

## **New Hampshire Legislative Committee To Study The Status Of Men**

Our thanks to Michael J. Geanoulis, Sr. for this report



The Men's Health Network -- An informational and educational organization recognizing men's health as a specific social concern.  
[www.menshealthnetwork.org](http://www.menshealthnetwork.org)

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The New Hampshire Legislative Committee To Study The Status Of Men was created by the legislature this past summer in response to a variety of concerns over the rapidly deteriorating status of men and boys in New Hampshire.

The Committee was enabled by passage of HB 553, and authorized by Chapter 272 of the Laws of 2000, effective June 12, 2000.

Membership consisted of three members from the House of Representatives and two members of the public appointed by the Speaker of the House:

Representative David A. Bickford, Chair  
Representative William R. Zolla  
Representative Gary R. Gilmore  
George V. Alexander  
Michael J. Geanoulis, Sr.

### **DUTIES of the Committee:**

1. Examine issues and effects of cultural biases and stereotyping beginning with childhood experiences and progress in public schools, and extending to include a study of male suicide and adult concerns such as family relations, promoting education and policies which bring fathers and children closer together.
2. Study health problems unique to men or which predominately affect men, and make appropriate recommendations.
3. Promote initiatives and programs that will enable men to develop career skills and continue their education so that they become productive and responsible citizens.

The Committee, with this report, meets the legislative requirement to report its findings and recommendations for proposed legislation to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Senate President, the House Clerk, the Senate Clerk, the Governor, and the state library on or before February 15, 2001.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The New Hampshire Legislative Committee To Study The Status Of Men wishes to recognize the cooperation and expertise of the many specialists and state agencies that contributed to the substance of this report. Without their cooperation and assistance, this report would not have been possible.

Joel J. Anderson and Ann V. Fitzgerald, Legislative Researchers  
Chuck Rhoades, author of "A Study of Men and Their Health"  
Dr. Murray A. Straus, PhD, Director, Family Research Lab, UNH  
Philip F. Nadeau, Director, Youth Development Center

Gary Fowler, Administrative Office of the Courts  
Mary W. Temke, PhD, UNH Cooperative Extension, Family Connections Project The  
Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Health Statistics and Data  
Management  
The Department of Education  
The Department of Corrections

The National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) provided special value with its booklet, "Father Facts," third edition. No serious study of the fatherless problem would be complete without the publications and resources of NFI, a 501c3 organization:

The National Fatherhood Initiative  
One Bank Street, Suite 160  
Gaithersburg, MD 20878  
301-948-0599 (phone)  
301-948-4325 (fax)  
<http://www.fatherhood.org>

The Family in America Studies of the Howard Center deserves recognition for its vast concentration of family research, as well. Their DigitalArchive was especially valuable in providing for a deeper understanding of contemporary social dynamics:

The Howard Center  
934 North Main Street  
Rockford Illinois 61103  
1-815-964-5819  
<http://www.profam.org>

Special thanks, also, go to the members of the public who took valuable time away from their place of employment in order to bring us a higher sense of urgency for those problems described herewith.

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## **OVERVIEW**

Over the past several decades, men and their families have experienced significant changes due to the restructuring of family roles, increasing health problems, educational deficiencies, and new economic and social pressures. This report provides a snapshot of the lives of men and boys in New Hampshire, details the following problem areas, and recommends the creation of a permanent commission on the status of men.

Boys have inferior reading scores, lower graduation rates, and are in need of special educational services at unprecedented rates. Men are increasingly less likely to pursue and complete secondary degrees. Men are participating less in university graduate programs.

Men have increasing problems with their health. Men are now dying a full 10 years sooner than women in New Hampshire with higher mortality rates beginning at birth. The suicide rates for boys, young fathers and older men range from four to ten times higher than that of women.

In the area of crime and behavior problems, males have higher arrest rates and incarceration rates. They are more likely to be victims of homicides. In New Hampshire's Youth Development Center, 80% of incarcerated youths came from homes absent their biological father.

Nationwide, 40% of America's children live in a home absent their biological father. Fatherlessness is considered by growing numbers of social thinkers to be our foremost social problem. Fatherless children have a higher likelihood of welfare dependency. A strong link exists between father absence and substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, and educational failure. Children having a poor or non-existent relationship with their biological father have lower scores in moral development and overall wellness.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

This committee recommends immediate passage of HB 587 relative to the establishment of a commission on the status of men.

The deteriorating condition of males should be officially recognized as a serious problem by the state of New Hampshire. Much needs to be done in the way of outreach and prevention to reduce both the suicide rates and the mortality rates of men. An improvement in the physical and mental health of men would, by association, improve the wellness of children and families.

Programs should be developed to improve the educational prospects for children—especially boys. Given the high level of father absence and its negative implications, special emphasis should be provided for the importance of biological fathers in the lives of children.

Outreach programs and proposed legislation need to be developed having a special emphasis on the need to improve the condition of the father/child relationship.

Benefits are difficult to estimate, but such a commission would more than justify its costs. Reduced suicide rates and better health for men will translate into savings through higher productivity and a reduced need for a variety of state-funded services. Higher father involvement will translate into reduced incarceration rates for both juveniles in the near term, and adults in the longer term, each of which costs the state about \$20,000 annually per inmate. The committee further believes higher father involvement will translate into a reduction in the need for child support collections services costing the state \$9 million annually as well as reducing a variety of welfare costs to the state.

## **DISCUSSION OF PROBLEM AREAS**

### **THE STATUS OF MEN'S HEALTH**

"I get an annual physical every 16 years."

Anonymous response to a seacoast men's health research survey.

Dr. William Pollack of the Harvard Medical School and Center for Men at McLean Hospital believes the health care of males in America should be elevated to emergency status. "Between boys' suicide rates, dropout rates and homicide rates, and men's self-destructive behaviors, generally, we have a real crisis in America."

In 1920, a difference of about one year existed between the average death rates of men and women. Something is happening to men's health that no one predicted.

#### **Mortality Rates**

This committee discovered that New Hampshire men are dying a full ten years sooner than women. The latest New Hampshire Bureau of Health Statistics and Data Management showed a full ten-year difference in the life expectancy of men and women. A New Hampshire man's lifespan, in 1998, was 69.8 years while a woman's was 79.8 years.

#### **Prostate Cancer**

About one in four prostate cancer cases strikes a man during his prime working years, under the age of 65. In 1998, the American Cancer Society reported a 23 percent rise in the prostate cancer death rate over a twenty year period. Another man is told he has prostate cancer every 3 minutes.

Much attention and funding has been rightfully given to the devastation of breast cancer, and that effort should not be abated in any way. But prostate cancer is a debilitating killer, as well. With the exception of skin cancer, prostate cancer is the most common form of cancer. In statistical terms, prostate cancer is a little less deadly, claiming about 10 percent fewer lives than breast cancer, but prostate cancer receives 300 percent less funding.

The US Postal Service has a matching funds program for the sale of breast cancer stamps to combat breast cancer. A similar fund-matching program for prostate cancer is also needed to combat prostate cancer.

#### **Suicide**

The most telling, and saddest indicator heralding the precipitous decline of males comes to us in the form of suicide statistics.

In studies performed by the World Health Organization for the period 1979 through 1994 and the National Center for Health Statistics for the same period, the ratio of suicides between males and females in the United States was 4.9 to 1.0. Recent data shows the incidence of suicide has risen steadily since 1979. Of the 31,000 suicides in the United States, 25,000 of them are males according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

While the suicide rate for 15 to 34 year-old women has declined significantly, the rate for men has increased. This rate holds steady through the age of 60, then again increases dramatically through the age of 85 where the suicide rate for males is ten times that of females.

In a study of 146 adolescent friends of 26 adolescent suicide victims, teens living in single-parent families are not only more likely to commit suicide but also are more likely to suffer from psychological disorders.

The reduced status of a man with his family and children has deadly implications, as well. According to the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, "Divorced or separated men are more than twice as likely to kill themselves as men who remain married." By comparison, the suicide rate for divorced men is almost ten times higher than the suicide rate for divorced women.

Some social scientists are beginning to speculate that there are "slow" forms of suicide such as substance abuse and criminal behavior that are not recorded as suicides. The suicide rate in New Hampshire exceeds that of the United States on a per capita basis. Of the 139 suicide victims in an average year in New Hampshire 110 are males.

#### Fatherless Children, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse

A study of preschool children admitted to New Orleans hospitals as psychiatric patients found that nearly 80 percent came from fatherless homes.

The absence of the father from the home affects significantly the behavior of adolescents and results in greater use of alcohol and marijuana. Fatherless children are at a dramatically greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse.

Boys who grow up in father-absent homes are more likely than those in father present homes to have trouble establishing appropriate sex roles and gender identity.

#### Fatherlessness, Self Destructive Behavior and Crime

- The likelihood that a young male will engage in criminal activity doubles if he is raised without a father and triples if he lives in a neighborhood with a high concentration of single-parent families.
- One study of adolescents charged with murder found that seventy-two percent grew up absent their biological fathers.
- A study of men accused of rape found that sixty percent grew up absent their biological fathers.
- Sociologist David Blankenhorn concludes that fatherlessness is a primary generator of violence among young men.
- The research is clear...the one human being most capable of curbing the antisocial aggression of a boy is his biological father.

The New Hampshire example reflects national findings on the link between fatherlessness and the instability of children. A typical juvenile incarcerated at the Department of Youth Development Services (DYDS) was committed because of multiple offenses including assault. His/her biological parents were divorced, separated, or never married with the mother as primary caregiver. He/she was identified as educationally disabled with a history of suspensions and school disciplinary actions. Two-thirds were medicated with drugs like prozac or ritalin. Problems identified were self-esteem, familial relationships, assaultive behavior, poor decision making skills, substance abuse, and being the subject of abuse.

A central theme was absence of a significant and positive adult role model. Eighty percent of incarcerated youths came from homes where the biological father was absent. DYDS administrator Phil Nadeau told us that if a child didn't know where one of his/her parents was, it was usually the father. All of the committed female youths came from homes absent their biological father.

At the Lake's Region Correctional Facility, A "Family Connections Project" of the UNH extension service administered by Mary Temke, Ph.D., male inmates were found to be very concerned about their families and children. They wanted to be better fathers. Many inmates themselves grew up without their fathers. Virtually all the men took parenting classes while in prison whether or not they had a relationship with their children. Incarcerated men are denied requests for continuing relationships with their children while, by comparison, incarcerated women are given court approval for those same requests. Temke said that men have poor attitudes about their status as nurturers and providers and should see themselves as being more important for their children than they do now. On a scale of one to ten on importance for children, she rated both mothers and fathers as ten.

## **THE STATUS OF MEN'S EDUCATION**

"Educationally speaking, boys are the weaker gender."  
Christina Hoff Sommers, PhD

Much is said about schools shortchanging girls in our educational systems. Conventional wisdom holds that girls are in a crisis. While there is, indeed, much that can be done to improve educational systems overall, this committee found an even bigger crisis for boys.

### **High School Performance**

Dr. Michael Gurian, psychotherapist and author of "The Wonder of Boys," claims from his short list, that two boys are learning disabled for every one girl; boys' grades are worse than girls'; and there are six boys with attention deficit disorder to every one girl.

In an in-depth study of education, Christina Hoff Sommers found that girls are eclipsing boys almost universally. Boys excel in sports but they get poorer grades. They have lower educational aspirations; participate less in confidence measures like student government, honor societies, school newspapers, and debating clubs. Boys read fewer books than girls, and study abroad at lower rates. The typical boy is a year and a half behind the typical girl in reading and writing; he is less committed to school and less likely to go to college. Girls outperform boys in artistic and musical ability.

Boys, meanwhile, have the edge in school suspensions, being held back, and dropping out. More boys than girls cut classes and fail to do homework assignments. Boys' SAT scores are higher but this is because boys with limited ability are less motivated to take the test and drag down the scores. While boys have a slight edge in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math and science scores of 5 and 8 points respectively, girls outperform boys

by 14 points in reading and 17 points in writing. In New Hampshire, those NAEP scores for boys are slightly below the national average: 15 points for reading and 18 points for writing.

In 1997, there were 20,152 New Hampshire boys coded for special education while for girls, the total was 9651—a ratio of about two to one.

### Post Secondary Education

At the University of New Hampshire in 1998, the male undergraduate population (4,746) was below that of females (5,337) by about 10%. The percent increase since 1987 for men was 13.6% while for women, by comparison, the increase was 16.4%.

The most dramatic indicators for men's lower participation in higher education occur at the graduate level. Male graduate students account for less than 40 percent of all graduate students at the University System of New Hampshire.

Men have significantly lower participation in all levels of higher education in comparison to women. If the discrepancy between male and female enrollment patterns continues, and there is no evidence to suggest they will not, the face of higher education will be forever changed.

Twenty percent of employed men had bachelor's degrees in 1995. By comparison, twenty-three percent of employed women had bachelors degrees. The difference is expected to widen over time.

Men account for only 12 percent of New Hampshire elementary school teachers and 43 percent of high school teachers.

### Fatherlessness and Educational Failure

To avoid the risk of losing the reader of this report with an overabundance of material facts on the link between fatherlessness and the educational failure of children, the serious student is simply asked to review the research items presented in Christina Hoff Sommers' *"The War Against Boys,"* Simon & Schuster (2000) and the "Father Facts" booklet published by the National Fatherhood Initiative referenced in the acknowledgements. It should suffice to state here, for the purposes of his report, that fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of school.

## THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF MEN

"Industrial communities are beginning to do more poorly by their male children in the present as they did more poorly by their female children in the past."

Lionel Tiger, Anthropologist

There has been a new trend developing in the economic status of men over the past 30 years or so—down. The growth in jobs for men is declining. "Nonemployment"—being effectively out of the labor force altogether—doubled for men twenty-five to fifty-five years of age between 1970 and 1994 in the United States. MIT economist Lester Thurow has described how the median wage of American males between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four has decreased in real terms by 25 percent, and one-third of them earn less money than is needed to keep a family of four at or above the poverty line. Government policy may be unwittingly creating perverse incentives for traditional family formation and the decline of males. Author Lionel Tiger coins the term "bureaugamy" to describe government options in family formation with which marginal wage-earners are unable to compete in economic terms. According to the

CATO Institute, wage-equivalent government welfare benefits exceeded the minimum wage by as much as 200 percent, or more, in many areas of the country including New Hampshire.

### Child Support Compliance Problems

In New Hampshire, 93% of those paying child support through the Office of Child Support Services are fathers. The Census Bureau reports that 66 percent of mothers with a child support award who did not receive payment from the father said it was because fathers were unable to pay. The average amount of child support paid by non-custodial parents remains relatively unchanged over time in spite of increased enforcement.

The New Hampshire Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) issues periodic news releases claiming increasing effectiveness by collecting more money than ever before. Actually, what drives the numbers up, for the most part, are ever increasing caseloads and a law that adds people to the roles even if they are compliant and make timely payments. Misleading releases imply success that cannot be justified by the facts. Even as caseloads constantly increase, current child support collections rates remain mired around 65 percent representing compliance rates that are not much improved over the years, in spite of glowing reports and increased enforcement.

The arrearage account has grown to more than \$200 million for New Hampshire alone. It is a fact that the Office of Child Support Services has transferred less than 37 percent of amounts owed by obligor parents from both current and arrearage accounts to obligee parents.

Misleading releases only serve to postpone the day when meaningful solutions are conceived--solutions that revolve around feelings, the natural inclination of parents to support their children, and a realistic approach to the costs of two households.

This committee found a direct relationship between father involvement and compliance with child-support orders. Since more than 90 percent of fathers who have a relationship with their children pay child support, and since fathers who have no parenting time have compliance rates hovering around 40 percent, or less, this committee believes one solution for improved support for children, in both emotional and economic terms, lies in the adjustment of policies that discourage father involvement.

Few statistics in the literature of divorce have been cited more frequently in the justification of child support guidelines than Lenore Weitzman's claim that the average divorced woman experiences a 73 percent decline in living standards while her former husband experiences a 42 percent increase in living standards. In statistical analysis of national income data, Stroup & Pollock found that the Weitzman "generalizations" do not hold. The researchers concluded that a woman's loss averaged 22 percent and that the average man suffered a loss of about 10 percent.

### THE STATUS OF FATHERS

"The single biggest social problem in our society may be the growing absence of fathers from their children's homes because it contributes to so many other social problems...Without a father to help guide, without a father to care, without a father to teach boys to be men, and to teach girls to expect respect from men, it's harder..."

President Bill Clinton  
University of Texas Speech  
Austin Texas, October 16, 1995

Dr. Louis Sullivan, former U. S. Secretary of Health & Human Services, declared fatherlessness to be America's number one social problem. Tonight, more than 24 million of America's children will go to bed in a home absent their biological father. More than one-half of



all children who don't live with their father have never been in their father's home. Twenty-six percent of absent fathers live in a different state than their children. The United States is now the world leader in fatherless families.

When the family unit breaks down, if it ever formed to begin with, the father's role as reflected in court decrees, social policy, and even by fathers' themselves, seems somewhat marginal. Fathers often vacate the family home on their own initiative.

In 1996 there were 11.7 million single parent families nationwide. Mothers headed 9.85 million and 1.86 million were headed by fathers.

The probability that today's marriage will end in divorce is calculated to be about 60 percent. Recent statistics from New Hampshire reflect national trends. Here, there were about 6,000 divorces and 10,000 marriages in 1998.

Fathers get sole physical custody of their children in only 15% of cases with most of those coming by default. In 1997, New Hampshire sole physical custody awards totaled 2,334 for the mother and 397 for the father.

This committee could not get divorce decree details on the allocation of parenting time but anecdotal evidence suggests a typical custody order provides for every other weekend of "visitation" for the father. This may be a reflection of RSA 458:17, IV "...the other parent shall be awarded physical custody rights during all periods of the time heretofore referred to as 'visitation'."

Researchers discovered that many fathers separated from their children found it difficult to maintain a close and loving relationship with their children; and that contact between fathers and children soon diminishes after divorce. In a national study of 14 to 21 year-olds, 50 percent of unwed fathers had significantly decreased the amount of time spent with their children over a five-year period.

In a nationally representative sample of 11 to 16-year-old children living in father-absent households, almost half had not seen their father in the last twelve months. In a 1990 survey, only one-third of father-absent children reported seeing their fathers at least once a week. Nearly one in five children in father-absent families had not seen their fathers for five years.

In basic terms, cultural presumptions have held, since 1900 or so, that there should be a strict division of labor within the family unit: mothers as nurturers, fathers as providers. It was assumed that everything a child became was the result of the maternal primary care taking role with paternal breadwinning a necessary supplement. As a result, mothers came to be seen as biologically predisposed to care taking and socialization, while fathers became "the forgotten contributor to child development."

When 1500 CEOs and human resource directors were asked how much leave is reasonable for a father to take after the birth of a child, 63 percent indicated "none." This committee found little that could justify the status quo of a father routinely living a life separate from his children.

### Stepparents or Substitute Fathers

Although stepfamilies often have an economic advantage over single-parent families, the children of stepfamilies have as many behavioral problems as the children of single-parent families, and in some instances more. Fatal abuse, serious abuse, and neglect are lowest in households with married biological parents and highest in households in which a biological parent cohabits with someone who is not biologically related.

In a Wall Street Journal article conveniently entitled "Fatherless Boys Grow Up To Be Dangerous Men," Maggie Gallagher outlines research from Princeton and the University of California demonstrating that each year spent without his dad in the home increases the odds of a boy's future incarceration by about 5 percent. Moreover, boys living in stepparent families were almost three times as likely to face incarceration as boys from intact families. Family structure was a more important factor than income.

Children care more about a relationship with biological parents than stepparents. Children have ongoing fantasies about their biological parents reuniting. In stepfamilies, emotional and behavioral problems of children more than doubles.

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

According to data supplied by the New Hampshire Administrative Office of the Courts, there were 6,441 petitions for relief of domestic violence filed in 1999. Most resulted in temporary or permanent restraining orders against men. Of the 2403 permanent restraining orders outstanding on November 8, 2000, 85% were against men. In domestic violence allegations, the accused are routinely removed from their homes to the street on short notice with nowhere to go.

Murray A. Straus, Ph.D., co-director of the University of New Hampshire's Family Research Lab, told us that women have equally high assault rates with their partners. Men should have been more involved in the formulation of domestic violence prevention and protocols.

This committee feels that the best way to achieve quality solutions for the problem of domestic violence is to include all members of society in the dialogue on a sex neutral basis.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

"Just as the last third of the twentieth century was about creating equal opportunity for women as workers, so the first third of the twenty-first century will be about creating equal opportunity for men as parents. Neither goal will be achieved until both goals are achieved."

From "Father and Child Reunion"

Warren Farrell, Ph.D.

This committee found the wellness of men, and by association, the wellness of their families and children, especially boys, to be in a serious state of decay-- a kind of deterioration that is not readily discernable to the casual observer. The decline is somewhat bewildering. The fatherlessness rates, suicide rates and mortality reports seemed like gross errors because men are supposed to be strong.

Some men came forward to complain there was very little in the way of services available for severely stressed men. Most men, however, suffer in silence. Many seem to be looking after their own wellness as though it mattered not whether they lived or died. In expressions of powerlessness and depression, men are neglecting and killing themselves at alarming rates. Alarming, especially, if we still believe men to be important for children and families. The declining status of males, and, as a result, the decline of those associated with them, remains mired in obscurity. Dr. Temke recommends programs for the children of incarcerated parents that provide for a continuing and meaningful relationship with their parents, regardless of the parents' sex.

Dr. Straus recommends developing prevention and intervention protocols for domestic violence problems that incorporate safeguards for the sanctity of family relationships on a sex neutral basis.

The research reflects a world of difference between the children whose fathers are involved with them and those whose fathers are not. Earlier, a sampling of such research was presented to make the point that father absence was not good for children or families. To end on a positive note, and to encourage higher paternal involvement, a sampling of research is here presented to demonstrate the inverse: a father's presence can be good for children and families:

A nationally representative sample of 1,600 10-13 year olds found that children who shared important ideas with their fathers and who perceived the amount of time they spent with their fathers as excellent had fewer behavior problems and lived in a more cognitively stimulating home.

Premature infants whose fathers spent more time playing with them had better cognitive outcomes at age 3.

A survey of more than 20,000 parents found that when fathers are involved in their children's education including attending school meetings and volunteering at school, children were more likely to get A's, enjoy school, and participate in extracurricular activities and less likely to have repeated a grade.

Under joint custody arrangements, child support compliance rates zoomed to a very high level: 93 percent by fathers' reports; 89 percent by mothers' reports.

Having loving parents teens can talk with helps reduce teen pregnancy.

Fathers (especially) are very influential in the decision not to have sex.

Whether the outcome variable is cognitive development, sex-role development, or psychosocial development, children are better off when their relationship with their father is close and warm.

# # #