

# RESEARCH CONNECTION

## Mental health: Are men ‘talking about it?’

*By Rachel Herron, Mairo Ahmadu, Candice Waddell,  
Jonathan Allan, Kerstin Roger, Margaret de Jager, &  
Adams Abdul Salam*



### **Why this research is important**

In general, men report lower levels of stress and depression, and yet suicide rates among men are four times higher than women. In Canada, rates of suicide are higher among rural men in comparison to urban men and rural women. Other research indicates that Canadian men generally endorse more stigmatizing views about male depression than women; they are less likely to seek support; and they often express mental distress differently than women. Research has linked this so-called “silent crisis” in men’s mental health to certain practices, values, and meanings that can be associated with dominant beliefs about what it means to be a man. However, practices and

### **What you need to know**

Movember has made men’s health into a month-long global movement. Building on this momentum here at Brandon University, we wish to share some findings from our recent research on rural men’s mental health. Most importantly, we emphasize that men in our study wanted to talk about their mental health, but they identified a number of barriers to expressing their mental health to friends, in their community, and in their work environments.

values vary in relation to where people live. In this project, we sought to understand how men in southwestern Manitoba experienced and expressed mental health problems and mental wellness.

### **How the research was conducted**

The findings of this study are based on the stories of men experiencing mental health problems or emotional distress. To collect these first-hand accounts, Dr. Herron and Research Assistant Mairo Ahmadu conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with self-identified rural men. Participants were 20-70 years of age with various professions and educational levels. The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and included a series of questions about social support, barriers to accessing support, and perceptions of what it means to be a healthy

man. All interviews were digitally recorded to ensure the findings reflected what participants said, and the research team analyzed the written interview transcripts collectively to summarize key findings.

### What the researchers found

The men who participated in the study identified challenges finding safe spaces to talk about their mental health outside the private sphere of their homes. Most study participants talked to a spouse about their mental health, although some single men in the study emphasized that expectations that mental health problems should be addressed in the private sphere were particularly disadvantageous to single men. A smaller number of participants talked to siblings or parents about their mental health. Notably, several participants mentioned that they did not discuss their mental health with their fathers because they believed they would not “get it.” Some participants expressed difficulty talking with their male friends about their mental health, and other participants discussed actively building “really healthy friendships with other men” so they could “spread their qualms.” For many participants, their work environment and community contributed to their stress and isolation, specifically the independent and competitive nature of rural work. Other participants emphasized the role of community gossip in preventing them from talking about mental health. Finally, participants identified a lack of opportunities in rural communities as contributing to mental health problems and a lack of spaces for social connection.

### How this research can be used

Our research emphasizes the need to develop community-based responses to mental health that address not only rural practices and values about what it

means to be a man but also the need to create different places for men to express their mental health needs including more supportive communities, work environments, and social spaces.

### About the researcher

Dr. Rachel Herron is the Principal Investigator for this project. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography and Environment at Brandon University and a Canada Research Chair in Rural and Remote Mental Health. Anyone interested in the study should contact her at:

[Herronr@brandonu.ca](mailto:Herronr@brandonu.ca)

### Keywords

Mental health, men, rural

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Editor: Christiane Ramsey [Ramseyc@brandonu.ca](mailto:Ramseyc@brandonu.ca)

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