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The Social Barriers and Social Facilitators of Men's
Medical Help Seeking Behaviours

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Abstract

The Social Barriers and Social Facilitators of Men's Medical Help Seeking

Gender, along with men's alignment with the normative masculine identity have been identified key determinants of medical help seeking for cancer symptoms. Combined these factors influence the self construct and shape individual attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, expectations and thus behaviours regarding health and including when medical help is sought. Socially conditioned from birth and with a need to conform to social expectations, men delay medical help seeking until their pain is unbearable, or they are faced with an inability to complete routine tasks due to the severity of their illness symptoms. This pattern of men's delayed help seeking contributes to their early mortality from all the leading causes of death, including gender neutral cancers.

Lifestyle factors have been identified key determinants of cancer and thus cancer is concentrated in low socio economic areas where factors such as poor nutrition, high obesity and low exercise prevail, as does delayed medical help seeking by men. In considering how best to address men's delayed help seeking, the source and accuracy of the health information men held was investigated and was found to be to a large extent, inaccurate. A positive factor identified however was that men do discuss health issues, informally amongst themselves.

With numerous factors influencing men's medical help seeking, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) was identified a suitable framework on which to base this investigation into those social factors that influence men's medical help seeking. Suggestions are made as to how to use this same framework to effect population behavioural change in this regard, that if successful would see improved treatment outcomes and a reduction in the gender mortality disparity.

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