.

The conference was structured to:

1. Examine what is known about community involvement in identifying and managing behavioral health issues for boys and men;
2. Provide insight in how to better engage community leaders in identifying boys and men at risk;
3. Provide insight into the process of appropriately identifying boys and men at risk in community settings and properly triaging them to care;
4. Examine some programs and screening tools that have been effective at the community level;
5. Examine current community level screening tools for behavioral health, examine the need for optimized male-centric screening tools and identify examples of such tools now being used;
6. Identify key next steps toward advancing community activity in this area;
7. Identify opportunities to help evaluate and report results of community-level programs;
8. Help better disseminate best practices and learnings about effective programs and approaches.

Background

The struggle to deal effectively with mental health issues for boys and men in America continues to be as difficult as it is important. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the average number of male suicides has been 3.5 times that of

females. In addition, 83% of male suicide victims had no prior diagnosed mental health condition. Suicidal men were more likely to belong to a racial or ethnic minority.^{1,2,3} Since 2018 the greatest increase has occurred in white males aged 25-45. Critics point out that men are half as likely as women to be clinically diagnosed with behavioral health issues, but experts in clinical care and epidemiology believe that this disparity is due largely to the reluctance of boys and men to talk about emotional issues and the lack of adequate primary care screening standards and tools to diagnose mental health issues in males.

The panel discussions touched on 7 main topic areas:

1. Important general trends of men's health in America were reviewed as a framework for the overall basis of these discussions. The panel felt it is important to view behavioral health in the context of broader trends in male health and how men access health care. There was also a discussion of how male health lags behind female health both in terms of mortality and morbidity, and specifically in the area of mental health and suicide.
2. Particular challenges found with various male demographics, such as minorities, millennials, first-responders and young boys were discussed. Of particular discussion is the way mental health is viewed by the community and these demographics, the role of stigma and

¹The health of Millennials. Blue Cross Blue Shield. April 24, 2019. <https://www.bcbs.com/the-health-of-america/reports/the-health-of-millennials>

²King CA, Horwitz A, Czyz E, Lindsay R. Suicide risk screening in healthcare settings: identifying males and females at risk. *J Clin Psychol Med Settings*. 2017;24(1):8-20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10880-017-9486-y>

³Schrijvers DL, Bollen J, Sabbe BG. The gender paradox in suicidal behavior and its impact on the suicidal process. *J Affect Disord*. 2012;138(1-2):19-26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2011.03.050>

underlying community factors surrounding behavioral health profiles in the community.

3. There was a good deal of discussion about emotional lexicons, the ways males express behavioral health symptoms and how these differ from women. Panel members provided insight into how these differing manifestations in males can often be misunderstood by community members and leaders and how best to educate those in the community about how to more appropriately identify boys and men in crisis.
4. Controversies in the types of behavioral health screening tools available in both the community and clinical settings were discussed. The panel reviewed the relevance and deficiencies of many commonly utilized screening tools in optimally identifying potential behavioral health episodes in males. There was also a discussion on the need for better guidelines on when and how often to screen males for mental health problems.
5. The pivotal role of individuals in various community settings, including educational institutions, the workplace and community organizations in identification and triage of males who may be having behavioral health challenges was discussed at length. Discussion included examples of successful community programs that are addressing these issues.
6. Guidance and suggestions about how communities can develop better skills in identifying and helping bring immediate “Emotional First Aid” and other support programs to boys and men in need.
7. Clinical panel members provided insights and suggestions on how community leaders can successfully navigate the intersection between community level involvement and referral of men to clinical care. This included a discussion of some important public policy and legal considerations.

Recommendations To Move Forward A Clarion Call for a National Action Plan

The panel discussed key areas of focus as important next steps to stem the trend of increasing behavioral health issues and suicide in boys and men. Broadly, these are as follows:

Systematically and extensively review the appropriateness of current screening tools with a specific focus on their effectiveness for boys and men and their utility in the clinical and nonclinical settings.

Critically reevaluate national professional, clinical, and community guidelines for screening across the lifespan of boys and men.

Develop and implement professional degree and postgraduate educational programs to better enable clinicians to care for male mental health.

Develop meaningful quality metrics for individual practices and health systems, to evaluate behavioral health care for boys and men.

Future Outcomes-Oriented Research Strategies

The need for additional research into the areas of mental health prevention and management and, more specifically, research that focuses on the community involvement in male mental health cannot be overstated.⁵ The US Preventive Services Task Force published recommendations for research priorities to address evidence gaps in preventative clinical services provides a good summary of overall research needs in this area. Examining the number and rate of suicides among males, and its alarming growth since 2015, clearly states the case for making male mental health a public health disparity.

There is also a great need to provide not only funding but expertise to apply for funding and collection and reporting of data at the community level to capture much of the important information being generated. Funders need to consider adjustments to applications to not only incentivize but also support community program leaders to engage in needed research about their work with males.

FULL TEXT OF THIS REPORT CAN BE ACCESSED ELECTRONICALLY AT

www.menshealthnetwork.org/library/depression-anxiety-males-gender-specific-screening-tools-report.pdf

About Men’s Health Network (MHN)

MHN is an international non-profit organization whose mission is to reach men, boys, and their families where they live, work, play, and pray with health awareness messages and tools, screening programs, educational materials, advocacy opportunities, and patient navigation. MHN is the sponsor of [Men’s Health Month](#) (June) and [Wear Blue Day](#). MHN maintains the TesticularCancerAwarenessMonth.com and ProstateCancerAwarenessMonth.com websites. For information on MHN’s programs and activities, visit them at menshealthnetwork.org, on Twitter ([@MensHlthNetwork](https://twitter.com/MensHlthNetwork)), and on Facebook (facebook.com/menshealthnetwork), or call 212-543-6461.

*Sr. Science Advisor Men’s Health Network and President, Griffon Consulting Group, Inc.

** Member Men’s Health Network Board of Advisors, President, Healthy Men, Inc.