



## The Central Association for Men's Organizations in Finland (MJKL)

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- 1 The Central Association for Men's Organizations in Finland (MJKL) is a coalition of eight organizations which concentrate on equality issues from a male perspective. Main fields of concern are fathers' rights, parenting of school children, rights of men who pay alimony, and the welfare of men who suffer from prostate cancer. Member organizations provide various practical services for people in need and raise public discussion on gender equality. MJKL collaborates with government organizations on numerous social policy issues.

### The submission of MJKL for the Universal Periodic Review 2022-2027

- 2 Finland is widely recognized for its good human rights record. Governments have throughout Finnish history put heavy emphasis on issues of equality. MJKL is, however, concerned about the place of men when it comes to certain areas of equality between sexes.

#### Equal parenthood

- 3 The main equality issues that concern MJKL are the equality between both parents of a child, the sidelining of men and boys from society and the symmetry of sexes in work for equality and well-being. There are aspects of these issues that are not addressed sufficiently by the Finnish society.
- 4 On parenthood we strongly support equal custody of children by both parents. At the moment the mother gets primary custody in 65 % of custody disputes<sup>1</sup>. There is reason to believe this is not entirely founded on neutral assessment alone, but that there might be bias embedded in the system.



- 5 The meeting rights of children with their other parent are not enforced in any significant way. Court-ordered arrangements between the child and the non-custodial parent are regularly made. Skipping appointments without necessarily even notifying the non-custodial parent is common and carries virtually no penalty for the custodial parent. The parent suffering from this breach of court order is most commonly the father. In each missed meeting the child is deprived of their father and the father is deprived of his child. This is in direct breach of article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- 6 We are concerned about the recognition of the importance of fatherhood and the availability of support for fathers. At the moment there are some organizations that provide support for fathers and fatherhood such as Miessakit ry, FinFami ry and Isät lasten asialla ry, but the weight put on this by society at large is insufficient. Services are mostly provided by small NGOs that receive some government funding but whose capabilities cannot provide all the necessary services. Society at large should take more steps to ensure support for fatherhood.
- 7 Our view is that professionals and officials should receive basic and advanced education on the importance of fatherhood for the well-being on families. Support for prospective fatherhood and times of crisis in fatherhood should be provided sufficiently, which now falls short of its target.
- 8 The presence of a father in the family has an immensely positive influence on life outcomes in numerous fields. These include better school achievement, better reading, writing and mathematical skills, less unemployment, lower risk of suicide, less drug use, less homelessness, less victimization by child abuse, sexual abuse or domestic violence, less violent crime, less poverty, more trust towards other people and a better developed capability for empathy.<sup>2</sup> Presence of the father in a child's life should be advanced in all possible ways. There is a serious lack of effort by society on the issue on father presence.

### **School achievement of boys**

- 9 School achievement of boys has fallen far behind of girls in Finland.<sup>3</sup> The disparity is so immense that Finland ranks among the worst of all OECD countries in equality of education between sexes despite the praise Finland receives for its track record on equality.<sup>4</sup> Women's education level has surpassed that of men<sup>5</sup>. Higher education is predominantly populated by women.<sup>6</sup> Pupils in secondary high schools (lukio) are mostly female<sup>7</sup> and women hold the most university degrees.<sup>8</sup> The education gap between sexes is going to widen further and measures must be taken to bring boys back on board.
- 10 Elementary school education should be developed so that boy's gender specific needs are better met. It should be ensured that boys properly meet the standard requirements for each grade of primary school. Boys would benefit from e.g., clear borders and sticking to them, authority of the teacher, working peace during lessons, clear instructions and a more kinetic approach involving games and physical activities.<sup>9</sup>
- 11 Men are at much higher risk of being sidelined from society compared to women.<sup>10</sup> This negative development starts at school. It can be turned around by providing school counselors

and psychologists, providing possibilities to have hobbies, and providing experiences of success rather than failure. Parental support can be decisive in school achievement. The presence of a father in the family is in strong correlation with school success. School achievement is thus also connected to custody arrangements in divorce.

- 12 The teaching profession is overwhelmingly female.<sup>11</sup> There is a lack of male role models for boys in schools starting from pre-school. The removal of male quotas for teacher education was an indication of the lack of interest by the government on this issue.

### **Symmetry of sexes in law and official structures**

- 13 MJKL takes the stance that sexes should be treated equally in legislation and official action. There are several issues in legislation that discriminate against men. First, the law on equality gives women the front row at the expense of men. The law states in the very first chapter that attention should be directed especially toward women's equality in working life.<sup>12</sup> There are no such special emphasis on any issues that concern mostly men.
- 14 Second, in Finnish legislation there is a law on the governmental support of certain women's organizations. The law lists women's organizations that are eligible for monetary support from the government.<sup>13</sup> No such possibility for support exists for any men's organizations. There are numerous NGOs that do invaluable work for the good of men in topics where government has little or no influence. These organizations are funded only a fraction of what women's organizations receive. The law is discriminatory against men.
- 15 The Finnish government has adopted a policy of assessing the gender impact of new legislation, "*suvaus*". This is a welcome development, if applied equally and neutrally to assess effects on both sexes. Now the application on *suvaus* leaves room for development. *Suvaus* as a process should also be applied not only to legislation, but all official action and system reform. Especially in social and health services and education it is important to assess the impact on boys and men.
- 16 Statistics show that in education many boys and young men face challenges that require special action.<sup>14</sup> In the field of physical and mental health there are male specific issues that call for action. The vast majority of suicide victims are men (74 %).<sup>15</sup> In the constantly changing working life problems pile specifically on men. In divorce men feel significantly more often than women that they have been mistreated. The *suvaus* process can affect all the above and should be developed under ministerial guidance.
- 17 MJKL suggests that *suvaus* be made a regular part of the legislative process. It should be conducted with every bit of new legislation and should be applied in an unbiased way that recognizes possible gender issues of both men and women equally.

### **Solutions**



- 18 On the issue of equal parenthood MJKL suggests that scrutiny would be imposed on the realization of parental meeting rights. It must be known by officials whether the custodial parent is in accordance with the court order on parental meeting rights. This would be no project of any certain duration, but a permanent and regular feature of official action in custody issues. The action is specific, possible to be put in action and its results are measurable. Further action can be taken based on the collected data on court order compliance.
- 19 More monetary support for men's organizations is needed. NGOs that provide services already receive some funding, but it is not at an adequate level. NGOs specific to men's equality issues receive no funding at all compared to millions of euros received by women's organizations, both domestic and international. Funding must be set at an equal level and proportionate to the scale of the problems being tackled. The law on governmental support for certain women's organizations must be changed so that relevant men's organizations are listed in it as well or the law be changed more thoroughly to make it non-discriminatory.
- 20 Results for funding of men's organizations can be measured for example by observing the male suicide rate after programs to prevent male suicide have been implemented. Currently there appears to be no governmental programs whatsoever to prevent male suicide despite the enormous gap in suicide rates between sexes. These programs should be started, funded adequately, and measured for results after, for example, two years. This sort of a project is specific to a purpose, its results are measurable as change in suicide rates, action is result-oriented with a clear goal in mind and the project is bound to a certain time frame. Suicide prevention is an ongoing effort that should continue after the pilot project has affirmed the right forms of action.
- 21 Professionals in social and health fields should have access to more education on how to promote good fatherhood, help men prepare for fatherhood and how to help fathers in crisis. Also, the structures in these fields must be developed to accommodate services for men by properly trained professionals in the institutions that are already in place, e.g., the child health centre, and possibly new institutions dedicated to the needs of fathers. There exists a robust body of research to aid in this effort.
- 22 This same kind of approach can be used to improve the school achievement of boys. There is plenty of research that can be used in, for example, designing teaching methods, structuring school days and motivating boys to educate themselves in a school system that is appealing to them. More counselors are needed, class sizes must be reasonable and working peace in class must be ensured not only through persuasion but also through authority. This requires funding and finding that funding is ultimately a question of will. The future and well-being of boys must share the same importance as that of girls.

## Conclusion

- 23 There is ample data to show that there are alarming issues that men and boys face. These include the insufficient recognition for fatherhood, treatment of fathers in custody matters, ignoring the right of a child to a father, lower school achievement of boys, sidelining from society and the disparity of governmental support on gender issues. These problems are



largely male specific and tackling them is a matter of gender equality. The gross negligence of these issues, in the presence of undisputable data, is a violation of the human rights of men and children. MJKL considers it unquestionable that these issues must be included in the Universal Periodic Review of human rights in Finland.

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