

Why boys are performing less well at school and how to fix it

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15-year-old boys are more likely than girls of the same age to be low achievers" said a recent OECD report. This is yet more evidence of a long term, worldwide trend of some boys falling behind at school.

University of Luxembourg researchers have identified two possible major causes and a potential solution in a new study published recently in the journal "Masculinities and Social Change". This work was conducted by gleaning evidence directly from children rather than the traditional source of seeking the opinions of teachers or parents.

"We saw a strong tendency for failing [boys](#) to be alienated from [school](#); feeling distant and thinking it is not useful," noted Andreas Hadjar a

Professor in the Sociology of Education who led the research. "There was also a clear link with under-performance and boys having traditional opinions about their gender role, that is, that men should lead women," he added. Boys with these traits tended to be more disruptive in class and hence underperformed, scoring about 8 per cent less in their year mark than the average male pupil.

As many girls as boys expressed their alienation from school, but these attitudes were shown to have a more negative effect on boys. Also, having traditional views of male/female roles tended to affect boys and girls equally, but the study showed these opinions are more prevalent amongst boys than girls. Other factors such as peer-group attitudes and socio-economic background also hinder [school performance](#) as they influence school alienation and gender role orientations and, thus, educational performance.

Questionnaires, group discussions and video observation of lessons were used to analyse the behaviour of 872 children, mostly aged 13-14 years, going to school in Berne, Switzerland. This data was compared to examination and class work results. Thus the researchers could analyse what the children said and their behaviour in class, observations which allowed for statistical analysis.

There might be a solution to this failing-boys syndrome. By observing behaviour in class, the researchers saw that underachieving boys responded best to authoritative teaching styles that feature a structured and caring but controlling approach. This is not to be confused with overly strict, authoritarian methods. This work shows that inappropriate teaching styles can cause and reinforce feelings of estrangement from school. "Teachers with an authoritative teaching style are clearly interested in their students, guiding them and being available if problems arise," noted Prof Hadjar. "This research demonstrates that that teachers need to be flexible in the way they deal with different personalities."

Provided by University of Luxembourg

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