

New IFS Report: Demoralized men suffer from lost pathways and greater struggles

A weakened social fabric, individual helplessness, and structural changes all characterize the experiences of young men today.

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA, UNITED STATES, August 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [A new report from the Institute for Family Studies](#) analyzes the social lives, individual perspectives, and online activities of American men aged 18-29.

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Based on a survey of 2,000 young men conducted with YouGov from April 7-15 2025, the report soberly examines the aspirations, struggles, and habits of many young men today.

Authored by University of Virginia sociologist Joe Davis, and IFS scholars Michael Toscano and Ken Burchfiel, the report

[builds on part one](#) of a two-part series meant to give a voice to young men in the broader discussion about them.

KEY FINDINGS:

- For many young men, friendships are in short supply. In fact, 4 out of 10 young men have two or fewer close friends, which includes 1 in 3 (34%) with one to two close friends and almost 1 in 10 (9%) who report zero close friends.
- Social, civic, and religious participation is low. While 57% participate in at least one community activity, a mere 31% report working as a volunteer, and even fewer are members of a faith-based group (29%), social club (27%), adult sports league (24%), or other type of civic organization.
- The American dream feels out of reach for many young men. About half of young men agree with the statement, “No matter how hard I work, people like me will never achieve the American Dream.” Similarly, 72% agree that “Who you know is more important than ability or hard work in getting ahead.”
- Electronic media use is very high. Gambling is rampant: 23% of young men gamble daily, an

additional 12% do so several times a week, and another 21% gamble weekly or less. Gaming is also very common, with 44% playing video games many times a day or more, and another 42% doing so at least a few times a week. Pornography use is also extremely widespread: 42% watch porn daily (27%) or several times a week (16%), with another 26% viewing it weekly or less.

- Online gambling and pornography have significant emotional repercussions. Around 2 in 3 regular online gamblers say it has caused them at least some distress. Of those who watch pornography many times a day or more, 43% experience loneliness, 36% feel depressed, and 29% are anxious.

"So much has been written about what's wrong with young men, but almost no one has bothered to ask what they want out of life and how they see their situation," said co-author Michael Toscano.

"There is a lot of pain and confusion out there, and many young men believe that the American Dream is beyond their reach. The vast majority of young men want to get married, be fathers, hold down a good job and have a thriving social life. They don't want to be on the sidelines, in the basement, addicted to games and online gambling. They want good things, but they feel trapped."

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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ABOUT IFS

The Institute for Family Studies is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Our mission is to strengthen marriage and family life and advance the welfare of children through research and public education.

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